

The Stewart/Colbert Effect

*Essays on the Real Impacts
of Fake News*

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Introduction

Surveying Scholarship on The Daily Show and The Colbert Report

JOSH COMPTON

From conventional late-night comedy talk shows to cable television news satire, editorial cartoons to viral online video clips; from books to bumper stickers, candidates' jokes to jokes about candidates, political humor is widespread in modern political campaigns (see Baumgartner and Morris 2008a and Compton 2008). Political humor may be at unmatched levels (Baumgartner and Morris 2008b, 622), and as this essay reveals, scholarship on political humor is at an unprecedented level as well. No outlet for political humor has received more attention in recent years than late-night television comedy, and no programs have received more attention than Comedy Central's *The Daily Show* (1996–) and *The Colbert Report* (2005–).

Some of the earliest explorations of political late-night television comedy fall under the rubric of *new media* (Davis and Owen 1998), *soft news* (Baum 2002), or *non-traditional media* (Moy, Pfau, and Kahlor 1999). In this type of research, late-night comedy is one example, joining other forms of entertainment television such as the daytime talk show. Analyses reveal that such television programs influence viewers' evaluations of political candidates (Pfau, Cho, and Chong 2001; Pfau and Eveland 1996), viewers' perceptions of certain institutions (Moy, Pfau, and Kahlor 1999), their interest in campaigns (McLeod et al. 1996), and their support for specific policies (Baum 2002, 2004). Some scholars find that people learn about politics from soft news (Baum 2003; Brewer and Cao 2006; Chaffee, Zhao, and Leshner 1994), while others conclude that learning effects, if any, are limited (Prior 2003; Hollander 2005). Research in soft news and new media offered some of the first inklings that late-night political humor mattered.

More recently, scholars have studied late-night television comedy in particular under the rubric of *soft news* or *new media* studies. Much of that work focuses on individual level voter variables. While most research has not revealed direct links between watching late-night comedy television and political knowledge (Brewer and Cao 2008; Cao 2008), we do find evidence that some viewers are learning during specific campaigns (Cao 2008). Other evidence suggests viewers of late-night comedy television may be *recognizing* political information (Hollander 2005), or that late-night comedy increases knowledge only of “widely known, thus relatively easy, political facts and issue” (Baek and Wojcieszak 2009, 797). When it comes to influencing candidate evaluations, viewers with lower political knowledge are more likely to be affected (Young 2004b), and late-night comedy makes negative characteristics of candidates more salient (Young 2006).

Scholars have also explored relationships between late-night television viewing and other dimensions, such as political participation and attitudes toward politics. Viewers of *The Tonight Show* and *Late Show* are more likely to be politically involved (Cao and Brewer 2008; Hoffman and Thomson 2009; Moy, Xenos, and Hess 2005) and participate in political discussions (Moy, Xenos, and Hess 2005); additionally, they are more politically knowledgeable and have more positive attitudes toward the political process (Pfau, Houston, and Semmler 2005). Viewers of late-night comedy are also more likely to be interested in traditional forms of news (Feldman and Young 2008), and viewers of certain late-night talk shows are less cynical about news media, while certain other shows seem to foster cynicism (Morris and Baumgartner 2008). Late-night comedy appears to have positive effects on viewers’ perceived political efficacy (Hoffman and Thomson 2009).

In other research, the focus is even more specific — not just from *soft news* to late-night comedy, but also from late-night comedy to particular comedy television programs. “Political humor — even late-night televised political humor — is not monolithic” (Baumgartner and Morris 2008b, 624), and neither is its audience (Young and Tisinger 2006). *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* are, for example, two shows that fit “the fake news subgenre” of political satire (Holbert 2005, 441). Jon Stewart (the host of *The Daily Show* since 1999) and Stephen Colbert (the host of *The Colbert Report* since its inception) are “*rhetorical critics* ... who creatively guide audiences toward democratic possibilities” (Waisenan 2009, 120, emphasis in original). Another scholar concluded: “The informed satire of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert can, arguably, be considered some of the most bracing and engaging commentary on the television landscape” (Colletta 2009, 872). Of the late-night comedy programs, none have received more specific attention from scholars than *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*.

Although viewers do not tune in to *The Daily Show* to get political news for the same reasons they tune in to national news (Holbert, Lambde, Dudo, and Carlton 2007), evidence suggests that *The Daily Show* is, in many respects, like national news. For example, *The Daily Show* offers as much substantive coverage of political events, like presidential debates and conventions, as network news coverage (Fox, Koloen, and Sahin 2007). Additionally, *The Daily Show* spends a great deal of its time covering politics, world affairs, and news media, including focusing its attention on policy issues (Brewer and Marquardt 2007, 264). Baym (2005) contends that *The Daily Show* should be considered *alternative journalism* rather than *fake news*. Journalists often praise *The Daily Show*, even though it derives much of its humor by mocking journalists (Feldman 2007).

Scholars differentiate *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* from other types of late-night political humor, such as *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* or *Late Show with David Letterman*. "Jon Stewart's approach differs significantly from that of David Letterman and Jay Leno — and Colbert differs from all three of them" (Baumgartner and Morris 2008b, 624). When comparing *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* to other late-night political comedy shows, scholars point to differences in impact, humor, and hosts. *The Daily Show* is more influential than other forms of political comedy (Baumgartner and Morris 2008b, 623), the show is more political than other late-night television programs (Young 2004a), and its host, Jon Stewart, is more vocal with his political ideology (Jones 2005; Morris 2009). Young and Tisinger noted:

While Leno and Letterman may be predominantly entertainment programs that include political elements, *The Daily Show* should be considered — in the spirit of Monty Python — something completely different: a program designed to entertain but that functions predominantly as a political program. (Young and Tisinger 2006, 129)

The humor of *The Daily Show* is more dependent on irony, parody, and satire than the simpler jokes of late-night talk show hosts, like Leno and Letterman (Young and Tisinger 2006, 118), and viewers are more cognitively engaged (Xenos and Becker 2009, 331); yet, the complexity of its humor is achieved during a shorter time frame: a thirty-minute program versus the hour-and-a-half format of most late-night talk shows (Jones 2005). On *The Colbert Report*, host Stephen Colbert relies on deadpan satire (LaMarre, Landreville, and Beam 2009), and his approach is "a fundamentally different type of humor" (Baumgartner and Morris 2008b, 625) when compared to other late-night programs.

Viewers of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* differ from viewers of other news media. As examples, *The Daily Show* viewers are more likely to be younger (Coe et al. 2008; Morris 2009; Young 2004a), male (Coe et al.

2008; Young and Tisinger 2006), have more education (Morris 2009), and be more liberal (Coe et al. 2008; Young 2004a). They are also more likely to be interested in political news (Feldman and Young 2008; Young 2004a; Young and Tisinger 2006) and to be more politically knowledgeable (Young 2004a; Young and Tisinger 2006). One study found that viewers who are higher sensation seekers and higher in verbal aggression are more likely to watch political satire shows, such as *The Daily Show* (Banerjee, Greene, Krcmar, and Bagdasarov 2009).

But before we lump Stewart and Colbert together as an alternative conceptualization of late-night television political humor, we should recognize the differences between the two comedic hosts. Colbert hosts his program in character, relying on “deadpan satire” (LaMarre, Landreville, and Beam 2009, 216). Baumgartner and Morris distinguish the two hosts in this way: “Unlike Stewart, who plays the role of a common-sense observer who humorously points out the absurd in politics, Colbert parodies the new breed of self-indulgent, conservative news personalities” (Baumgartner and Morris 2008b, 623). Additionally, “Stewart delivers his jokes in his own left-leaning, astounded-but-amused persona, whereas Colbert’s character and show are formal, stylistic appropriations of generally right-wing news reporting” (Waisenan 2009, 125). *The Colbert Report* has been characterized as “an even more extreme parody than *The Daily Show*, as Colbert more fully inhabits his persona” (Druick 2009, 304). While the hosts share similarities and stand in contrast to other types of late-night television personas, they host decisively different programs.

But more importantly for this essay, the effects of these shows are also different. Effects of watching *The Daily Show* are more pronounced and consistent when compared with watching *The Tonight Show*, *Late Night*, or *Late Show* (Morris 2009). In recognizing that *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* are unique when compared to other late-night comedy programs (and even when compared to each other), this essay turns to a survey of scholarship exploring unique effects of these two programs. A review of what we know from empirical effects research on these two programs helps us to see similarities and differences between the two programs, and also helps us to move forward with future investigations of this unique type of political humor.

Learning and Information Processing

As with research into the genre of soft news (Baum 2003; Brewer and Cao 2006; Chaffee, Zhao, and Leshner 1994), scholars have looked for learning

effects with *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. In their study, "Just Laugh!" (2008) Young Mie Kim and John Vishak compare effects of watching entertainment coverage of the U.S. Supreme Court Justice and Chief Justice nominations in 2005. Participants watched a clip from *The Daily Show*, news from NBC and CNN, or, in the control condition, a science documentary. Viewers of evening news segments recalled more factual statements (and more accurate information in terms of issues and procedures) than viewers of *The Daily Show*. Kim and Vishak also found that viewers in both conditions learned more information than the control group. But perhaps their most compelling finding was that viewers of late-night comedy are more likely to engage in online-based political information processing, whereas viewers of conventional news are more likely to engage in memory-based political information processing. That is, "entertainment media appeared to be used for an affective integrator (i.e., online tally), the basis for individual's political judgments" (Kim and Vishak 2008, 353). Kim and Vishak's findings add a layer of nuance to the question of whether viewers learn from late-night comedy television. Their research reveals that besides learning some factual information, viewers may be processing political information differently.

Other scholars have explored effects of late-night comedy on information seeking. In "Moments of Zen" (2009), Michael Xenos and Amy Becker use experimental studies to ascertain whether jokes about issues on *The Daily Show* lead less politically interested viewers to seek out additional information about the issues from other news sources. Results indicated that watching *The Daily Show* enhances time spent searching for additional information using Web-based news sources, and "that less politically interested comedy viewers may also more easily acquire information subsequently encountered in more traditional news media" (Xenos and Becker 2009, 329). This research suggests that some of the most significant learning impacts of *The Daily Show* may be related to searches for more information, post-viewing.

From these two studies, we see an expanded view of what it means to learn from late-night comedy, including impacts on information processing (Kim and Vishak 2008) and the motivation to learn more (Xenos and Becker 2009). We can also compare these findings to previous work which found that late-night comedy viewers are more likely to seek out more information from conventional news (Feldman and Young, 2008) and a focus group study which found that some participants see *The Daily Show* as motivating their interest in other forms of news (Rottinghaus, Bird, Ridout, and Self 2008). *The Daily Show* may be teaching, influencing, and motivating political information and political participation — effects that move beyond individuals' political attitudes.

Attitudes and Behaviors Toward Conventional News and Politics

Other research turns away from direct effects of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* to examine indirect effects, such as attitudes and behaviors toward other forms of news. In their study, "Primacy Effects of *The Daily Show* and National TV News Viewing" (2007), Lance Holbert and his colleagues examined whether watching *The Daily Show* lowered viewers' political gratifications met by watching conventional television news using experimental design and real-time broadcasts of Comedy Central's *The Daily Show* and CNN's *Headline News*. When students watched *The Daily Show* and then *Headline News*, viewers indicated the lowest levels of political gratifications met by the conventional news broadcast. As the researchers note, the primacy effect seems to explain *The Daily Show's* effect when it was watched prior to *Headline News*. But their research also revealed that when students watched *Headline News* first and then *The Daily Show*, their political gratifications from national news were lower than when not watching *The Daily Show* at all (the control group). Holbert and his colleagues found similar results with the inverse of this order: watching *Headline News* prior to *The Daily Show* lowered the gratifications met by watching *The Daily Show*. Primacy effects for *The Daily Show* were limited to those with lower political self-efficacy: "Watching *The Daily Show* prior to CNN leads those individuals with lower internal political self-efficacy to think less of national television news as a source for political information" (Holbert, Lambde, Dudo, and Carlton 2007, 32). Holbert and his colleagues' research expands the scope of assessing late-night comedy effects beyond attitudes and political behavioral intentions to look at effects on other types of political information gathering. Such research paints a more dynamic, expansive conceptualization of late-night political comedy effects.

But watching *The Daily Show* affects more than how much viewers value conventional news. It can also affect how much cynicism viewers have toward news media. In "The *Daily Show* and Attitudes Toward the News Media" (2008), Jonathan Morris and Jody Baumgartner turned to experimental and survey data to reveal a connection between watching *The Daily Show* and viewers' trust in news media. Watching *The Daily Show* does not seem to cause viewers to think that news media covers politics with a liberal bias. But, there is a causal connection between the *The Daily Show* and cynicism toward the news media for young viewers age eighteen to thirty, a finding consistent with Baumgartner and Morris (2006). Cynicism caused by *The Daily Show* toward other media contrast with the effects of watching other types of late-night political humor — *The Tonight Show* and *Late Show* — where we find negative correlations with cynicism (Morris and Baumgartner 2008).

Effects on efficacy showcase the complexity of assessing effects of late-night television comedy. Jody Baumgartner and Jonathan Morris found that watching *The Colbert Report* decreases viewers' perceptions of their political efficacy: "Colbert's satire seems to confuse some young viewers" (Baumgartner and Morris 2008b, 634). But on the other hand, Baumgartner and Morris (2006) found that watching *The Daily Show* increases young viewers' perceptions of their political efficacy.

These studies remind us that effects of late-night television comedy, or more particularly, *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, extend beyond issues of learning and candidate evaluations. *The Daily Show* affects what viewers think they are getting from conventional news (Holbert, Lambde, Dudo, and Carlton 2007) and increases some young viewers' cynicism toward the news media (Morris and Baumgartner 2008), but it also increases viewers' perceptions of their political efficacy (Morris and Baumgartner 2006). *The Colbert Report*, on the other hand, appears to decrease viewers' perceptions of their political efficacy (Baumgartner and Morris 2008b).

Political Ideology and Political Parties

Does ideology matter when it comes to effects of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*? Brandon Rottinghaus, Kenton Bird, Travis Ridout, and Rebecca Self conducted a series of focus groups of *The Daily Show* viewers. One participant argued that ideology does not matter: "As long as it makes it funny, it's good" (Rottinghaus, Bird, Ridout, and Self 2008, 286). Is extant effects research consistent with this perception? The short answer is yes. But for an expanded picture, we can, in turn, examine research exploring viewers' ideology, perceived television program ideology, and differences in effects on targets of humor based on political party.

Kevin Coe and his colleagues explored ideology impacts in their study, "Hostile News" (2008). They based their study on the hostile media phenomenon, where ideology impacts perceived media bias (see Vallone, Ross, and Lepper, 1985). Their research, which also explored perceptions of FOX News' *The O'Reilly Factor* and CNN evening news, revealed that *The Daily Show* is perceived as more biased than *The O'Reilly Factor* and CNN evening news. Coe and colleagues also found that liberals feel more interested and informed after watching *The Daily Show* than conservative viewers, but that "almost uniformly, partisans of both stripes considered *The Daily Show* content to be less interesting and informative" than CNN evening news or Fox News' *The O'Reilly Factor* (Coe et al. 2008, 215).

Viewer ideology affects perceptions of television program ideology. But

does political party matter in terms of the targets of late-night humor? According to Baumgartner and Morris (2006), for younger viewers, the 2004 presidential candidates from both parties were negatively affected by mockery from *The Daily Show*.

But during the 2004 party conventions, we find a difference in effects between the two parties. Jonathan Morris' investigation reveals viewers' more negative perceptions of Republicans. In his study, "*The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart and Audience Attitude Change During the 2004 Party Conventions" (2009), Morris reveals that attitudes toward President Bush and Vice-President Cheney worsened while watching *The Daily Show's* coverage of the Republican Convention, but watching *The Daily Show's* coverage of the Democratic Convention had little impact on perceptions of presidential candidate John Kerry or his running mate, John Edwards. "This relationship held even when several demographic and attitudinal factors were controlled, and the effect was not limited to partisan Democrats" (Morris 2009, 99). Morris suggests that these differences may be explained by the differing tones of jokes between the two conventions. Much of the humor on *The Daily Show* that was aimed at Democrats targeted the candidates' physical appearance, whereas the ridicule of Republicans was often based on policies and perceived candidate character (Morris 2009).

We also find that ideology matters with *The Colbert Report* effects. In their work, "The Irony of Satire" (2009), Heather LaMarre, Kristen Landreville, and Michael Beam found that liberal or conservative viewers found Colbert funny. But conservative viewers were more likely to think that Colbert only pretends to be joking: he actually means what he says but cloaks his dislike of liberalism in humor. Liberal viewers think Colbert's humor is satire. As they (2009, 226) note, "results indicate that the ambiguous deadpan satire offered by Stephen Colbert in *The Colbert Report* is interpreted by audiences in a manner that best fits with their individual political beliefs." LaMarre and her colleagues wonder if this biased interpretation leads to a polarizing effect of political satire, with each "side" strengthening their positions after viewing the same message.

Jody Baumgartner and Jonathan Morris looked at effects of Stephen Colbert's *The Colbert Report* on young viewers' political attitudes and their perceived political efficacy (2008b). The results revealed that *The Colbert Report* affects political attitudes, but the influence was unexpected. As they (2008b, 634) explain:

Instead of giving viewers pause to ponder the legitimacy of Colbert's implicit criticisms of the far right, this experiment found that exposure to Colbert increases support for President Bush, Republicans in Congress, and Republican policies on the economy and the War on Terror.

Instead of honing in on the implicit arguments of *The Colbert Report*, some viewers seemed to take the satire at face value. Quite simply, they didn't get the joke.

Summary of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* Scholarship Findings

The Daily Show and *The Colbert Report* affect viewers; in many instances, these effects challenge conventional wisdom. Some *Daily Show* viewers think more negatively about television news (Holbert, Lambde, Dudo, and Carlton 2007; Morris & Baumgartner 2008) and more negatively about some politicians (Morris 2009), but they're also learning some political information (Kim and Vishak 2009). *The Colbert Report* may be enhancing instead of derogating perceptions of a common target of its satire — the right wing (Baumgartner and Morris 2008b) — and lowering viewers' perceptions of their political efficacy (Baumgartner and Morris 2008b). But, with *The Colbert Report*, when it comes to effects, it also seems to matter who's watching — that is, the political ideology of the viewer can factor into the effects of *The Colbert Report* humor (LaMarre, Landreville, and Beam 2009).

Two studies explored effects of *The Daily Show* in relation to perceptions of other news media sources. Watching *The Daily Show* makes viewers think of conventional news less in terms of gratification (Holbert, Lambde, Dudo, and Carlton 2007) and this lowers younger viewers' trust in conventional news (Morris and Baumgartner 2008).

The two studies that teased out effects of *The Colbert Report* found these effects to be complementary. Many conservative viewers don't think Colbert is simply cracking jokes — he secretly means what he is saying (LaMarre, Landreville, and Beam 2009, 226). Viewers in general have more positive perceptions of Republicans after watching Colbert (Baumgartner and Morris 2008b).

Some of these effects are consistent with effects of other forms of late-night television political humor. For example, viewers with lower levels of political knowledge are most affected by late-night political humor when it is packaged with network late-night shows (e.g., Young 2004b, 2006) and cable shows such as *The Daily Show* (e.g., Holbert, Lambde, Dudo, and Carlton 2007; Morris and Baumgartner 2008). But, there are also differences between effects of *The Daily Show* and network late-night comedy. Watching *The Daily Show* appears to make some viewers more cynical, whereas watching network late-night comedy lowers cynicism (Morris and Baumgartner 2008). But we also see some differences emerge with effects of *The Daily Show* and

The Colbert Report. For example, we have some evidence that *The Daily Show* is more damaging to Republicans than Democrats (Morris 2009), but *The Colbert Report* seems to boost Republicans' image (Baumgartner and Morris 2008b).

Future Directions for Research

Scholarly attention to Comedy Central's *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* has produced nuanced explanations for what it means to laugh with, and at, politicians. Future research of late-night television political humor in general, and *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* in particular, will continue to clarify effects of political humor.

Scholars have pointed out that late-night comedy is not monolithic (Baumgartner and Morris 2008b; Young and Tisinger 2006). *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* humor is not monolithic either. Consider, for example, the 2004 Democratic and Republican Conventions. While both party conventions were mocked on *The Daily Show*, a content analysis reveals that the humor directed at the Republicans was harder hitting and more substantive (Morris 2009). Furthermore, portions of the programs use different humorous techniques. Scholars using qualitative approaches have isolated specific segments of the shows (Baym 2007), and LaMarre, Landreville, and Beam's empirical effects research used a three-minute clip of an interview on *The Colbert Report* (LaMarre, Landreville, and Beam 2009). Yet our current understanding of effects of interviews on *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* is limited, and future research should take a closer look (Compton 2008). Future scholarship should also explore recurring segments, such as the health news segment on *The Colbert Report*. Other recurring segments warrant effects scholarship, such as *The Daily Show*'s recurring religious news segment. Might these unique segments on *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* have unique effects? Would we find different effects from watching the segments in the context of the entire program compared with watching the segments on their own in, for example, an online clip?

Types of humor differ on *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* (Baumgartner and Morris 2008b; Druick 2009; Waisenen 2009). While some have pointed out that *The Daily Show* humor is more complex than other late-night offerings, such as Jay Leno's monologue (Jones 2005; Young and Tisinger 2006), there are moments of simple humor on *The Daily Show*. In a pilot study, Ya Hui Michelle See, Richard Petty, and Lisa Evans (2009) discovered that people found it more difficult to follow conventional political news forums (panel discussion and debates) than political humor (cartoons and, in their

study, *The Daily Show*). Scholars could take an even more specific view of political humor by looking at specific types of humor, from extended satire to the occasional one-liner.

Future research should also explore effects of failed humor, or statements that elicit a backlash. Research into other forms of political humor — for example, Bippus' (2007) study about jokes told during political debates — suggests that the perceived quality of the humor matters in terms of effects. Failed humor in a radio broadcast annoys listeners (Duncan and Nelson 1985, 38), and failed humor during interpersonal conversations is often followed by such responses as silence (Hay 2001) or laughter (Bell 2009). But what happens when humor fails on late-night television comedy? Does failed humor on *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* have a unique effect?

Some viewers are exposed to *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* without watching the actual television programs and, instead, catch content in other venues. For example, late-night television political humor is often rebroadcast during conventional news programs (Compton 2008). We have reasons to believe these clips also have effects. Other types of late night comedy, such as *Saturday Night Live* and late-night television monologues shown at the conclusion of a news broadcast, can reduce viewers' worries and decrease their perceptions of the severity of the issues raised during the preceding news stories (Zillmann, Gibson, Ordman, and Aust 1994).

Additionally, viewers talk about late-night comedy with their friends, colleagues and family members (Schaefer and Avery, 1993). Research suggests that humor can affect and sometimes mitigate conflict during conversations (Norrick and Spitz 2008). Would political humor — Comedy Central political humor particularly — have similar mitigating effects? If so, perhaps word-of-mouth transmission of late-night political comedy content could help people approach potentially contentious topics with less chance of disruptive conflict.

Some theoretical approaches seem particularly well-suited for future late night comedy research. For example, scholars have wondered about a sleeper effect (see Hovland, Lumsdaine, and Sheffield, 1949) with late night political humor, where content lingers longer than recollection of the original source of the content (e.g., Compton 2006; LaMarre, Landreville, and Beam 2009). Inoculation theory offers another rich area for theoretical exploration (see Compton and Pfau 2005). Inoculation scholars find that weakened counter-arguments motivate a process of resistance that leads to rejection of subsequent persuasive influences, working much the same way as a medical inoculation injecting a weakened version of an offending agent to bolster resistance against disease (see McGuire, 1964, for an overview of early research, and Compton and Pfau, 2005, for the most recent overview of subsequent scholarship). Can

jokes function as weakened versions of persuasive attacks? If so, the humor on *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* could be functioning as an inoculation.

Conclusion

Television political humor effects scholarship is on a path of increasing specificity. Our earliest findings of television political humor effects come from research on the larger genre of soft news. Scholars in pursuit of a more nuanced understanding of soft news effects turned to late night comedy shows in particular, then turned to specific comedy programs such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. Certainly, we will gain more precise understandings of political humor effects as scholars continue to examine specific types of humor and specific segments on *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. We can't help but wonder what's next. Will *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* inspire other programs using similar types of late-night political humor, prompting scholars to study these programs as a new genre of late-night comedy? Or, will future research continue to find unique differences among late-night comedy television programs? The merging of news, politics, and entertainment has been profound, with "the line between entertainment and news ... blurred, if not completely eradicated" (Mutz 2004, 34). Perhaps no other programs reflect the merge better than *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*.

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