Star Spangled Awesome? Exposing American Exceptionalism Through Political Satire

Dissertation

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By
Megan Rose Hill, M.A.
Graduate Program in Communication
The Ohio State University
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Dissertation Committee:
R. Lance Holbert, Advisor
David Herman
Daniel McDonald
Emily Moyer-Gusé
Abstract

Many scholars have noted the narrative turn that has taken place across academia over the past several decades (e.g., Herman, 1999; Hyvärinen, 2006). Such attention is a clear indication that stories are driving scholarly research in multiple ways, including attempts aimed at understanding how narratives help individuals make sense of the world.

One of the primary means by which narratives organize understanding is by arranging actions and events into intelligible sequences. The ease and speed at which most events are recognized and incorporated into individual experience is a testament to the organizing power of master narratives. Indeed, the control master narratives exert over our understanding of daily life is a function of their ability to normalize actions and events as routines (Bamberg, 2004; Nelson, 2001). Simply put, master narratives become a natural part of our interpretative process, escaping conscious detection as they continually work to organize our perception of the world.

In the United States (U.S.), perception is, in part, organized around the master narrative of exceptionalism, which vigorously asserts that America is not only destined to be special (Hughes, 2003; Madsen, 1998; Tuveson, 1968), but that America is the chosen nation, with a mission to act as the force of good against evil (Judis, 2005; Esch, 2010). There is, however, a growing sense that America’s exceptionalism is in jeopardy (Packer, 2011; Bacevich, 2012; Lewis, 2012). Packer (2011), for example, argues that the narrative of America today is one in which, “Solving fundamental problems with a can-do practicality – the very thing the world used to associate with America, and that redeemed us from our vulgarity and arrogance – now seems
beyond our reach.” According to this narrative, America’s exceptionalism is being torn apart at its seams.

Given the potential unraveling of the American exceptionalism narrative, one important empirical question needs to be asked - what happens when a master narrative comes under attack?

Before addressing this question, the framework underlying this dissertation is established by connecting the concept of master narrative with cultivation theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Additional cross-disciplinary connections are then utilized to conceptualize political satire as a form of counter narrative (Hill, 2013), with two types of satire (horatian and juvenalian) considered to occupy different degrees of narrative resistance.

Having established the theoretical boundaries of this study, the discussion turns to the online experiment utilized to test the seven hypotheses that serve as the foundation of this dissertation. Participants (N = 243) were randomly assigned to one of two studies (The Newsroom or Chappelle’s Show), each of which contained three message conditions (horatian, juvenalian, and control). Prior to and following exposure, participants’ attitudes regarding the U.S. were assessed. Results suggest that exposure to satire engenders cognitive dissonance, which, in turn, influences individuals’ exposure to subsequent narrative headlines. Moreover, identification with the American exceptionalism narrative declined over time.
Dedication

For my mom and dad, my first and most beloved teachers.
Acknowledgments

On my first official visit to Ohio State, a graduate student in the haze of the comprehensive exam process, bleary eyed and exhausted, candidly explained that the only way to make it through graduate school was to be entirely committed to doing so – in other words, be ready to sign over your mind, body, and soul. In fact, if we were attending graduate school to appease anyone else, we would never make it. Although true in some respects, none of us make it through graduate school on our own. We are buoyed by friends and family; colleagues and mentors; university staff, and many others. It is to them that I owe my gratitude, for whom I made it through the demands of a rigorous graduate program, and without whom this journey would have been incomplete.

Specifically, I am grateful to my advisor, Lance Holbert, for adding me to his already burgeoning list of advisees. I immediately gravitated to Lance during my first quarter of graduate school because of his humility, his sense of humor, and his ability to adapt to the needs of each of his (numerous) students. He manages to make time for each of us while endlessly attempting to find balance between his own work and family. Lance will be the first to admit that achieving balance between life and work is a never-ending pursuit - one that is, perhaps, only attainable in fleeting moments but worth attempting every day. I have appreciated, too, all of the conversations we have had about things unrelated to our roles as advisor and advisee, especially ones in which the Michigan State Spartans have emerged victorious over the Wisconsin Badgers!
Over the past five years, Lance has worn many hats, from confidant to cheerleader, and he has changed from one to the other exactly when needed.

I also extend my gratitude to my dissertation committee: David Herman, Emily Moyer-Gusé, and Dan McDonald. Their thoughtful, critical, and prompt feedback has been essential to this project’s success and to my success as a scholar. I have learned a great deal by observing each of their unique approaches to research and teaching and am thankful to have had the opportunity to do so.

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To my brother, thank you for the grounding you provide and for rekindling memories of our childhood through over-sized Christmas trees, overzealous puppies, and the camaraderie of a partner I’m proud to call family. And, finally, to my parents, who have supported and sacrificed for me since the day I was born. Thank you for every paper proofread and every meal made; for every encouraging word and every question indulged; for every phone call and every care package; for every hour of sleep you have lost and every gray hair you have gained; for every happy memory; for everything. I am eternally grateful.
Vita

June 2003 .........................................................L’Anse Creuse High School

December 2007 ..................................................B.A. Communication, Oakland University

2008-June 2012 ..................................................Graduate Teaching Associate, Communication,

School of Communication, The Ohio State

University

2012 .................................................................M.A., Communication, School of

Communication, The Ohio State University

Publications


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Chapter 1: Theoretical Foundation

Cultivating American Exceptionalism

In February of 1941, publishing mogul Henry Luce penned an essay for Life magazine titled, “The American Century.” The essay was intended to establish the case for United States (U.S.) entry into World War II. Yet, more than that, the essay became, as Bacevich (2012) asserts, “a summons, an aspiration, a claim, a calling, and ultimately the shorthand identifier attached to an entire era. By the time World War II ended in 1945, the United States had indeed ascended – as Luce had forecast and perhaps as fate had intended all along – to a position of global primacy” (para. 2).

According to Luce, the American Century was to be characterized by “a sharing with all peoples of our Bill of Rights, our Declaration of Independence, our Constitution, our magnificent industrial products, our technical skills” (p. 64). Moreover, Luce called on the nation to “undertake now to be the Good Samaritan of the entire world…[and] to accept wholeheartedly our duty…to exert upon the world the full impact of our influence, for such purposes as we see fit and by such means as we see fit” (italics added; p. 63-65). As will become evident, Luce’s rhetoric manifestly exploited elements of the American exceptionalism master narrative and, in doing so, capitalized on the narrative’s performative power to shape and define public sentiment regarding the United States’ role in World War II, its aftermath, and the remainder of the 20th century – the American century.
Seventy-two years later, the exceptionalism narrative Luce so shrewdly employed has, for many, begun to ring hollow. Packer (2011), for example, argues that while the “surface of life has greatly improved…the deeper structures, the institutions that underpin a healthy democratic society, have fallen into a state of decadence” (para. 5). As a result, the narrative of America today is one in which, “Solving fundamental problems with a can-do practicality – the very thing the world used to associate with America, and that redeemed us from our vulgarity and arrogance – now seems beyond our reach” (para. 6).

According to this narrative, the land of opportunity has lost its luster; its cherished narrative of exceptionalism in serious jeopardy of disrepute. Indeed, “Dismayed by the steady immiseration of the vaunted middle class, the billions squandered on two decades of optional military adventures, and the competition from new economic powerhouses,” this narrative argues that we need “a twenty-first-century reset” (Lewis, 2012, p. 101-102). And, perhaps a reset is in order. After all, “Rarely – and certainly not since the Civil War – have we been so divided on which direction we should be heading as a country” (Chafe, 2012, p. 11). According to these accounts, the exceptionalism narrative is fraying at both ends, losing coherence and fidelity (Fisher, 1987; Wood, 2004), and leading Bacevich (2012) to claim that, “…the bracing future that Luce confidently foresaw back in 1941 has in our own day slipped into the past” (para.5). The American century is over (Bacevich, 2012).

The American exceptionalism narrative, however, has not gone gently into that good night. Even if the notion of the American century is over\textsuperscript{1}, “most Americans appear loath to concede that fact” (Bacevich, 2012, para. 5). In fact, nowhere is the notion of the American Century, of America’s inherent exceptionalism, resuscitated more often than in American

\textsuperscript{1} If it ever existed.
political rhetoric. During the 2011 Republican Presidential Primary, for example, then front-runner Mitt Romney proclaimed:

> I am guided by one overwhelming conviction and passion: This century must be an American Century. In an American Century, America has the strongest economy and the strongest military in the world…God did not create this country to be a nation of followers. America is not destined to be one of several equally balanced global powers…we are an exceptional country with a unique destiny and role in the world…This is America’s moment. We should embrace the challenge, not shrink from it, not crawl into an isolationist shell, not wave the white flag of surrender, nor give in to those who assert America’s time has passed. That is utter nonsense. (“Text of Romney Foreign Policy Speech,” para. 23,24,27,55,58)

Lest the opposition be outdone, a different riff on the same narrative was advanced by President Barack Obama in his 2012 State of the Union Address, in which he ardently proclaimed,

> “America is back…Anyone who tells you otherwise, anyone who tells you that America is in decline or that our influence has waned, doesn’t know what they’re talking about” (“Remarks by the President in State of the Union Address,” para. 100-101).

Perhaps such rhetoric is simply to be expected from American politicians. After all, when President Obama offered a more sobering account of such nationalistic enthusiasm at a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit in France in 2009, noting that he believed in American exceptionalism just as the “Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism,” he was immediately criticized (Stephens, 2012, para.4).

America’s exceptionalism is, by definition, something different, something that separates the United States from other societies, distinguishing the U.S. as a providential nation destined to be special and better than all others (Hughes, 2003; Lipset, 1996; Madsen, 1998; Tuveson, 1968); to suggest otherwise, to speak “too candidly about the country’s faults…[is to risk] being labeled the most devastating of epithets – un-American” (Shane, 2012, para.13).

Thus, to suggest that rhetoric regarding American exceptionalism is the sole dispensation of those who walk the hallowed corridors of Washington, D.C., would be both naïve and unduly
limiting. To exert influence, the exceptionalism narrative must permeate society, becoming both an unconscious part of normal reality and a common sense aspect of American identity, and what better way to both attain and maintain such cultural saturation than through the most ubiquitous medium – television.

In the span of a single decade (1950-1960), the television set went from a relatively sparse commodity present in only ten-percent of American homes to an entrenched cultural experience present in nearly ninety-percent of American homes (Sparks, 2006). Today, roughly fifty-five percent of U.S. households possess three or more televisions (Nielsen, 2010) and, according to Nielsen (2011), the average American watches approximately thirty-five hours of television each week, with his/her daily dose now reaching nearly five hours.

The sheer amount of time individuals devote to television has, from the very beginning, intrigued and concerned members of the scholarly community and public alike, particularly regarding the type(s) of stories television tells and their (potential) effect(s) on members of the viewing audience (Sparks, 2006). Specifically, there has been considerable concern about the impact of consuming violent media (Bushman & Anderson, 2011; Huesmann, 2010). In response, extensive research has been conducted on the amount, type, and effect(s) of media violence (e.g., Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980a; Gunter, 1985; Bandura, 1986; Potter & Smith, 2000), with several theoretical traditions (e.g., Cultivation Theory, Social Learning/Cognitive Theory) emerging from this body of work.

Although violence is a considerable part of the American television diet, with nearly 70% of prime-time programs containing violence (Weaver, Zelenkauskaite, & Samson, 2012), media scholars have also devoted attention to the reasons why individuals turn to television in the first place (Uses and Gratifications Theory; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973); the persuasive effects of television stories, including but not limited to violence (Cultivation Theory; Gerbner & Gross,
the ability of the stories present in television news to set the public agenda (Agenda-Setting Theory; McCombs & Shaw, 1973); the impact of television stories on public opinion formation and expression (Spiral of Silence; Noelle-Neumann, 1974); the cultural impact of television as a medium on human communication (Medium Theory; McLuhan, 1962; Meyrowitz, 1985); how television narratives’ openness or closure as texts influences viewers (Eco, 1979); how viewers from different cultural backgrounds interpret television narratives (Katz & Liebes, 1986; Morley, 1980); and how viewers read (e.g., dominant, negotiated, opposition) media texts (Reception Theory; Hall, 1980). In short, television and its stories have, from the very beginning, been a source of interest and research, with scholars from a variety of epistemological backgrounds seeking to understand television’s influence on viewers’ attitudes, knowledge, and/or behavior(s).

Over the past decade, one relatively new and burgeoning line of research has led scholars to the study of entertainment media and politics. At the heart of this research is recognition of the increasingly unstable distinction between “the serious and non-serious…the political and non-political” (Williams & Delli Carpini, 2011, p. 184), directing researchers to question the socio-political ramifications stemming from the consumption of political information in all its guises, from traditional political rhetoric, to fictional political dramas (e.g. The West Wing; Sorkin, Schlamme, &Wells, 2002), to satirical news shows (see Holbert, 2005 for a typology for the study of entertainment television and politics).

In fact, politics has become the issue du jour for American television, with the American narrative becoming the entertainment centerpiece on a range of prime-time programs, including HBO’s The Newsroom (Sorkin & Mottola, 2012a), Showtime’s Homeland (Gansa, Gordon, Raff, & Cuesta, 2011), and FX’s The Americans (Weisberg & Fields, 2013), to name a few. At a time when politics at all levels – local to international – are as rife with tension as any time in recent
memory (e.g., Bartels, 2010; Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2005; McCarty, Pool, & Rosenthal, 2005; Mann & Ornstein, 2012), when questions regarding American decline are being confronted in both real and fictional worlds, when the American narrative itself appears both in flux and up for grabs, it is important to understand how exposure to political entertainment regarding the U.S. influences Americans’ perceptions of their country. Specifically, this dissertation focuses on aspects of the cultivation of the American exceptionalism master narrative before addressing the potentially subversive influence of political satire.

Cultivation Theory

For nearly four decades, cultivation research has focused on the role television plays in distributing and consolidating beliefs about social reality (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner, Gross, Jackson-Beeck, Jeffries-Foy, & Signorielli, 1978; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002). As one of only a few contributions made by mass communication scholars to have crossed disciplinary boundaries (Bryant, 1986), the cultivation hypothesis has sustained scholarly interest to the tune of more than 500 individual pieces of research, with more than 125 studies appearing since 2000 alone (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Despite such sustained scholarly engagement, in which a small, yet reliable cultivation relationship has been demonstrated (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002; Morgan & Shanahan, 1997), questions remain about the mechanisms that link exposure to perception. This dissertation addresses these questions by re-focusing attention on cultivation theory’s narrative roots. More specifically, this project advances an integrative theoretical perspective grounded in the belief that perceptions of social reality are organized in relation to master narratives, which offer individuals pre-existing sets of socio-cultural codes for making sense of the world. The power behind master narratives is a function of their ability to naturalize sequences of actions and events.
as routines. The cultivation effect is thus dependent upon the degree to which individuals have internalized master narratives, limiting their interpretation strategies and bringing them in line with the dominant cultural perspective (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999).

This focus on the role of master narratives is in line with academia’s surging interest in all things narrative. Our storytelling ability is, after all, what separates humans from other species (Bruner, 1987, 1991; Gerbner, 1969; Fisher, 1984; Randall, 2001), and it is this separation that is being culled as a means of understanding how individuals make sense of the world. As McIntyre (1984) argues:

> It is through hearing stories about wicked stepmothers, lost children, good but misguided kings, wolves that suckle twin boys, youngest sons who receive no inheritance but must make their own way in the world and eldest sons who waste their inheritance on riotous living and go into exile to live with the swine, that children learn or mislearn both what a child and what a parent is, what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words. Hence there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources. (italics added; p. 216)

Unfortunately, cultivation scholars have been slow to incorporate advancements in narrative theory to explain how exposure to narratives influences viewers’ beliefs about social reality (for exceptions see Shanahan & Morgan, 1999; Bilandzic & Rössler, 2004; Busselle, Ryabovolova, & Wilson, 2004; Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). Even the most recent edited volume regarding cultivation (Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2012) only includes two significant references to narrative as a foundation for understanding cultivation (i.e., chapters 11 and 13, respectively). Given the theory’s foundational interest in the power of narrative influence, it is surprising that narrative concepts have largely been overlooked and hence, under-theorized. Perhaps such oversight can be attributed to Bruner’s (1991) assertion that storytelling is “so familiar and
ubiquitous that it is likely to be overlooked, in much the same way as we suppose that the fish will be the last to discover water” (p. 4).

There is a brutal irony in Bruner’s assertion. Cultivation theory is steeped in water metaphors, the result of George Gerbner’s belief that the media environment is “a tidal wave, a flood, an ocean in which we are swimming without knowing or being aware of the nature of the ocean” (2002, p. 498). This dissertation addresses a clear theoretical gap by jumping into the deep end of the pool and integrating the concepts of master (Abbott, 2008; Bamberg, 2005; Nelson, 2001) and counter narratives (Andrews, 2002a; Bamberg, 2004; Nelson, 2001) into cultivation research. In doing so, this dissertation returns to Gerbner’s original interest in narrative, specifically his observation that the power of stories resides in their ability to “confirm authority and redistribute power in specific ways” (Gerbner, 1986, p. 255).

One of the central tenets advanced in this dissertation is that cultivation occurs when the positions afforded by master narratives are taken up and internalized by individuals; such internalization brings an individual’s world view in line with the dominant culture and forecloses alternative explanations for how the world works. As a result, when such individuals are exposed to a counter narrative that challenges the dominant cultural perspective, as can be the case from exposure to specific mass mediated messages (e.g., satire), dissonance is aroused within the individual that must be reduced. Here, dissonance refers to a sense of psychological discomfort, which, according to cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), provokes an individual’s desire to return to a state of comfort or equilibrium, primarily by avoiding information likely to increase his/her discomfort. The theory also holds that the more anxiety or stress an individual feels (i.e., the greater the magnitude of dissonance), the more pressure he/she feels to engage in behavior(s) that will reduce his/her discomfort (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999). Before making such arguments, however, a clearer understanding of cultivation theory must be established.
To that end, the first results of cultivation analysis were published in 1976 (Gerbner & Gross). Since then, explanations of cultivation theory have largely held that “those who spend more time watching television [heavy viewers] are more likely to perceive the world in ways that reflect the most common and recurrent messages of the television world, compared to those who watch less television [light viewers] but are otherwise comparable in terms of important demographic characteristics” (Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2009, p. 34). In other words, television viewers’ perceptions of social reality are shaped by recurrent exposure to a stream of predominantly consonant (if not accurate) perceptions of the world as presented by television narratives. Consequently, individuals who are exposed to greater amounts of television are more likely to internalize television’s stories, adopting as their own the beliefs and values of the television world and, in so doing, overriding any pre-existing differences as they are drawn to a convergent, or mainstream, perspective (i.e., mainstreaming; Shanahan & Morgan, 1999).

It is important to remember that these explanations have been derived from over thirty years of research, a timeframe conducive to the condensation of scholarly thought into succinct summaries. Although productive in terms of organizational power and internal consistency (Berger & Chaffee, 1987), such compression can also blur a theory’s original focus and scope. For example, there is often no mention of George Gerbner’s initial scholarly interest in and study of folklore and literature, and although his fondness for quoting Andrew Fletcher has been discussed (Morgan, 2002), the implications of the quote – “If a man were permitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who should make the laws of a nation” (as cited in Morgan, 2002, p.7) – for the development of cultivation theory have been under-theorized, particularly in light of the quote’s focus on the power of a particular narrative form. In short, Gerbner’s academic pedigree was rooted in the power of storytelling, particularly the stories that drive and derive from culture. Gerbner saw this power as capable of eclipsing that of the state, as illustrated by
Fletcher’s quote and, thus, one of cultivation theory’s founding principles is reflected in his assertion that, “Whatever else they do, stories confirm authority and distribute power in specific ways. Storytelling fits human reality to the social order” (italics added; Gerbner, 1986, p. 255). Clearly, Gerbner’s concerns regarding cultivation were, at their heart, about the influence of stories and the process of storytelling.

In fact, if we dive into George Gerbner’s personal narrative, we find the seeds of cultivation in a handful of precipitous experiences. First, Gerbner grew up in Budapest, Hungary during the 1930s, an experience that coincided with the rise of fascism, which came “to dominate and oppress much of [his] life and thinking” (Gerbner as cited in Morgan, 2002, p. 21). According to his own account, he “spent probably the most rewarding months each year of [his] teens in various villages in Hungary, living and working with the peasants and trying to learn their culture, their language, their dialects, collecting folks songs and folktales” (p. 21). Gerbner’s intentions to continue studying folklore and literature at the University of Budapest were cut short, however, by World War II and his inscription into the Hungarian Army. Although he had “no particular objections at that time about serving in the army, [he] had grave objections about serving in the Hungarian army” (p. 22).

So, Gerbner left Hungary, eventually making his way through Paris to Mexico, Cuba, and finally, the United States, where he hitchhiked to Los Angeles and enrolled at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). Unfortunately, UCLA did not have a journalism program (the closest program to literature), so Gerbner transferred to Berkeley, where he earned a degree in journalism. While there, Gerbner reflected on his experience living under fascism, which eventually led him to join the American army. At the conclusion of the war, Gerbner returned to the United States to attend graduate school at the University of Southern California (USC). His doctoral work took place in the Audiovisual Department of the School of Education, which,
according to Gerbner, was “the only place where communication was taken seriously” (p. 27). As a result, Gerbner became convinced that “communication is really where the action is – the political action, the social action, the cultural action” (p. 27-28).

In short, a line can be traced between Gerbner’s interest in folklore and literature against the backdrop of fascism, to his education at Berkeley, his military service and, eventually, his doctoral focus at USC, directly to the development of cultivation and its attendant focus on the cultural process of storytelling. Gerbner experienced, first hand, the destructive effect of cultural imperialism and political hegemony, especially when such power is amplified through complete control of a culture’s narratives. Gerbner’s experience of fascism led him to question the impact of television, which he regarded as operating under a similar regime. The roots of cultivation are thus as much in the power of narratives to shape belief as in who yields power over their creation and dissemination. These roots, much like other theories entering the communication landscape at the same time, are a reflection of the historical period and the power of technological change to alter human communication.

Along with cultivation, for example, the spiral of silence, proposed by German political scientist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in 1974, posits that mass media circulate a narrow and preferred set of viewpoints that enter public discourse. Individuals, immersed in this mediated environment, use their quasi-statistical sense to perceive which views are dominant among the public and which are disfavored. If an individual perceives his/her opinion is on the margins, he/she becomes less comfortable and willing to express that opinion for fear of being isolated from others or being negatively evaluated for supporting an unfavorable position. As a result, minority opinions become harder and harder to hear and can eventually be completely silenced from public discourse, save for those of the “hard core,” who “regard [social] isolation as the price it must pay” (Noelle-Neumann, 1993, p. 170) for publicly voicing an alternative opinion.
The spiral of silence thus emerges from the same shadow of fascism as cultivation, focusing specifically on public opinion formation and expression at the individual level.

Similarly, agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1973) predicts a positive relationship between the attention a topic receives in the mass media and the public’s perception of the importance of that topic. Simply put, the more attention and time the media devote to a single topic, the more likely members of the viewing public are to perceive that topic as significant. Perhaps best summarized by Cohen (1963), the basic premise of agenda-setting theory is that the press “may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” (p. 13). That is, media coverage of an issue may not directly determine the position(s) people take on particular issues, but it does guarantee which issues will be considered important. By focusing on a few select stories then, the media are not only capable of dictating which narratives enter public discourse, but of prioritizing those narratives in the public agenda. Agenda-setting theory’s focus on the process of salience transfer thus explains how certain issues become the “focus of public attention, thought, and perhaps even action,” which, in turn, lays the foundation for public opinion (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009, p. 1).

Although this cluster of theories (i.e., cultivation, spiral of silence, agenda-setting) all speak to the media’s potential to generate large effects, Gerbner focused his attention explicitly at the cultural level, where technological change had dramatically altered the storytelling process, transforming television into the most prolific and potent storyteller of the industrialized age. In light of the flood of mass produced popular messages proliferating through radio, newspapers, magazines, movies and, most importantly, the rapidly growing television medium, Gerbner believed we were on the precipice of “a revolutionary social and cultural transformation in message production and an intellectual challenge of the highest order” (Morgan, 2012, p. 19).
Television was at the heart of this transformation, with its mass-produced messages both reflecting and shaping American culture in the same way as the peasant folktales he had once recorded in rural Hungary. Rather than exhibiting diversity, however, television, as the “central cultural arm of American society,” was:

an agency of the established order and as such serves primarily to extend and maintain rather than to alter, threaten, or weaken conventional conceptions, beliefs, and behaviors. Its chief cultural function is to spread and stabilize social patterns, to cultivate not change but resistance to change. Television is a medium of the socialization of most people into standardized roles and behaviors. (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 175)

The authors’ trepidation regarding television is thus its power to cultivate, beyond recognition, the viewing public’s adherence to dominant forms of cultural sense making (see also Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, & Morgan, 1980b). This concern primarily stems from the way in which television’s messages are mass-produced by elites, whose social and economic goals are pursued regardless of any potential consequences for the viewing audience (Gerbner, 1969; Gross & Jeffries-Fox, 1978). Of those consequences, Gerbner’s principal concern was the cultivation of a collective consciousness dominated by basic assumptions about society’s norms and values, which would guide people to “perceive as real and normal and right that which fits the established social order” (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 173).

As a result, Gerbner called for the creation of a cultural indicators project designed to assess the “general terms of collective cultivation about existence, priorities, values, and relationships...given in collectively shared public message systems” (Gerbner, 1969, p. 126). To illustrate the value of such research, Gerbner argued that a statement such as, “John believes in Santa Claus,” means little unless we also know “in what culture, at what point in time, and in the context of what public message systems cultivating the reinforcement or inhibition of such beliefs” (p. 126). In this sense, cultural indicators were intended to serve as a “‘third voice’ of independent research building a continuing and cumulative factual basis for judgment and policy”
(Morgan, 2002, p. 176). This institutional approach to mass communication called for a three-pronged analysis of the relationships among media industries (responsible for the production of messages – institutional process analysis), media content (the nature of the messages themselves – message system analysis), and media effects (the consequences and functions of messages – cultivation analysis) (Gerbner, 1969; Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Shanahan & Morgan, 1999; Morgan, 2002, 2012).

Each prong of the cultural indicators program was thus understandable only in direct relation to the other two. As Morgan (2012) asserts, “media institutions, messages, and audience beliefs…work as a…three-legged stool. It is meaningless to ask which of the three legs is most important to keep the stool from falling over” (p. 57). Put simply, cultivation was the result of a long-term reciprocal process involving the institutions which (a) produce media messages, (b) the messages themselves, and (c) the images, values, and beliefs that were then embedded within a given culture (Gerbner, 1969; Gerbner & Gross, 1976).

In its earliest forms, then, the idea of cultivation and the cultural indicators program was based on Gerbner’s desire to describe the process by which mass communication sets “the cultural ground rules for what is, what is important, what is right, and what is related to what,” such that the rules become invisible (Gerbner, 1969, p. 127; Morgan, 2002). The point of cultivation was never that it occurs, for it is a basic function of all socio-cultural institutions and the stories they tell, but that in modern society “the cultivation of collective consciousness is now institutionalized and corporately managed to an unprecedented degree” (Morgan, 2002, p. 9).

In order to develop a productive means of addressing this arrangement, Gerbner developed the cultural indicators program, which ultimately sought to close the intelligence gap created by the mass-production of messages, which “superimpose their own forms of collective consciousness” (p. 176). Only through a systematic analysis of the institutions responsible for
producing the messages, the messages themselves, and the consequences of those messages, would policy makers have the information and tools necessary to change the media system, thereby changing what type of culture was being cultivated.

Over thirty years later, however, the bulk of research related to the cultural indicators program has been conducted in relation to message system and cultivation analysis\(^2\). Message system analysis, in particular, seeks to profile the overall composition and structure of television messages and, in doing so, “uncover the dominant patterns in symbolic materials created for and consumed by heterogeneous and anonymous publics” (Morgan, 2012, p. 60). As early as 1980, results of message system analysis were published regarding patterns in a range of topics, including violence\(^3\), aging, sex roles, minorities, occupations, educational achievements and aspirations, family images and impact, sexual depictions and lessons, and death and dying (Gerbner, et al., 1980a, p. 11). As Gerbner and Gross (1976) made clear, “Message system analysis yields the gross but clear terms of location, action, and characterization discharged into the mainstream of community consciousness. Aggregate viewer interpretation and response starts with these common terms of basic exposure” (p. 182).

Cultivation analysis is thus predicated on message system analysis, as it attempts to determine the relationship between the patterns identified in the symbolic world and the audience’s assumptions, expectations, interpretations, and values (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Shanahan & Morgan, 1999; Morgan, 2002, 2012). The application of cultivation analysis involves first determining the television answer (i.e., the answer “slanted in the direction of the

\(^2\) Few studies have addressed institutional process analysis (although see Gerbner, 1972 & 1988 for examples), primarily because of (a) time and resource limitations and (b) its more direct ties to policy, which make it extremely difficult to fund (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, 1986).

\(^3\) The study of violence has been the most prolific area of study within cultivation analysis. Gerbner and colleagues annually published “violence profiles” presenting content analyses of television programs taken over a week’s period of prime-time network television viewing, combining these with cross-sectional survey analyses to determine the cultivation effect (e.g., Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner, Gross, Eleey, Jackson-Beeck, Jeffries-Fox, & Signorielli, 1977; Gerbner, Gross, Jackson-Beeck, Jeffries-Fox, & Signorielli, 1978). One of the primary results of these profiles was the identification of the “mean world syndrome.”
world of television,” Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 191), to a question posed by an interviewer as part of a survey. If upon subsequent analysis results indicate that exposure to television is positively related to giving the television answer, then evidence of cultivation has been found. The independent contribution of television is therefore found in the (cultivation) differential between light and heavy television viewers, with heavy viewers offering answers more indicative of the television world than the real world (Gerbner & Gross, 1976).

In short, cultivation theory asserted that: (a) the mass media are controlled by elites; (b) these elites are driven to create television programming that produces profit rather than content representative of the real world; (c) individual audience members internalize television messages; and consequently (d) the more viewers are exposed to these messages, the more likely they will be to share the beliefs and values of the television world than those who are exposed less frequently (Gerbner, & Gross, 1976; Shanahan & Morgan, 1999).

To briefly illustrate the difference between the world as seen on TV and a more objective measure of social reality, Weaver et al. (2012) recently compared the amount of violence on mainstream media (MSM) to user-generated content uploaded to YouTube. Using three categories of videos (i.e., most viewed, top rated, and most recently posted), the researchers content analyzed 2,520 videos for violent content. Their findings not only suggest that YouTube content is, in general, much less violent than television content, but “a significantly smaller percentage of the user-generated amateur videos (7.1%) contained violent content than any of the other three categories” (i.e., user-generated professional – 22.9%, recording of MSM – 24.3%, and user manipulation of MSM – 19.5%; p. 1073). The fact that users took the time to (a) upload videos containing far less violence than MSM and then (b) selected these videos (i.e., most viewed and top rated) further suggests a striking difference in the type of real-world content users consider significant enough to share with others and the type of content presented by television.
Weaver et al. (2012) thus highlight the atypical nature of the television world, particularly when compared to the real world of user-generated amateur videos.

Given these recent findings, it is not surprising that subsequent research immediately challenged cultivation’s assumptions (e.g., Doob & McDonald, 1979; Hirsch, 1980, 1981a, 1981b; Hughes, 1980) on both conceptual and methodological grounds, spurring Gerbner and colleagues to adjust the theory’s specifications. Principally, they developed two constructs to account for personal experiences that may moderate the cultivation effect. The first construct, mainstreaming, suggests that exposure to television might override individual differences arising from different personal experiences, whereas the second construct, resonance, suggests that cultivation effects may be even more pronounced among individuals whose personal experiences match that of the television world (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980a; Shanahan & Morgan, 1999; Morgan, 2012). In other words, mainstreaming suggests that greater exposure to television content reduces the impact of individual differences, drawing individuals to a convergent perspective, while resonance suggests a more one-to-one configuration between television and real world experience, with the television message providing a “double dose” of a particular message and therefore amplifying the cultivation effect (Gerbner, et al., 1980a, p. 15). These refinements were also attacked, with perhaps the harshest criticism coming from Hirsch (1981a), who concluded, “Gerbner et al.’s formulation(s) and assertions about cultivation effects are so inclusive that any response to survey items can be argued to support one or another version of the hypothesis. This makes the assertion both irrefutable and untestable, which argues for its rejection as a scientific proposition” (p. 3).

Despite this controversy, small, yet persistent evidence of cultivation has consistently been found (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999). As Hawkins, Pingree, and Adler (1987) assert, “enough studies have replicated cultivation with multiple controls, longitudinal designs, and even field
experiments that we are convinced that an effect exists” (p. 555). However, Hawkins et al. also clearly indicate that “the cultivation hypothesis, and all the evidence for it, is essentially at the social system level of analysis” (p. 555). Although the influence of cultivation is measured at the individual level, the theory does not specify how this process occurs because its main focus is the influence of television messages, as a system, on society as a whole (Hawkins et al., 1987). The absence of research on the psychological processes involved in cultivation was thus considered a significant limitation of the theory and a necessary element in advancing understanding of the phenomenon.

Hawkins et al. (1987) sought to address this gap by testing a model of social reality effects in which information about characters and actions was first accumulated incidentally (i.e., learning) and then utilized to construct judgments about social reality (i.e., construction). In short, the researchers tested two psychological processes, the first linking incidental learning from television to beliefs about the real world (first-order effects) via perceptions of the television world and the second linking beliefs about the television world to general values (second-order effects). Results did not support either hypothesized process, but Hawkins et al.’s recognition of the potential importance of studies that address psychological processes marked a turning point in cultivation research, with scholars taking a decidedly psychological turn as they moved from asking if and to what extent cultivation effects occurred, to how and why they occurred.

The most prominent advances in this line of research have been made by Shrum and colleagues (e.g., Shrum & O’Guinn, 1993; Shrum, 1995, 1996, 1997; Shrum, Wyer, & O’Guinn, 1998; Shrum, 2001; Shrum & Bischak, 2001; Shrum, Lee, Burroughs, & Rindfleisch, 2011), whose research has led to the development of an accessibility model (Shrum, 2007) to explain first-order cultivation judgments. The model posits that because television messages contain a preponderance of certain constructs – over and above these constructs’ existence in real life (e.g.,
crime, affluence, occupational conceptions) – frequent exposure to television increases the accessibility of these constructs in memory. When asked to make judgments about the prevalence of these constructs (e.g., the percentage of Americans who work as police officers, lawyers, doctors), as is typical of a cultivation study, respondents base their judgments on how easy it is to recall instances of them. More specifically, respondents apply the “availability heuristic,” inferring that the easier it is to recall the construct from memory, the more often it must occur (Shrum & O’Guinn, 1993; Shrum et al., 2011). Because heavy viewers of television have been exposed to these constructs more often, their judgments are more representative of the television world than what would be found in lighter TV viewers, a finding consistent with cultivation (Shrum, 2007). Of note, the model suggests that the accessibility of information takes place during viewing (via the frequency, recency, and vividness of portrayals), but the actual application of this information to judgments occurs at the time the judgment is made (when answering cultivation questions post TV viewing).

The accessibility model has proven robust for first-order cultivation judgments; however, it only applies to these memory-based decisions (Shrum, 2004, 2009) because they rely on the retrieval of specific information from memory to be constructed at the time a judgment is elicited, and memory-based judgments are highly susceptible to heuristic effects (Shrum et al., 2011). Hence, the accessibility model can only be utilized to explain one component of cultivation, the construction of first-order memory-based judgments, which Shrum et al. (2011) note are not only quite rare in real life but are even difficult to produce in the lab. Moreover, the model cannot explain how information from television is integrated into individuals’ value systems (i.e., second-order judgments), which “seems to better capture the original notion of cultivation than does the influence of television estimates of societal affluence or workforce prevalence” (p. 37). In short, the accessibility model cannot address the theory’s central concern, namely the
cultivation of a collective consciousness dominated by basic assumptions about society’s norms and values.

To address this limitation, Shrum et al. (2011) tested the online process model of second-order cultivation effects (Shrum, 2004, 2009) with regard to materialism. Briefly, the online process model suggests that second-order judgments are made as information is encountered and, therefore, factors that affect this process will also influence the cultivation of second-order judgments. Moreover, the online process model conceptualizes television viewing as persuasive communication, which implies that factors that facilitate or inhibit persuasion are also likely to influence cultivation (Shrum, 2009). Experimental results showed support for the model, indicating that factors influencing the viewing process (e.g., narrative transportation) moderate the cultivation effect (for materialism).

However, the online process model remains focused on factors that influence how individuals process information (e.g., viewer attention, comprehension, involvement). The model does not focus substantive attention on how narratives provide structure and meaning to the information being processed. In fact, narrative is positioned (at best) as secondary to variables that influence information processing. Thus, although Shrum’s model provides a means of examining cultivation at the individual, psychological level, it cannot address cultivation as a cultural-level phenomenon. Like most extant work on cultivation, then, the theory’s initial focus on stories and storytelling is lost in empirical translation.

To address this limitation, this dissertation conceptualizes cultivation as the internalization of master narratives. In doing so, the analysis of cultivation remains focused at the cultural level, where dominant stories are produced and disseminated to confer authority and distribute power in specific ways. A detailed examination of master narratives is offered below.
Master Narratives

In order to adequately conceptualize master narratives and how they cultivate particular distributions of power, we must first understand positioning theory. Briefly, positioning theory asserts that individuals use speech acts to assign positions to social actors (e.g., themselves and others; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). Positions, in this sense, are considered “dynamic alternatives to the more static concept of role” (p. 14) and represent embodied locations on a moral continuum ranging from, for example, powerful to powerless, confident to apologetic, dominant to submissive. Positioning is thus a discursive construction of storylines that allows participants to make sense of each other’s actions relative to the specific positions they have selected or that they have been assigned during conversation. These storylines, in turn, provide the context by which specific speech acts are understood as having a position-assigning force (Herman, 2007).

The literature on positioning is predominantly situated in the analysis of oral narratives. However, as a theoretical tool, narrative has been characterized as “domain-general,” a distinction highlighting the utility of narrative to facilitate “humans’ efforts to organize multiple knowledge domains” (Herman, 2003, p. 165). Given the domain-generality of narrative, positioning theory should be applicable across a range of communicative forms for storytelling, a proposition supported by Herman (2009), who argues that the expressive resources afforded by each medium generate means by which interpreters of various texts can be positioned. Moreover, Herman (2003) asserts that, “positioning is a relevant parameter for analysis on several levels…[including] the level of [the] narrative’s bearing on more or less dominant storylines, or master narratives, about the way the world is” (p. 59).

In this regard, positions are understood as being grounded in master narratives, “which are viewed as providing the social locations where subjects are positioned” (Bamberg, 2005, p.
As pre-existing forms of interpretation, master narratives provide a template with a set range of moral positions that individuals utilize as they position themselves and others. As Bamberg (2005b) argues, the term master narrative “typically refers to pre-existent socio-cultural forms of interpretation…meant to delineate and confine the local interpretation strategies and agency constellations in individual subjects as well as in social institutions” (p. 287). Understood as “a kind of cultural glue that holds societies together,” (Abbott, 2008, p. 47) master narratives constitute “the mythological structure of a society from which we derive comfort, and which it may be uncomfortable to dispute” (Kermode as cited in Abbott, 2008, p. 47-48).

In short, master narratives are the stock set of stories drawn from a particular culture that circulate frequently and widely among the members of the culture and embody the culture’s shared understandings. As such, master narratives can be understood as a set of cultural templates upon which the idiosyncratic details of individuals’ lives are made intelligible. The force, or power, behind master narratives is a function of their ability to normalize particular sequences of actions and events as routines, “with the consequence that the more we as subjects become engaged in these routines, the more we become subjected to them” (Bamberg, 2004, p. 360; see also Andrews, 2002a; Nelson, 2001). That is, the more we are exposed to our culture’s master narratives, the more likely we are to use them to make sense of everyday life. In doing so, master narratives become a natural part of our interpretative process, escaping conscious detection as they continually work to organize our perception of the world (Bamberg, 2004). Master narratives are thus “like the lenses in a pair of glasses…they are not the things people see when they look at the world, they are the things they see with” (Bennett, 1980, p. 167).

Such invisibility (i.e., their internalization; Randall, 2001) is a key function of master narratives, for they operate as a culture’s taken-for-granted assumptions, identifying what is ultimately defined as normal (i.e., what is good and right) and providing the template within
which we comprehend stories about ourselves, about others, and about society (Phelan, 2005). Consequently, master narratives constrain narratives of personal experience because “they hold the narrator to culturally given standards, to taken-for-granted notions of what is good and what is wrong” (Talbot, Bibace, Bokhour, & Bamberg, 1996, p. 225).

It is important to note that master narratives are global-structures and, therefore, do not restrict individuals’ choices of what or how to narrate a specific account (Talbot et al., 1996). As Schiffrin (1996) maintains:

Telling a story allows us to create a ‘story world’ in which we can represent ourselves against a backdrop of cultural expectations about a typical course of action; our identities as social beings emerge as we construct our own individual experiences as a way to position ourselves in relation to social and cultural expectations. (p. 170)

Master narratives thus serve as the backdrop against which individuals personally construct meaning by positioning their own life experiences vis-à-vis specific social and cultural expectations. Although master narratives provide a template or structure for constructing a story, the specific details of the story are malleable and capable of personalization.

However, the flexibility built into the master narrative is not limitless. The specific details of any individual story must remain within the master narrative’s structural boundaries, which ultimately shape how an individual’s experience fits within the cultural landscape. In fact, for the details of an individual’s story to appear intelligible, they must fit “within some temporally ordered, unified narrative sequence,” which is dependent upon “the stories of one’s community…that develop one’s capacity to see things as reasonable, appropriate, valuable, and so on, and that also supply the norms for such seeing” (Nelson, 2001, p. 54). Thus, it is the surface variability of individual stories that makes master narratives so (potentially) pernicious. As dynamic entities, they evolve to suit particular situations. This diversity, rather than undermining the master narrative, strengthens its ties to other master narratives. As Nelson (2001) argues, “Because master narratives can incorporate an enormous diversity of even the
humblest items in the cultural store, and because they can link themselves to any number of other master narratives…these stories infiltrate every corner of a society and lodge there tenaciously” (p. 159).

Master narratives thus provide the illusion of choice by allowing individuals to select specific details to compose individualized stories; such personal distinctions, however, are embedded within a pre-established narrative framework, with its attendant and limited range of moral positions. As a result, the underlying meaning and significance of an individual’s story remains entrenched in his/her culture’s prevailing narrative scaffold. Simply put, although we may exchange one pair of glasses for another, the lenses we see through remain the same.

It is important to address the challenges represented by master narratives’ invisibility. The degree to which master narratives permeate every aspect of a culture’s discourse – from “dinner table conversation, to the morals of television programs, to the lofty policy debates of Congress” (Bennett, 1980, p. 167) – make them difficult to identify and, in turn, analyze (Andrews, 2002b). Indeed, as Andrews (2002b) notes, “One of the defining features of dominant narratives [is] their ability to evade analysis. They enjoy a status more or less unchallenged, relying instead on commonly held assumptions about the nature of reality” (p. 10). Simply by virtue of their (seemingly) seamless integration into the way we make sense of the world, then, “academics are no more immune to the influence of these narratives than any other sector of society” (Andrews, 2002b, p. 10). Therefore, identification and analysis involve the complex interplay between contexts of production and consumption, requiring researchers to ask: “From whose perspective is any particular story a counter-narrative?” (Andrews, 2002a, p. 4). This is especially true from the standpoint of empirical research, where the inability to test a theory or construct, to identify boundary conditions, is grounds for its rejection as a scientific proposition.
(Chaffee & Berger, 1987), a critique previously leveled against cultivation theory (e.g., Doob & McDonald, 1979; Hirsch, 1980, 1981a, 1981b; Hughes, 1980).

Moreover, Lyotard (1984) initially developed the master narrative concept in relation to modernity, when grand narratives unified a society and led all of its members to share a coherent view (Andrews, 2002b; Bamberg, 2005b; Wood, 2004). In the current post-modern era, grand narratives are viewed suspiciously; such stories are not to be trusted any more than the society that declares them to be true (Wood, 2004). As Peters and Lankshear (1996) assert, “what characterizes cultural post-modernity is an ‘incredulity towards metanarratives’ – an incurable suspicion that all grand, sweeping, narratives perform their legitimation functions by masking the will-to-power and excluding the interests of others” (p. 3). Clearly, the very idea that master narratives continue to exist, let alone exert influence, is received critically.

Nevertheless, Fredric Jameson, in his introduction to Lyotard (1984), argues that rather than disappearing, master narratives have gone underground, continuing to exert influence unconsciously “as a way of ‘thinking about’ and acting in our current situation” (xii; see also, Peters & Lankshear, 1996; Cox & Stromquist, 1998; Bottici, 2007). Hackett and Zhao (1994) similarly assert that “in an age of contradictory faiths and ‘globalized’ culture, it may be that people reassert [master narratives] all the more tenaciously…to restore a lost sense of faith, meaning, selfhood, and community” (p. 540). The point is not that master narratives are less important now than they were before, but rather, they are subtler and that subtlety leaves room for plausible deniability.

All of this is to say that despite the challenges – conceptual and methodological – of investigating master narratives, such narratives do exist. Acknowledging the difficulty of identifying and analyzing master narratives in no way suggests their absence in post-modernity.
Rather, their (apparent) invisibility is a testament to their enduring power and flexibility, which allows them to bypass critical scrutiny. They are, in effect, hiding in plain sight.

Conceptualizing Cultivation as the Internalization of Master Narratives

Gerbner’s conceptualization of cultivation was based on the assumption that any effects were likely indirect and, therefore, “uncovering aggregate and implicit patterns in mass-produced messages ‘will not necessarily tell us what people think and do. But they will tell us what most people think or do something about and in common’” (italics added; Gerbner as cited in Morgan, 2002, p. 8). Cultivation is thus the process by which the predominant storyteller of the era (i.e., television), streams a limited set of stories that, when internalized by viewers, sets “the cultural ground rules for what is, what is important, what is right, and what is related to what,” such that the rules become invisible (italics in original; Gerbner, 1969, p. 127; Morgan, 2002).

This conceptualization of cultivation is predominantly concerned with the influence of stories and the process of storytelling. It is this focus on the power of narrative that ties cultivation to the concept of master narrative, which, in turn, provides a framework for understanding the set of stories that viewers internalize. As the stock set of stories that circulate frequently and widely among the members of a culture and embody the culture’s shared understandings, master narratives constitute “the mythological structure of a society from which we derive comfort” (Kermode as cited in Abbott, 2008, p. 47). That is, master narratives provide a culturally acceptable framework for understanding every day actions and events; they provide a set of comforting answers and guidelines to the barrage of questions and uncertainties we face on a daily basis. To provide such clarity, however, master narratives only offer a limited range of acceptable positions for individuals and social institutions to take up. It is this set of positions that provides comfort by unconsciously positioning events as important or unimportant, right or
wrong, good or bad. In short, master narratives set the cultural ground rules Gerbner described in 1969 and that were later examined by Potter (1990).

Briefly, Potter (1990) argued that viewers do not learn singular facts from watching television, but rather general messages imbued with particular social values. Based on this assumption, Potter asserted, “If television is the ‘common storyteller of our age’ and if those stories rely on ‘relatively stable and common images’ then there should be a dominant lesson woven into that common pattern” (p. 844). To test this assumption, Potter examined a set of general values, including the following: “‘Truth always wins out; Honesty is the best policy,’ ‘Hard work yields rewards,’ and ‘Good wins over evil’” (p. 847). Results indicated that heavy viewers were more likely to believe the themes on television were “Truth wins out” and “Hard work is rewarded.”

Of note, Potter’s (1990) themes were taken from a content analysis completed by Selnow (1986) that identified four predominant rules for resolving television problems. The analysis led Selnow (1986) to conclude, “Television audiences cannot escape the repetition of a limited number of moral lessons” (p. 70). Moreover, in his overall conclusion, Selnow went on to suggest:

Television script writers rarely stray from a few narrow themes that have been espoused by mainstream religious cultures and over the centuries have become woven inextricably into the *American moral fabric*…In a subtle way, without explicitly articulating religious doctrine, prime-time television programs incorporate the principles that have, over time, served the church, and, by extension, the state in engendering conformity to and acceptance of the larger cultural system. (italics added; p. 71)

Importantly, Gerbner and Gross (1976) similarly referred to the patterns present in television messages as representative of a “new electronic priesthood” (p. 176), with Gerbner going so far as to suggest that “if Marx were alive today, he would say, ‘electronic mass media are the opiate of the people’” (Morgan, 2002, p. 495). The implications of these statements are profound and speak on one hand to cultivation researchers’ concerns regarding the increasingly
dominant role of television as the preeminent storyteller of the modern era, while on the other positioning television’s stories against the specific historical, political, and religious structure that has come to define the United States of America. In this sense, the patterns present in television are the same patterns that have worked for generations in cultivating adherence to particular ways of seeing the world; that is, the patterns are representative of the master narratives of American culture.

In 1993, Potter referred to the general messages present in television as metanarratives, a concept Bilandzic and Rössler (2004) have elaborated, asserting that metanarratives “lie at the base of the actual story and are not confined to a certain show or a certain genre, but cross these borders liberally” (p. 309). Bilandzic and Rössler offered this definition in relation to the first of three questions that arose following their extensive review of cultivation research. Their first question – what part of the television message does actually influence the viewer? – has as its answer, metanarratives (p. 308). Based on this rationale, Bilandzic and Rössler argued that researchers should begin focusing on identifying similar metanarratives across programs. Once identified, the metanarratives should be clustered into meta-units, which would then become the independent variable during data analysis and would, in effect, replace genre-specific cultivation variables.

Neither Potter (1993) nor Bilandzic and Rössler (2004) offered an extensive review of the metanarrative concept. In fact, Potter merely offered the term in passing, a fact that is perhaps attributable to his belief that, “It is a very interesting conceptual challenge to articulate the essence of that metanarrative. If cultivation theoreticians are to continue defending its existence, then it is essential that this challenge be met now” (p. 597). Simply put, Potter was not convinced that such metanarratives existed, and even if they did, offering a conceptualization and operationalization of them would be an “interesting…challenge.”
Potter’s challenge has, in part, motivated this dissertation, which proposes that cultivation is the result of long-term, cumulative exposure to master narratives. Although similar to the metanarratives discussed by Potter (1993) and Bilandzic and Rössler (2004), master narratives are not standardized message units (i.e., facts) that invariably cut across all program types. Rather, they are flexible narrative structures whose components, when put together, reproduce a culture’s dominant perspective. Master narratives thus provide the scaffolding that gives sense and relevance to the facts that reside within a culture’s stories. Furthermore, it is the combination of repeated exposure to and immersion in these master narratives that produces their invisibility and power.

Cultivation thus occurs through repeated exposure to master narratives that crystallize particular social positions. In doing so, master narratives promote adherence to the in-group (e.g., solidarity to a particular culture) and its norms and values. By integrating this concept into cultivation theory, we are adding texture and nuance to Gerbner’s basic ideas, advancing his claim that television’s stories instill within viewers a set of standardized roles and behaviors relative to gender, age, class, vocation, and lifestyle, ultimately shaping how we think and act (Morgan, 2002).

The current effort re-contextualizes Gerbner’s roles as positions, offering a more dynamic alternative to the original theory while still maintaining a sense of an embodied location in which specific moral imperatives are at play (e.g., powerful-powerless, dominant-submissive). Moreover, these positions are located relative to storylines that offer models of conformity, in the acceptance of a master narrative, and/or targets of rebellion, in the rejection of a master narrative and the creation of an alternative, counter narrative (to be discussed further below). These reconceptualizations in no way alter the original motivating force behind cultivation. Rather, they provide a means by which researchers from multiple fields of study can address narratives’ role in
culture. In this sense, integrating ideas from narrative studies with cultivation is an attempt to return cultivation to its narrative roots, thereby reclaiming its potential to transform our understanding of how we make sense of ourselves and our positions relative to how the world works.

Moreover, the identification of master narratives offers a means of explaining the small, yet persistent effects of cultivation, particularly at the level of second-order judgments, which have been consistently more difficult to document (Hawkins, Pingree, & Adler, 1987). As Hawkins et al. (1987) argued, “Another facet that requires further research on the relationship of demographic and second-order beliefs stems from the previous finding that second-order results are much more problematic or group specific than demographic cultivation results” (p. 574). This specificity can be explained by the degree to which particular groups position themselves within or against the dominant cultural narrative, as well as the degree to which they are positioned as within or against that narrative. In this sense, individuals’ second-order judgments result from the intersection of personal experiences, group membership, and the location of these positions relative to (a) how individuals position themselves and (b) how they are positioned by dominant cultural narratives. This formulation can be extended to include the concepts of resonance and mainstreaming, where resonance occurs when the positions at each level (individual, group, socio-cultural) are aligned and mainstreaming occurs when an initial mismatch between positions at the individual or group level are brought in line with those established at the socio-cultural level through repeated exposure to a given master narrative.

To reiterate, the question is not whether cultivation exists, for hundreds of empirical studies have illustrated it does, but how and why it occurs, and to answer these questions we need to return to Gerbner’s initial focus on narrative. Gerbner argued that the basic difference between human beings and other species is our storytelling ability (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999; Morgan,
In fact, “Most of what we know, or think we know, we have never personally experienced; we ‘know’ about things based on the stories we hear and the stories we tell. We are…the stories we tell” (Gerbner as cited in Morgan, 2002, p. 7). In the United States, the stories we tell are of exceptionalism.

Now, to be fair, the exceptionalism narrative is not the only story we tell. As McAdams (2006) explains, “In a complex society like ours…different stories compete for dominance; some stories win, and others lose” (p. 292). Yet, as will become clear, the exceptionalism narrative is the undefeated heavyweight champion; its existence and formulation not only antedate the nation itself but have succeeded in sustaining the American purpose over two hundred years of turbulence and change (Kammen, 1972; Bercovitch, 1978; Morgenthau, 1983). As a nation derived not from ethnic affinities or historic traditions (Morgenthau, 1983), the United States owes its existence to the will of successive generations of immigrants who, in adopting the exceptionalism narrative, have continuously renewed its promise and confirmed the American way (Hughes, 2003). As the foundation upon which other foundational beliefs have been built (e.g., individualism; McAdams, 2006), the exceptionalism narrative has proven to be the most vital, striking, and enduring narrative in American culture and, therefore, a crucial starting point in the analysis of master narratives.

American Exceptionalism

The notion of “American Exceptionalism” has been in existence longer than America itself (Judis, 2005; Madsen, 1998; Tuveson, 1968) and has, throughout this history, undergone transformations in its meaning (Esch, 2010). As a result, the term has been hard to pin down, its slippery contours perplexing historians and social scientists for over a century (Koh, 2003; Litke, 2010).
For a hundred years, however, scholarship on this topic has largely focused on the roots of America’s uniqueness, with some arguing that it is America’s lack of a feudal past, along with the Lockean liberal consensus that has followed, that sets it apart on the world stage (Hartz, 1955). Others have suggested that America’s exceptionalism stems from its cultural heritage of liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire (Lipset, 1997), while still others have attributed American exceptionalism to the country’s political system (Krislov, 2001), to the importance of the frontier in American life (Turner, 1996), and to its unique economic circumstances (Gerber, 1997), respectively. As this list illustrates, there is little consensus in the academic community on the nature or causes of American Exceptionalism.

There is, however, some agreement that at its core, the term means there is “either some standard from which America deviates – perhaps one provided by an historical ideology such as Marxism – or that America deviates from an empirical pattern set by similar countries – as with America’s high rates of imprisonment” (Litke, 2010, p. 9; Donoghue, 2012). Such conceptualizations thus assume that whatever the nature or cause of America’s exceptionalism, it is a measurable phenomenon. It is important to note, however, that there is currently no generally accepted measure of American exceptionalism, making empirical assessment an important priority in further advancing our understanding of this concept.

This dissertation focuses on American exceptionalism in what Litke (2010) describes as its “unique” sense, which “often has connotations of idiosyncrasy or praise…[and] has roots in religious thought” (p. 13; see also McAdams, 2006). Perhaps best epitomized by John Winthrop, the first Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, this conceptualization of exceptionalism is often tied to Winthrop’s claim that, “We must consider that we shall be a city upon a hill – the eyes of all people are upon us.” These words, uttered by Winthrop while on board the Arbella, describe “the special destiny awaiting the community of saints as they voyaged to Massachusetts.”
(Madsen, 1998, p. 18). In his sermon, Winthrop called on colonists to set an example and to fulfill their responsibility in “proving the ways of God to man” (p. 10). Winthrop thus relied on the exceptionalism narrative to distinguish the U.S. as a providential nation destined to be special and better than all others (Lipset, 1996; Madsen, 1998; Tuveson, 1968), and this meaning has henceforth been used to undergird a belief that America is, and shall forever be, the “last best hope of Earth,” the “leader of the free world,” and the “indispensable nation” (Walt, 2011, p. 72).

Moreover, uniqueness was the predominant focus and meaning of Alexis de Tocqueville’s (1835) description of the exceptional position of Americans in Democracy in America. In fact, the discursive force behind American exceptionalism, as a phrase, has often been attributed to Tocqueville, who utilized it to articulate what he saw as a qualitative difference between the United States and other developed nations regarding the United States’ origin, national credo, historical evolution, and distinct political and religious institutions (see also Lipset, 1996; Madsen, 1998). Case in point, speaking about America’s unique qualities, he wrote, “Their strictly Puritanical origin, their exclusively commercial habits, even the country they inhabit…a thousand special causes, of which I have only been able to point out the most important…(p. 36-37).

As a master narrative, American exceptionalism thus provides the moral scaffolding for understanding how the United States and, by extension, its citizens, views its position in the world. The exceptionalism narrative continues to be of great consequence today, with Litke (2010) arguing that, “No less depends on it than our stance toward the world and our own view of ourselves…the history of the idea of American exceptionalism is a sobering reflection on our origin, our development, and future as a country” (p. 5). More specifically, the American exceptionalism narrative can be distilled into three interlocking streams: America is the chosen
nation, America has a calling or mission, and America has a moral duty to answer that mission by acting as the force of good against evil (Judis, 2005; Esch, 2010).

The notion of America as a chosen nation is derived from the Protestant millennialism brought to America by the English Puritans, who believed the battle of Armageddon foretold in the Book of Revelation was to take place in America (Judis, 2005; Madsen, 1998; Tuveson, 1968). As Madsen (1998) asserts, the New England Puritans “…saw the Great Migration as inevitable, an event already determined by the structure of providential history” (p. 6). Puritan leaders like John Winthrop were often described as “fulfilling the promise of Moses, who in the Old Testament led his people out of bondage into the Promised Land” (p. 6). In this case, Puritan leaders were believed to have led their people from the darkness and immorality festering in England to the beckoning light of hope and freedom in America.

The Puritans thus brought with them the notion of a national covenant, first popularized by William Tyndale, who fervently believed that “England stood in a covenant relationship with God” (Hughes, 2003, p. 20). The covenant, like a marriage bond, held that as long as England obeyed God’s commands, it would be blessed. If it failed to do so in any way, however, it would be cursed (Hughes, 2003). John Winthrop incorporated this sentiment into his sermon on board the Arbella, preaching, “We are entered into a Covenant with him for this work…Now if the Lord shall please to hear us, and bring us in peace to the place we desire, then hath he ratified this Covenant and sealed our Commission” (as cited in Hughes, 2003, p. 29).

The correlation between America’s exceptionalism and its covenant with God was made even more explicit by Peter Bulkeley’s sermon, “The Gospel-Covenant (circa 1639-1640),” which proclaimed:

We are as a city set upon an hill, in the open view of all the earth; the eyes of the world are upon us because we profess ourselves to be a people in covenant with God, and therefore not only the Lord our God, with whom we have made covenant, but heaven and earth, angels and men, that are witnesses of our
profession, will cry shame upon us, if we walk contrary to the covenant which we have professed and promised to walk in. (as cited in Madsen, 1998, p. 19-20)

Here, Bulkeley emphasized the dualities of the covenant. On the one hand, provided the Puritans fulfilled their responsibilities, they would have succeeded in creating “a purified and perfectly reformed church to be the world’s model,” thus realizing their millennial hopes (Madsen, 1998, p. 20). On the other hand, should they falter, the world would have bore witness to their disgrace and would “scorn them for their excess of ambition and pride” (p. 20).

What is clear, then, is that the notion of the covenant was not new, but the application of the covenant in the American environment was and this change in scenery shifted the covenant narrative’s focus to America’s uniqueness (Morgenthau, 1983). That distinctiveness has become central to the larger American imagination through repeated exposure to the exceptionalism master narrative (Hughes, 2003). Indeed, the strength and longevity of the exceptionalism narrative can be attributed to the fact that “the Puritans told a focused, compelling, and convincing story that no other immigrant group could match” (p. 33). It was, however, “a story with which many immigrant groups could identify,” a story that appeared in “numerous books, treatises, and sermons,” and a story that was adopted by immigrants “as if it were their very own…[making it] a permanent part of the American consciousness” (p. 33).

As one might imagine, however, the strictly religious tenor of the exceptionalism narrative was unsustainable. Indeed, for a master narrative to survive, it must not remain static but rather adapt to the shifting cultural milieu. Therefore, by the 18th century, the biblical vision of America as the New Jerusalem had begun to shift to a nationalist vision of America as a model society, albeit one comprised of a chosen people selected for an exceptional destiny (Madsen, 1998; Tuveson, 1968). The colonial interpretation of America as a chosen nation buried the difference between secular and sacred selfhood, ultimately fusing the two-halves together to form a complete national identity and a unified sense of what it means to be an American citizen.
(Madsen, 1998). The American identity was thus infused with the same sense of uniqueness as
the exceptionalism narrative, distinguishing each individual as being chosen for a special destiny
(McAdams, 2006). In short, on a collective level, Americans are a chosen people selected for an
exceptional destiny, while on an individual level, “each person is chosen, too – called to a unique
and special endeavor in life…to manifest [his/her] own personal destiny and leave [his/her] own
indelible mark…upon posterity” (p. 109).

The second stream of American exceptionalism posits that America has a calling or
mission. This notion also stems from the national covenant and is embodied in America’s vision
of itself as a redeemer nation. As Tuveson (1968) explains, “Providence, or history, has put a
special responsibility on the American people to spread the blessings of liberty, democracy, and
equality to others throughout the earth…” (p. viii). Luce (1941) drew on this stream of the
exceptionalism narrative in proposing that the American Century not only be characterized by the
sharing of the Bill of Rights, Declaration of Independence, and Constitution, but that it was the
United State’s responsibility to “be the Good Samaritan of the entire world…[and] to accept
wholeheartedly our duty…to exert upon the world the full impact of our influence…” (italics
added; p. 63-65).

Historically, the most obvious manifestation of America’s mission was manifest destiny,
a term that first appeared in an article published in the July-August 1845 issue of the Democratic
Review, edited by John L. O’Sullivan (Hughes, 2003, p. 106; Esch, 2010; McAdams, 2006;
Tuveson, 1968). Submitted anonymously, the author argued that westward expansion was “our
manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of
our yearly multiplying millions” (as cited in Hughes, 2003, p. 106). According to Hughes (2003),
the author’s use of the term, intended to justify the annexation of Texas, merely gave voice to a
westward movement that began following the War of 1812. Nevertheless, the term’s appearance
also served to transition the view of America’s calling from a belief in acting as a moral example, with the eyes of the world upon her, to a belief in using force to fulfill America’s mission to establish a territorial empire and, in doing so, keep its covenant (Tuveson, 1968).

The final stream of American exceptionalism flows from the first two: America represents the forces of good against evil. As previously mentioned, American exceptionalism is derived from Puritan millennialism, which conceived of history as “an epic conflict between Christ and Antichrist” (Madsen, 1998, p. 8). As this form of millennialism transitioned into the more secular and nationalist environment of the 18th century, its apocalyptic strain was incorporated into a nationalist ideology marked by a clear distinction between good and evil (Esch, 2010; Madsen, 1998; Tuveson, 1968). A pertinent example of this belief is illustrated by Abraham Keteltas, who, when speaking about the American colonists’ triumph in the revolutionary war, referred to the Americans’ cause as “…the cause of righteousness against iniquity; the cause of the oppressed against the oppressor…the cause of heaven against hell…(as cited in Judis, 2005, p. 56). This dimension of the exceptional narrative thus positions America as a *uniquely* virtuous nation that “loves peace, nurtures liberty, respects human rights, and embraces the rule of law” (Walt, 2011, p. 73) and *only*, when necessary, utilizes force to defeat “the sinister powers of darkness” (Tuveson, 1968, p. viii).

The superior moral positioning the master narrative of exceptionalism affords the United States has provided comfort to generations of Americans from the Puritans to the present (McAdams, 2006). In fact, several Pew Research Center surveys have been conducted within the past decade to assess the strength of Americans’ belief in this narrative. For example, a 2007 Pew Global Attitudes survey of 47 nations (“World Publics Welcome Global Trade – But Not Immigration”) contained an entire chapter (Chapter 4) devoted to “Values and American Exceptionalism” (Kohut, Wike, & Horowitz, 2007). Data from the survey indicated that more
than half (55%) of Americans agree that the United States is culturally superior to others, more than three in four (77%) believe it is sometimes necessary to use military force to maintain order in the world, and more than six in ten (64%) disagree that success in life is controlled by outside forces, an indication of Americans’ faith in individualism. A 2011 Pew Global Attitudes survey (“The American-Western European Values Gap”) found similar results, with three quarters (75%) of Americans agreeing that military force is a necessary component of international affairs and more than six in ten (62%) indicating that success in life is not dictated by forces outside an individual’s control (Kohut, Wike, Horowitz, Poushter, & Barker, 2011). Additionally, a public opinion poll conducted by USA Today/Gallup from December 10th to 12th, 2010, found that eighty percent of all Americans believe that “the United States has a unique character because of its history and Constitution that sets it apart from other nations as the greatest in the world” (Jones, 2010, para. 1). Given the label “American exceptionalism,” the poll illustrates, along with the PEW surveys, that the exceptionalism narrative continues to instill in Americans a sense of cultural and individual distinctiveness (i.e., a chosen people), as well as a sense of obligation (i.e., duty) in maintaining order in the world (i.e., the force of good against evil).

Clearly, the exceptionalism narrative’s ability to adapt, to shed features that no longer resonate, and to incorporate new ideas that give the sense of American identity new relevance give this narrative an especially powerful force. Case in point, in their analysis of print news discourse surrounding the first Gulf War, Hackett and Zhao (1994) found evidence of each stream of American exceptionalism, with the predominant narrative positioning the U.S. “at the Center as the epitome of Good” and implying intervention was “a special moral responsibility” (p. 533-534). The authors argue that this narrative “slide[s] easily into a master narrative of America’s experience of war,” whereby, “…the American motive in going to war is not self-aggrandizement
or revenge…rather, it is punishment of evil, meted out from above, just as God may punish sinners, and parents, their children” (p. 534).

Woven together, the press’s narrative regarding the United States’ intervention in Iraq was molded to fit expectations of America’s mission as a chosen nation to protect the innocent and to defeat global forces of evil. Alternative narratives, particularly those advanced by anti-war protesters, were marginalized, attacked as unpatriotic, and directed by “fringe” people. In short, the hostile response anti-war protesters received from journalists and readers can be understood as a manifestation of the hegemony of the American exceptionalism master narrative. The protestors’ counter narrative was unintelligible within the borders established by the exceptionalism narrative and, therefore, relegated to the margins, filtered out of public discourse due to its inappropriate and adversarial character. The only intelligible story was one that maintained the pre-existing narrative structure, thereby positioning intervention as America’s moral responsibility, legitimizing military action, and cultivating support from the American public (Hackett & Zhao, 1994).

To be clear, the tendency to see the destiny of America as special is not new. Historically, all great nations have attempted to tie their missions to a divine purpose and have claimed it their duty to defend civilization (Morgenthau, 1983). In fact, among most great powers thinking of one’s self as special is the norm rather than the exception (Walt, 2011), a tendency that may ultimately stem from a general social psychological drive to favor one’s own group over others (McAdams, 2006). What separates the destiny of America from previous great powers, however, are the interlocking ideas of a (1) chosen people with a (2) special mission to act as the (3) force of good against evil. The blurring of these streams of American exceptionalism into a consonant master narrative has sustained the American people since the colonial period, leading
McAdams (2006) to argue that even though “we are no longer Puritans…their story, for good and for ill, has been absorbed into our own” (p. 108).

Moreover, the United States is, according to Morgenthau (1983), the only nation to have reflected upon its purpose before it came into existence. Indeed, “The awareness of its purpose was not an afterthought. The United States was founded as a nation with a particular purpose in mind,” (p. 11) and that purpose is reflected in the master narrative of American exceptionalism. The continuous re-generation of this master narrative underscores its significance to American identity at a cultural and individual level; it is the story Americans continually return to for comfort, clarity, and communion amidst the uncertainty and anxiety of life. It is the story that dictates how we view our position in the world, how we view ourselves, our history, our development, and our future as a country (Litke, 2010).

Given the importance of the exceptionalism narrative to American identity, it is vital to establish the link between television viewing and perceptions of American exceptionalism. To do so, the following section discusses data from the 1996 General Social Survey (GSS).

1996 General Social Survey (GSS)

To more clearly establish the link between television viewing and perceptions of American exceptionalism, data were obtained from the 1996 General Social Survey (GSS). This section explains the intent of the General Social Survey, why data from the 1996 survey, in particular, is essential to this dissertation and, finally, outlines the analyses and results.

Design. Since 1972, the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) has annually conducted the General Social Survey. Designed to collect information regarding the structure and development of American society, including demographic information and respondents’ attitudes on a variety of topics, the survey replicates question items and wording in order to facilitate time-
trend studies (“GSS: General Social Survey,” n.d.). Using data collected through personal interviews, the GSS has essentially tracked “the pulse of America...over the last four decades,” making it “widely regarded as the single best source of data on societal trends” (“GSS: General Social Survey,” n.d.).

In addition to the standard core of demographic, behavioral, and attitudinal questions, the GSS began to incorporate topic modules in 1977 in order to study new topics of interest and/or to expand coverage of existing topics. Of importance here, the 1996 GSS not only contained a special topic module on national identity developed by the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), but also asked respondents about their television viewing habits.

Participants. The 1996 GSS includes 2,904 respondents drawn from all United States residents. The sample is split into two halves, with each split half randomly assigned to one of three questionnaire ballots, resulting in six different conditions. Nearly half \((n = 1,341)\) of all individuals answered questions related to national identity. Of those 1,341 individuals, the effective subset for the analyses reported here is reduced to 913, given this is the subsample who also responded to the television viewing item. This functional subsample was 57.2\% female \((n = 522)\), 80.6\% white \((n = 710)\), and 13.6\% black \((n = 122)\). Their median age was 44 \((M = 44.40, SD = 16.48)\), with an average of 13.5 years of education.

Measures

Television Viewing. Television viewing was assessed using a single item. Respondents were asked: “On the average day, about how many hours do you personally watch television?” Answers ranged from 0 to 24 hours \((M = 2.92, SD = 2.14)\).

American Exceptionalism. Although the 1996 GSS did not directly assess American exceptionalism per se (again, there is no accepted measure), an index was created based on four items included in the national identity topic module. Specifically, the index was calculated using
the following four questions: “I would rather be a citizen of America than any other country in the world” (Citizen); “The world would be a better place if people from other countries were more like Americans” (Be Like); “Generally speaking, America is a better country than most other countries” (America Better); “People should support their country even if the country is in the wrong” (If Wrong). Responses were assessed using 5-point scales ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) and averaged to create a composite measure (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .649$, $M = 2.32; SD = .71$).

**Covariates.** Several demographic variables were included as covariates, including: age ($M = 44.40, SD = 16.48$), biological sex (female coded high), race (white or black), class, income, education, and religious preference (Protestant or Catholic). Class was measured on a four-point scale ranging from lower to upper class ($M = 2.46, SD = .660$). Income was measured on a 12-point scale ranging from (under $1,000$) to (over $25,000$), and education was measured on a 19-point scale ranging from no formal schooling to eight-years of college. Respondents’ political view ($M = 4.17, SD = 1.38$) was also included as an exogenous control, with answers measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (extremely liberal) to 7 (extremely conservative).

**Analyses.** A structural equation model predicting perceptions of American exceptionalism from television viewing (see Figure 1) was tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) with maximum likelihood (ML) estimation using (AMOS). In accordance with standard representation, the observed variables are depicted as rectangles and the latent variable as an oval. For simplification purposes, indicators influenced by the latent variables and error terms have been omitted from the figure.

The model’s fit was assessed using a series of three model fit statistics: the model chi-square ($\chi^2$), the comparative fit index (CFI) as an incremental fit statistic, and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) as an absolute fit statistic (Holbert & Stephenson, 2002).
Given that chi-square tests are extremely sensitive to sample size and significant values do not necessarily indicate a poor fit with large samples, the additional indices, which are not as sensitive to sample size and represent a graded index of fit, were added (Kline, 2005). The cutoff for good fit with the CFI statistic is .95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999) and the cutoff for good fit with the RMSEA statistic is .06 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993).

Results. The hypothesized model fit the data well [$\chi^2$ (df = 35) = 123.59, $p < .001$, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .053, 90% CI: .043-.063]. The model explained 25% of the variance in American exceptionalism, with the predicted path between TV hours and American exceptionalism ($\beta = .18$, $p < .001$) more than twice the size of the standard relationship found in cultivation meta-analysis (.08, Shanahan & Morgan, 1999), even after the influence of exogenous variables (see Table 1). Generally speaking, then, the model supports the predicted relationship between time spent viewing television and perceptions of American exceptionalism.
Table 1. *Influence of Exogenous Variables on TV Viewing and American Exceptionalism.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exogenous Variables</th>
<th>TV Viewing</th>
<th>American Exceptionalism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.13***</td>
<td>.18***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.09***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.17***</td>
<td>-.26***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-.13***</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (Caucasian)</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (Black)</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Views</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.19***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.15***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV Viewing N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td>.18***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N* = 902, ** *p < .01, *** *p < .001*
Figure 1. Proposed Model.
Summary. Hundreds of studies have documented the relationship between the amount of time individuals spend viewing television and their perceptions of the world (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). However, to date, no study has formally documented the influence of television viewing on perceptions of American exceptionalism and, thus, this dissertation engaged in secondary analysis of 1996 GSS data to empirically substantiate this hypothesis. Although turning to a data set from the 1990s is not ideal (a point that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4), little to no empirical attention has been given to American exceptionalism, a point that perhaps speaks to its pervasiveness as a generally accepted characteristic of American culture. As an entrenched way of viewing American experience, the notion of exceptionalism may be so commonplace that recognizing it as a topic in need of study is like seeing the forest through the trees. Nevertheless, not only did the theoretical model fit the data well, but the predicted path between TV hours and American exceptionalism was more than twice the size of the standard relationship found in cultivation meta-analysis (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999). These findings lend strong support to the theoretical associations being made in this dissertation and clearly suggest the need for more in-depth analysis of this topic.

With that in mind, the following section turns the tables on the cultivation of American exceptionalism by shining light on the very stories this master narrative works to conceal. Given the difficulty of identifying, let alone empirically analyzing master narratives, this dissertation suggests that for those excluded by master narratives, for those whose lives look deviant compared to the regular lines of the dominant story (Andrews, 2002a), the shape and impact of the master narrative appears most clearly and, as will become apparent, individuals respond to such discrepancies by cultivating their own stories, or counter narratives.
Counter Narratives

For individuals whose everyday experiences are not reflected in their culture’s master narratives, counter narratives serve the same sense-making function. Much like master narratives, counter narratives “build consensus, a common culture of shared understandings, and deeper, more vital ethics” (Delgado, 1989, p. 2414). However, as “stories which people tell and live which offer resistance, either implicitly or explicitly, to dominant cultural narratives” (Andrews, 2002a, p. 1), counter narratives also contest deep-seated explanations of how the world works (Herman, 2007b), suggest different approaches to the same story in order to defend against the pain that results from being excluded by the master narrative (Andrews, 2002a), and “…open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live” (Delgado, 1989, p. 2414).

The question of when and why individuals construct counter narratives is thus an important piece in understanding how stories both reinforce and undermine hegemony. According to Nelson (2001), there are at least three major defects in master narratives, each of which may be conceptualized as a gap or opening that is capable of rupturing the master narrative’s dominance and therefore creating a space for a counter narrative. The three openings emerge as a result of (a) the fact that most master narratives are not unified wholes, but rather an “ensemble of repeated themes” incorporated into maxims, sermons, stories, songs, commercials, and other cultural artifacts, with resulting tensions and inconsistencies that can be exploited by counter narratives; (b) the lack of fit between connected master narratives; and (c) the gap between master narratives’ prescriptions and actual, lived experience (p. 165-169). Each of these gaps represents an opportunity for a counter narrative to take hold, to reject the positioning inherent in the master narrative and to assert a different perspective that publicly and
systematically counters the taken-for-granted positions prescribed by the master narrative. Indeed, the inherent power of a counter narrative resides in its ability to “…expose the construction of the dominant story by suggesting how else it might be told” (Harris, Carney, & Fine, 2001, p. 13).

More specifically, the first crack in the master narrative lens appears as a result of the cultural mash-up that, together, forms the master narrative. As an accretion of a myriad of cultural elements, the ensemble does not always play in the same key, generating tensions among the collection that can be exploited by counter narratives. Nelson (2001) identifies these gaps as tensions within a master narrative, arguing that “while the hodgepodge character…contributes to the prevalence and tenacity of these narratives, the same quality of bricolage also opens avenues within the narrative that are vulnerable to a counterstory” (italics in original, p. 165). In this regard, the ensemble is revealed to be “less stable and unified than [it] appears, more susceptible to fracture and subversion” (Squire, 2002, p. 170).

The second crack emerges when the master narrative does not mesh well with the stories to which it is connected. Nelson (2001) identifies these gaps as tensions among master narratives, which emerge “in the fissures and cracks that are formed at the interstices [of several master narratives], since the narratives are almost sure not to fit together smoothly” (p. 166). For example, several master narratives are used to exclude Southern Baptist women from becoming ministers (Nelson, 2001; Caldwell, 1999). However, among the narratives that constitute the Southern Baptist identity is the “Protestant story about the ‘priesthood of all believers’ – a narrative that represents every Christian as a priest in his or her own right” (italics added, Nelson, 2001, p. 166). Given the prescriptions of this story, the exclusion of women from the pulpit “creates a contradiction that few Baptists are willing to acknowledge” (Caldwell, 1999, p. 5).
Because the contradiction clearly undermines the rationality of the stories utilized to exclude women from becoming ministers, it represents a gap that can be exploited by a counter narrative.

The final crack materializes when the norms the master narratives prescribe do not align with individuals’ lived experience. Nelson (2001) identifies these gaps as *prescription and description*, noting that “the final weakness…lies in the gap between the norms of conduct that it [the master narrative] prescribes for a particular class of people and how such people actually behave” (p. 167). The disparity between what is prescribed by the master narrative and the individual’s lived story can only be papered over for so long before the master narrative loses its credibility, opening space for a counter narrative to take hold.

In short, individuals construct counter narratives in order to make sense of their lives, which are often understood as unfolding outside of the cultural mainstream and are therefore unintelligible when compared to dominant cultural storylines (Delgado, 1995). Such stories are consciously constructed by members of outside groups, who recognize that although their stories are on the periphery of the mainstream, they are not unique (Andrews, 2002a). In fact, “counter narratives, like the dominant cultural narratives they challenge, might be experienced and articulated individually, but nonetheless have common meanings” (p. 2).

It is important to note that counter narratives and master narratives are not dichotomous entities. Rather, the degree of success a counter narrative achieves is contingent upon the story becoming widely circulated and socially shared and, in some instances, becoming a master narrative itself. And, “just as it’s a mistake to conceptualize master narratives as single, unified stories, so is it mistaken to think of counterstories as full-blown stories that preexist their encounter with any given master narrative” (Nelson, 2001, p. 169). Counter narratives “…are always (and at once) in tension with dominant stories, neither fully oppositional nor untouched” (Tore, Fine, Boudin, Bowen, Clark, Hylton, et al., 2001, p. 151). As a result, counter narratives
“can often be read under the covers of master narratives,” (Andrews, 2002a, p. 2) emerging “through a process of ongoing engagement with the narratives they resist” (Nelson, 2001, p. 169).

In other words, counter narratives rely on master narratives for means of expression and understanding, much like satire, which relies on an existing mode of understanding for representation (Knight, 2004). In fact, satire can be understood as a type of counter narrative, a conceptualization explained in more detail below.

Satire as Counter Narrative

As a literary genre, satire is pre-generic (Knight, 2004). That is, “It is not a genre in itself but an exploiter of other genres…[it is] a mental position that needs to adopt a genre in order to express its ideas as representation” (p. 4). To be successful, then, satire relies on an existing mode of understanding, a default lens through which individuals process information and thereby arrive at the same perception as that of the satirist.

In its exploitation of others genres, however, satire seeks to attack an object representative of human evil and folly and, in so doing, make such qualities appear patently offensive (Knight, 2004). The same purpose ultimately lies at the heart of counter narratives, which take as their object of attack master narratives that both manipulate public consciousness and inculcate a set of common cultural ideals (Peters & Lankshear, 1996). In fact, by splintering and disturbing master narratives, counter narratives’ target the “terroristic and violent nature” by which master narratives “assert certain ‘Truths’ from the perspective of one discourse, by silencing or excluding statements from another” (p. 9).

Clearly, counter narratives aim to challenge a culture’s predominant sense-making strategies. Emerging from the gaps and fissures of a master narrative, counter narratives chip at a society’s preferred viewpoint, exposing the hypocrisy and inequality master narratives work to
conceal. As Delgado (1989) asserts, “They [counter narratives] can show that what we believe is ridiculous, self-serving, or cruel” (p. 2415). In short, counter narratives aim to shatter complacency, to challenge the status quo, and to “prove by holding up to scrutiny our idealized images of ourselves – forcing us to admit that such images are forever out of reach, unavailable to us, or even the last things we would really want to attain” (Griffin, 1994, p. 60).

The key to conceptualizing satire as counter narrative is thus establishing their commensurate purpose. To that end, satire has been described as taking the form of paradox, carrying within it “the notion of a challenge to ‘received opinion,’ as para-dox challenges ortho-
dox” (Griffin, 1994, p. 53). The challenge, although destructive, is not merely so, for a paradox is intended to provoke consciousness, to re-awaken human perception from the slumber induced by the everyday, and to incite “a Thinking and Philosophical Temper” (Dunton as cited in Griffin, p. 53). As such, satire can be understood as the means by which an unorthodox opinion is advanced, a vulgar error exposed, or thought stimulated via rhetorical ingenuity (Griffin, 1994).

The satirist’s goal is thus to compel the audience to see the everyday in a new light, to pull back the curtain created by society’s master narratives, and to shine a light on normal reality and common sense in order to expose the construction of a culture’s dominant stories (Harris, Carney, & Fine, 2001). In other words, “The satirical writer believes that most people are purblind, insensitive, perhaps anaesthetized by custom and dullness and resignation. He wishes to make them see the truth – at least that part of the truth which they habitually ignore” (italics added; Hight, 1962, p. 19).

To achieve this goal, satire uses laughter as a weapon to diminish or derogate a subject and evoke toward it attitudes of amusement, disdain, ridicule, or indignation (Abrams, 1999). In fact, Feinberg (1967) not only describes satire as a “playfully critical distortion of the familiar” (p. 19), but argues that satire’s “most striking quality…is its freshness, its originality of
perspective “(p. 15). Like teaching an old dog a new trick, satire shows “old things in a new way...jar[ing] us out of complacence into a pleasantly shocked realization that many of the values we unquestioningly accept are false” (p. 15-16).

To be clear, satire is not merely humor for humor’s sake (Feinberg, 1967). Rather, satire has a larger purpose, particularly with regard to socio-political life where its influence has historically been assumed to be so great that the Roman emperor Augustus passed a law forbidding its practice (punishment of which was death by whipping), Plato proposed laws against satirists, and England forbade its publication in 1599 (Feinberg, 1967).

And, lest we think such practices have gone out of fashion, a segment of The Daily Show with Jon Stewart was censored in Great Britain in 2011 (Baym & Jones, 2012). The segment, which included a video montage of Prime Minister David Cameron answering a barrage of questions regarding his relationship with members of Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation, concluded with Stewart proclaiming, “England is awesome!” Stewart addressed the issue a few weeks later with his usual aplomb, jesting that despite being aired in 85 countries around the world, “’including such free speech havens as, I don’t know, Chad, Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen,’ British rules prevented a UK audience from seeing his friendly, although satirical, treatment of Parliament” (p. 2). In fact, although British Parliament has allowed television cameras into its chambers since 1989, it strictly forbids the use of that footage “’in any light entertainment program or in a program of political satire’” (p. 3).

Historically, such concern has been driven by a belief in satire’s ability to reform society by exposing and criticizing hypocrisy and folly. In this light, the satirist’s jokes can be seen as a potential means for undermining society’s master narratives by pointing out and ridiculing their gaps and fissures. By attacking society’s problems, the satirist gives credence to a counter narrative that might inspire individuals to reappraise normative experience, to question the
foundations of society’s dominant stories and, thus, to challenge power (Hill, 2013). More simply, satire can be considered an important and dangerous weapon for questioning established power structures because it is capable of creating new insights through the use of humor. As a result, people not normally oriented to subversive activity are entered into a contract with the satirist, who attempts to foster perspective by incongruity (Burke, 1984). By offering a new way of looking at normal reality, the satirist’s strategy calls into question the taken-for-granted assumptions (i.e., the master narrative) underpinning social life and, therefore, attempts to awaken citizens’ perceptions by illustrating that “one’s way of seeing is, inevitably, a way of not seeing” (Gring-Pemble & Watson, 2003, p. 139; Burke, 1984). The ultimate provocation of satire is thus to make people aware of the lenses they see with.

Generally speaking, the actual force of satire has been as much a mixed bag as satire itself4 and is likely dependent on the type of satire being examined. Two of the most prominent types of satire have come to be defined as juvenalian and horatian, where juvenalian is perhaps best classified in the terms of tragedy and horatian in terms of comedy (Sander, 1971). Both forms of satire contain humorous material that can make audience members laugh and both retain, as with all modes of satire, an “inescapable aggressivity” (Bogel, 2001, p. 50). However, beyond these similarities, the two forms represent vastly different means of “provoking and challenging comfortable and received ideas” (Griffin, 1994, p. 160). As Hightet (1962) argues, there are two different types of satirist, one who likes people but considers them “rather blind and foolish” and one who “hates most people, or despises them”; “one is a physician, the other an executioner” (p. 235).

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4 The word satire comes from the Latin satura, meaning full, and in the context of literature meaning “a mixture full of different things” (Hightet, 1962, p. 231).
Horatian satire, the namesake of Quitus Hoatius Flasccus, a Roman poet and satirist who lived from 65 BC to 8 BC, is predominantly designed to comment on the ruling elite and macrolevel norms of social behavior (Hight, 1962). Lighter than juvenalian, its ultimate goal is the production of a wry smile in audience members (Sander, 1971). As Hight (1962) suggests, a horatian satirist “tells the truth with a smile, so that he will not repel them [audience members] but cure them of that ignorance which is their worst fault” (p. 235). Indeed, the satirist utilizing the horatian form is an optimist, writing to heal the diseases of folly and evil. This type of satirist “recognizes that some people are evil, but all are foolish not only because they do foolish things but because they are unaware of their folly” (Knight, 2004, p. 3). In order to cure them, then, the satirist must adjust their perception by “denounce[ing] in such a way as to warn and to deter” (Highest, 1962, p. 243).

Bogel (2001) further describes Horatian satire as displaying “urbanity” and “good manners,” with satirists in this tradition being “gentle” (p. 30). In short, Horatian satire is softer than juvenalian; its ultimate goal is to “persuade more than…denounce,” which imbues this form with a sense of optimism regarding humanity’s willingness and ability to overcome its deficiencies, once made aware of them (Hight, 1962, p. 237). Consequently, horatian satire often appeals to “some vaguely defined Golden Age – some Cockaigne, Utopia, Never-Never Land – where man may fulfill his ideal nature” (Bloom & Bloom, 1979, p. 221). In this regard, horatian satire represents a less pungent form of counter narrative that mocks and ridicules humanity’s inability to occupy the appropriate moral positions afforded by society’s master narratives without fully assailing the master narratives themselves. Within these boundaries, horatian satire fulfills many scholars’ assumptions that political satire is “essentially conservative in thought and impact” (Schutz, 1977, p. 9).
In sharp contrast, juvenalian satire adopts an acidic tone and has been described as “savage and merciless” (Sander, 1971, p. 254). This form of satire gets its name from Decimus Junius Jevenalias, who produced 16 satires on the corruption and vices of Rome from 60 AD to 140 AD. Rather than cajoling audience members to jovially reflect on the inconsistencies and hypocrisies of life, however, juvenalian satire is designed to disorient, “to wound, to punish, to destroy” (Hight, 1962, p. 235). Satirists operating in this tradition are known as “vigorous and aggressive attacker[s]” (Bogel, 2001, p. 30), who “laugh with contempt at their [the audience’s] pretensions and incongruities and base hypocrisies” (Highest, 1962, p. 235).

Juvenalian satirists are thus pessimists who see no opportunity for reform. There is no hope for a humanity “populated by recidivist criminals…ineducable morons, simian savages” (Highest, 1962, p. 237). Rather than appealing to an ideal, juvenalian satire exposes, criticizes, and shames humanity for believing such an ideal has ever, or could ever, exist. In this regard, juvenalian satire represents a most pungent form of counter narrative, cutting society’s master narratives at their knees while simultaneously leveling an ominous eye at members of the public for ignorantly complying with such ideals.

Recent empirical assessments of satire have focused explicitly on the differential persuasive effects of the horatian and juvenalian forms (Holbert, Hmielowski, Jain, Lather, & Morey, 2011; Holbert, Tchernev, Walter, Esralew, & Benski, in press). More specifically, Holbert et al. (2011) found that the impact of horatian and juvenalian satire differs depending on the audience member’s ability to process the satiric message. For participants equal in motivation to process, juvenalian satire more effectively influenced post-stimulus attitudes (toward Hillary Clinton) in those with high ability, while horatian satire produced stronger effects for participants with low ability. Also of note, regardless of ability level, juvenalian satire produced a more consistent level of humor than horatian satire. Furthermore, Holbert et al. (in press) examined the
perceived persuasive impact of satire (horatian and juvenalian) compared to a traditional opinion-editorial. Results indicated both forms of satire were perceived relatively equally in terms of persuasive intent; however, relative to perceived influence, juvenalian satire showed effects more similar to the traditional op-ed than horatian satire, with perceptions of horatian satire reaching decidedly lower levels of message strength and perceived influence on oneself. Overall, these studies provide empirical support to the notion that all satire is not created equal (Holbert et al., 2011), with the horatian and juvenalian forms producing differential effects across various outcome variables.

However, these studies also illustrate the need for additional research, particularly in regard to the different elements of satire. This dissertation addresses one of these elements by conceptualizing satire as counter narrative and by asserting that different types of satire (horatian and juvenalian) represent varying intensities of invective against society’s master narratives. More specifically, this dissertation argues that political satire attempts to contest the singularity of perspective engendered by the internalization of dominant discourse and, in so doing, provide citizens with different, yet equally legitimate pairs of lenses by which to view experience. In short, by disrupting and dispelling the mythical consensus created by master narratives, satire seeks to establish the limits of any single position or discourse by being “skeptical about the validity of all dogmas concerning men and institutions” and by subjecting all discourse to potential censure and ridicule (italics added; Feinberg, 1967, p. 5).

What’s missing in such an account is the sense of pleasure or enjoyment audience members also feel in response to satirists’ performances (Feinberg, 1967). Satirists must walk a fine line between derision and reprimand, for “dissembled anger is an unpleasant emotion to observe or read about” (p. 6-7). As a result, the audience assumes a central role in determining the ultimate success or failure of satire and, to keep an audience, the satirist must first and
foremost possess the skills of a comedian, for although satire deals in derision, “man [only] enjoys derision as long as it is not directed at himself” (p. 6). This is arguably the most difficult criterion for satirists to meet, for it requires the highest degree of deftness to both challenge attitudes and opinions and to do so in a manner that invites amusement. After all, “most readers do not like to be exposed to unpleasantness – or, if they are, they want to be comforted and reassured about the unpleasantness” (Feinberg, 1967, p. 266).

Feinberg’s claim brings us back to the larger themes operating in this dissertation. Specifically, the recognition that because master narratives constitute “the mythological structure of a society from which we derive comfort,” any disruption or fragmentation of these narratives is likely to create discomfort (Kermode as cited in Abbott, 2008, p. 47). In response, individuals are likely to seek reassurance in order to restore faith in the master narrative’s principles. Accordingly, if political satire disrupts the rationality of the American exceptionalism master narrative, individuals should (a) feel a sense of discomfort and (b) be driven to reduce that discomfort by seeking ways to bolster their faith in the exceptionalism narrative. Shane (2012) suggests just this, asserting that, “Americans demand constant reassurance that their country, their achievements and their values are extraordinary” (para. 4).

Altogether then, political satire has the ability to subvert the influence of the American exceptionalism master narrative by emphasizing tensions within the narrative, tensions among connecting narratives, and discrepancies between the narrative’s prescriptions and actual, lived experience. This final strategy is of particular import here, for it strikes a cord with oppressed groups, “whose marginality defines the boundaries of the mainstream, whose voice and perspective – whose consciousness – has been suppressed, devalued, and abnormalized” by the master narrative (Delgado, 1989, p. 2412). In fact, as Delgado (1989) notes, “Oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool in their own survival and liberation” (p. 57).
The next section thus discusses the relationship between satire and one particular aspect of oppression – race.

*Satire and Race*

It is easy to understand why counter narratives are particularly attractive for members of oppressed groups. Such stories create bonds, shared understandings, and social cohesion for those excluded by master narratives, establishing a kind of “counter-reality…[that] aim[s] to subvert” the reality imposed by the master narrative (Delgado, 1989, p. 2412-13). Of importance here, counter narratives told by those relegated to the margins are frequently ironic or satiric. As Delgado (1989) suggests, ‘a root word for ‘humor’ is humus – bringing low, down to earth. Along with the tradition of storytelling in black culture there exists the Spanish tradition of the picaresque novel…of humble folk piquing the pompous or powerful” (p. 2414).

With respect to this dissertation, the narrative of American exceptionalism is open to attack from myriad groups – including but certainly not limited to Native Americans, African Americans, and women – all of whom have suffered (un)justifiable exclusion. In fact, “From the beginning, whole categories of Americans [were] excluded from the vital center or enjoyed no meaningful role in the political tradition” (Lewis, 2012, p. 108). Barred from the exceptionalism narrative, these unacknowledged and suppressed categories were *uniquely* divided by race, class, gender, and empire (Lewis, 2012). Race, however, would be at the forefront, with Du Bois (1903) laying bare “The problem of the twentieth century” as “the problem of the color-line – the relation of the darker and lighter races of men” (p. 13) even as Luce (1941) proclaimed the twentieth century the American century.

In truth, there exists perhaps no greater stain on the American narrative than the act of slavery, prompting Hughes (2003) to assert that “African Americans did not simply suffer; they
suffered at the hands of the rich, the powerful, and the privileged. If we can view the American experience through their eyes, we will learn much about the capacity of the rich and powerful to exploit those less fortunate than themselves” (p. 9). Because of this history, “African Americans often provide a perspective on the American experience that differs dramatically from the perspective of the historically privileged classes” (p. 9).

The African American perspective is thus a pre-eminent form of counter narrative, one that expressly emphasizes the hypocrisy of the master narratives undergirding the grand experiment known as America. As Frederick Douglass pointedly asked in 1852:

What, to the American slave, is your Fourth of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty an unholy license; your national greatness swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants brass-fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are to Him mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety and hypocrisy – a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. (para. 44)

Douglass’s speech underscores the paradox created by the United States’ engagement in slavery. For a nation ostensibly steeped in freedom and independence, in the creed that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,” the Fourth of July is both celebration and sham, a means of reinforcing a righteous, yet imaginary master narrative (“Declaration of Independence”, para. 2). By challenging the received opinion regarding the Fourth of July, Douglass advanced a counter narrative designed to subvert the prescribed definition of “Independence Day” and to interrogate it as a socially constituted fiction out of line with the historical reality of African American people. As a result, Douglass pointed his audience’s attention to a different American story, one woven out of the voices of the dispossessed, the poor, the forgotten (Hughes, 2003).
Douglass’s biting critique is certainly one of the most well known counter narratives constructed by African Americans, especially (former) slaves, but it is not the only one. As Delgado (1989) notes, “Black slaves told, in song, letters, and verse about their own pain and oppression. They described the terrible wrongs they had experienced at the hands of the whites and mocked…the veneer of gentility whites purchased at the cost of the slaves’ suffering” (p. 2436). Indeed, slaves sought revenge against their white masters “disarmingly with guile and indirection,” their humor characterized as both “Inwardly masochistic, indeed tragic” and “externally aggressive, even acrimonious” (Boskin & Dorinson, 1985, p. 91-92).

Without question, the experience of slavery complicated the form and expression of black humor, with African Americans successfully adapting existing forms of humor as a means of rebellion. In doing so, African Americans crafted several distinct genres, including “gallows humor, the ironic curse, double meanings, trickster tales, and retaliatory jokes” (Boskin & Dorinson, 1985, p. 91). Despite its variety, each form of black humor retains (a) a unique quality of play, “which seeks to ward off punishment and thus permits quick retaliation,” (b) a commitment to “deep scrutiny,” and (c) a “type of control…vital for the maintenance of a highly attuned and carefully scrutinized community” (p. 91).

Unsurprisingly, such scrutiny extended to the practice of humor. As Kercher (2006) notes, prior to the 1960s, African Americans “were required to enjoy their practice of comic reversal and comic revenge in private,” meaning “white Americans could little imagine or admit the extent to which they and their institutions were subjects of such hearty laughter” (p. 280). Unbeknownst to the white community, the length to which (some) whites went to assert authority and power “inspired a tradition of assertive, impious, and absurdist jokelore traded privately by African Americans since the days of slavery” (p. 280). From their position at the margins of American life, African Americans found “solace and enjoyment by laughing at whites from the
outside”; as W. E. B. Du Bois remarked in 1940, “To the black world alone belongs the delicious chuckle…” (as cited in Kercher, 2006, p. 280).

To be clear, African Americans turned to humor because it allowed them to “laugh at that which is normally unlaughable” (Ellison as cited by Kercher, 2006, p. 281). Systematically deprived of status and power, African Americans were able to turn humor to their advantage, utilizing various forms, including self-deprecation, to advance a common goal – equality (see Bippus, 2007, Gilbert, 2007; Esralew, 2012). By re-purposing the stereotypes used to marginalize them and by making such perceived flaws (e.g., intelligence, moral virtue, physical attractiveness) the targets of their jokes (Greengross & Miller, 2008), African Americans sought to critically undermine racial prejudice by closing the gap between the master narratives undergirding racism and the actual, lived experience of African Americans.

Comedy thus provided “an otherwise unavailable clarification of vision that calms the clammy trembling which ensues whenever we [African Americans] pierce the veil of conventions that guard us from the basic absurdity of the human condition” (Ellison as cited by Kercher, 2006, p. 281). Ellison’s remarks point to the anxiety, “the clammy trembling,” which would ensue whenever African Americans attempted to pierce the veil constructed by the master narrative. By disrupting what had become a natural part of the interpretative process, black humor came into direct contact with the “terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs” of society, as well as the “contradictory forms of ‘common sense’ which have taken root in and helped to shape popular life” (Hall, 1986, p. 26). Black humor thus served to critique racial hegemony and to promote group solidarity by emboldening others within the black community who likely had the same thoughts and experiences but were afraid to give them voice (Delgado, 1989).

Two of the most important African Americans giving voice to humor in the 1960s were Flip Wilson and Richard Pryor (Haggins, 2007; Zakos, 2009). Although their approach to humor
differed greatly, their shows were significant in relation to the progression of prime-time black sketch comedy, particularly the development and popularity of Comedy Central’s satirical sketch comedy program, *Chappelle’s Show*. Before focusing on *Chappelle’s Show*, however, a brief overview of Wilson and Pryor’s shows is warranted.

According to Haggins (2007), Flip Wilson wielded a brand of comedy solely aimed at making people laugh, which he did for four seasons on *The Flip Wilson Show*. As the least political of the comedians discussed here, Wilson’s work is also the most overlooked, a curious phenomenon given that his success using the comedy-variety format literally set the stage for future generations of black comedians trying to break into television, including Dave Chappelle (Zakos, 2009). As Sutherland (2008) notes, “few contemporary television comedians, either white or black, cite Wilson among their influences” (p. xxii). Sutherland goes on to suggest that, “Perhaps Wilson’s competing reputations for selling out and speaking out place him in an awkward position in popular memory, somewhere between the very proper Dr. Huxtable played by [Bill] Cosby in the eighties and the inimitably improper [Red] Foxx and Pryor” (p. xxii-xxiii).

Indeed, Richard Pryor’s brand of comedy, an unyielding mixture of intrepid and stinging social commentary, is perhaps the reason *The Richard Pryor Show* lasted only four episodes (Haggins, 2007; Sutherland, 2008). Nevertheless, those four episodes had a substantive impact on future comedy-variety shows, leading Acham (2007) to suggest that the show stood as “a living critique of network television’s attempt to shape black life” (p. 157). During the show’s short run, Pryor not only satirized the boundaries he was up against as a black comedian on network TV, but he did so by explicitly pointing out the things he was and was not allowed to do (e.g., using censored language) for fear of alienating the network’s core (i.e., white) audience (Acham, 2007; Zakos, 2009).
Wilson and Pryor can thus be understood as representing different counter narrative positions. Wilson’s humor, far less critical than Pryor’s, represented a more palatable form, owing to the comedian’s chief concern – making people laugh. After all, as noted earlier, “man [only] enjoys derision as long as it is not directed at himself” (Feinberg, 1967, p. 6). Pryor, on the other hand, attempted both. As Chappelle has noted, “He [Pryor] gave a voice to the voiceless, made the black experience accessible to all, but he was funny first” (as cited in Hampton, 2005, para.3, p. 208). In doing both, however, Pryor’s humor was less palatable, particularly to network executives, who pulled the show after only four episodes.

In short, Wilson and Pryor set the stage for Chappelle’s Show, which first aired on Comedy Central on January 22, 2003 (Zakos, 2009). Designed as a thirty-minute satirical sketch comedy program, the show included monologues delivered by Dave Chappelle before and after each sketch, performances of the sketches, and occasionally, a guest performance by a music star. According to Farley (2005), Chappelle’s Show combined the “pop culture instincts of early Saturday Night Live, the satiric inventiveness of the Ben Stiller Show and the racial daring of In Living Color” and, in doing so, “illumine[d] the idiocy, the sheer lunacy, of racial bigotry” (p. 72). Relative to the show’s content, Bell-Jordan (2007) adds that “Chappelle’s Show regularly placed race in our face and dared audiences to tune in to each episode’s hard-hitting political and racial discourse. It reminded viewers of the naked truth about prejudice and intolerance, and it openly ridiculed people convinced that race no longer matters in America” (p. 74).

By tackling the state of race relations in America through satire, Chappelle continued a tradition of black humor intended to “laugh at that which is normally unlaughable” (Ellison as cited by Kercher, 2006, p. 281). Chappelle’s comedy was thus “largely built around the grand narratives of American history,” including the narrative of exceptionalism, which has continuously worked to cover the sins of America’s racist past (Wisniewski, 2009, p. 185).
panache with which Chappelle dispatched this narrative, however, speaks to his “performance of an oppositional discourse [that] confronts racial and cultural taboos by bursting out of the ‘seams and cracks’ of dominant cultural forms, where counter-hegemonic messages have traditionally inscribed their challenge to central political positions and cultural assumptions” (Bell-Jordan, 2007, p. 75).

Evidence of Chappelle’s ability to point both a sharp eye on politics and race in America and successfully generate laughter can be seen in the show’s critical and commercial success. Critically, Chappelle’s Show was nominated for three Emmy awards for the 2003-2004 season. The nominations included: Outstanding Variety, Music or Comedy Series, Outstanding Writing in a Variety, Music or Comedy Program, and Outstanding Directing for a Variety, Music, or Comedy Program (“Awards for ‘Chappelle’s Show’”, n.d.). Commercially, the show averaged 3.1 million viewers per episode in 2003 and sold nearly 3 million copies of the first season’s DVD (Bao, 2009). The show’s unquestionable popularity even earned Chappelle a two-year, $50 million contract (Wisniewski, 2009).

Imagine the dismay, then, when in April 2005, rumors began circulating that Chappelle had not only abandoned the show’s set while taping the third season but had left for Africa (Wisniewski, 2009). “Why,” after all, “would such a budding young star with a successful show walk out on a $50 million deal?” (p. 1).

The answer, according to Chappelle, was his concern that he “had gone from sending up stereotypes to merely reinforcing them” (Farley, 2005). In an interview with Oprah Winfrey, Chappelle explained, “I was doing sketches that were funny but socially irresponsible.” Specifically citing a sketch about racial pixies, Chappelle recounted the premise of the sketch, stating, “The premise of the sketch was that every race had this pixie, this racial complex. But,
the pixie was in blackface. Now, blackface is a very difficult image, but the reason I had chosen blackface at the time was because this was going to be the visual personification of the N-word.” While taping the sketch, however, Chappelle took note of the way a white member of the crew laughed, doing so in a way that made Chappelle feel uneasy. As Chappelle told Oprah, “I know the difference between people laughing with me and people laughing at me. And it was the first time I’d ever gotten a laugh that I was uncomfortable with.”

Chappelle’s suspicion that members of his audience were not understanding his humor as intended ultimately stemmed from the inherent ambiguity of satire, and his resulting frustration is common among satirists (Bogel, 2001; Simpson, 2003; Knight, 2004). Because satire is pre-generic (Knight, 2004), it relies on an existing mode of understanding, a default lens through which individuals process information and thereby arrive at the same perception as that of the satirist. In its reliance on and interaction with existing references established by society’s master narratives, however, satire runs the risk of being “co-opted” and, in Chappelle’s case, “ultimately, serving a mainstream consumerist imagination of racial and racist objectification” (Bao, 2009, p. 168). As Bao (2009) asserts, “His humor could not and cannot be extricated from a history that is laced with both spectacularized and quotidian dehumanization and abjection of blacks,” a fact that “he and his audience inevitably must wrestle with” (p. 168).

Chappelle’s Show thus illustrates the difficulty of performing race in the pursuit of social commentary, especially via satire. As an exploiter of other genres, the performance must inherently rely on the very images, depictions, and beliefs that it is trying to refute. As Sanchez and Stuckey (2000) maintain, “Challenging hegemonic codes…is difficult, not least because whether by using them, contradicting them, and/or adapting them to different purposes, these codes are still present. The more deeply embedded and pervasive these codes are, the more difficult it is to replace them” (p. 88-89). In short, “An effort to deflate a stereotype instead
affirms one. A comedian [Chappelle] brought down by a single snicker from a single white man he realizes is laughing with the blackface devil not at him” (Italics in original; Cobb, 2007, p. 252).

By satirizing longstanding stereotypes and assumptions directed at African Americans, *Chappelle’s Show* attempted to exploit the tensions within and among the master narratives undergirding racism, but in the process, may have done exactly the opposite. Despite attempting through the use of satirical sketch comedy to suggest a different way of telling the same story, to turn the master narrative’s structure on its head, Chappelle left behind $50 million out of a concern that, at best, members of his audience were missing his point, and at worst, that his critique was being “hijacked…to reinforce racial hierarchies and reify racial stereotypes” (Bao, 2009, p. 179).

If we take as a given that “Most of what we know, or think we know, we have never personally experienced…” and that “we [only] ‘know’ about things based on the stories we hear and the stories we tell,” (Gerbner as cited in Morgan, 2002, p. 7) then we must come face to face with the fact that the primary source of the stories we hear is television, where, “Past stereotypical images that have denied black people any particular level of humanity act as a filter for understanding new images. This fact accentuates the need to locate the meaning of a television program continually within the broader discourses that limit and control possible interpretations” (Jhally & Lewis, 1992, p. 116).

In the case of *Chappelle’s Show*, the broader discourse of American exceptionalism, which has long excluded entire categories of Americans, especially African Americans, limited the show’s meaning for some audience members. Perhaps a victim of his own popularity, Chappelle’s expanding audience inevitably contained those “who found liberation in his expression and representation of their racial disenfranchisement and dislocation,” as well as
“those who enjoy the bounties of racial privilege,” which meant “the effects of this sketch comedy…could be either ‘uplifting’ or tragically destructive” (Bao, 2009, p. 178-179). In his performance of the racial pixie sketch, Chappelle came up against every satirist’s worst fear; “namely, the fear of admitting that satire may teach nothing, and the corresponding guilt over the possibility that all we are left with is malicious, utterly ‘unedifying’ laughter” (Rosen, 2012, p. 18).

To be clear, the satirist’s fear derives from the potentially insidious and harmful effects of master narratives, which work to constrain perception and limit understanding of how the world works. If satire is incapable of provoking consciousness or inciting critical thought, then curing people from the diseases of folly and evil is a hopeless endeavor and, perhaps even worse, the satirist may ultimately be affirming the very objects he/she seeks to ridicule. For Chappelle, the realization that his satiric performance of race might be re-inscribing a master narrative of racism rather than undermining one, prompted enough fear to leave behind $50 million and enough dissonance to flee to Africa in search of peace of mind (Farley, 2005).

Chappelle’s inability to fully transcend racial hierarchies and racist stereotypes underscores the degree to which master narratives unconsciously shape how we think and act. As an enduring feature of every aspect of a culture’s discourse (Bennett, 1980), master narratives become so ingrained, so familiar and ubiquitous that they are likely to be overlooked (Bruner, 1991). Indeed, as David Foster Wallace (2005) so aptly noted, “the most obvious, important realities are often the ones that are hardest to see and talk about” (para. 3). To illustrate, Wallace (2005) offered the following anecdote: “There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says ‘Morning, boys. How’s the water?’ And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes ‘What the hell is water?’” (Wallace, 2005, para. 2).
The “ocean in which we are swimming without knowing or being aware” (Gerbner, 2002, p. 498) is dominated by master narratives, which makes flipping the coin to counter narratives so important and a main contribution of this dissertation to communication research. By breaching the legitimacy of a canonical narrative script, a counter narrative, such as that offered by satire, generates both discord and attention (Bruner, 1991). As something unusual, the counter narrative not only warrants telling but challenges individuals “into fresh interpretive activity” (p. 12-13). However, humans possess limited cognitive capacity (Miller, 1956), so any deviation from the norm, let alone a disruption intended to generate fresh activity, is likely to generate psychological discomfort (Kermode as cited in Abbott, 2008, p. 47). Simply put, when individuals are exposed to a counter narrative that challenges the dominant cultural perspective (i.e., a canonical script), as can be the case from exposure to specific mass mediated messages (e.g., satire), dissonance is aroused within the individual that must be reduced. The following section addresses dissonance arousal by focusing on cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957).

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

One of the canonical scripts in America is that of American exceptionalism. Yet, recently, this script has run afoul, raising the question - Is the American century over? “Have we, inheritors of this continent and of the ideals to which the fathers consecrated it,” as Woodrow Wilson (1912) once asked, “Have we maintained them, realizing them, as each generation must, anew?...; or, disillusioned and defeated, are we feeling the disgrace…of not having done them?” (para. 1). Although a complete answer to these questions is beyond the scope of the current study, a fundamental component of each question is at the heart of this dissertation – how will individuals react when exposed to a narrative that directly challenges the master narrative of American exceptionalism?
To answer that question, the current effort draws on cognitive dissonance theory. Like cultivation research, cognitive dissonance theory has engendered decades of scholarly research (Jones, 1985). Originally proposed by Leon Festinger in 1957, dissonance theory postulated that pairs of cognitions (i.e., attitudes, thoughts, and beliefs) can be relevant or irrelevant to one another. If relevant, the cognitions are either consonant or dissonant. If consonant, the cognitions are consistent with one another, whereas if dissonant, the cognitions are contradictory.

The existence of dissonance, which produces a sense of psychological discomfort, provokes an individual’s desire to return to a state of comfort or equilibrium, primarily by avoiding information likely to increase his/her discomfort. The theory also holds that the more anxiety or stress an individual feels (i.e., the greater the magnitude of dissonance), the more pressure he/she feels to engage in behavior(s) that will reduce his/her discomfort (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999).

According to the theory, an individual can reduce his/her dissonance by engaging in one of four activities: he/she can (a) remove the dissonant cognitions; (b) add new consonant cognitions; (c) reduce the importance of the dissonant cognitions; or (d) increase the importance of the consonant cognitions (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999). To illustrate this, Festinger (1957) used the following scenario as an example: a habitual smoker learns that smoking is bad for his/her health. According to the terms noted above, the smoker will likely experience psychological discomfort because the knowledge that smoking is unhealthy is dissonant with the cognition that he/she continues to smoke. Why, after all, would a person continue to smoke if he/she knew doing so was a significant danger to his/her well-being?

The resulting incongruity in cognitions would produce a sense of psychological discomfort that the smoker would be motivated to reduce. To do so, the smoker could either: (a) change his/her behavior (e.g., stop smoking) to eliminate the dissonant cognition; (b) change
his/her cognitions about smoking by dismissing evidence of its harmful effects (i.e., eliminate the dissonant cognition); (c) look for evidence of the positive effects of smoking (i.e., add consonant cognitions); (d) conclude that the risks smoking presents are negligible in comparison to other factors (e.g., automobile accidents) and thereby reduce the importance of the dissonant cognitions; or (e) consider the beneficial aspects of smoking as essential to his/her life (i.e., bolstering the importance of consonant cognitions).

Since its initial publication, cognitive dissonance theory has not only been the subject of hundreds and hundreds of studies, it has also been subject to revision and controversy (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999). Such interest has been attributed to the general and abstract nature of Festinger’s (1957) initial postulates, which broadened the theory’s scope and applicability. As Harmon-Jones and Mills (1999) contend, “Rather than being relevant to a single topic, the theory is relevant to many different topics” (p. 5). One of those topics is under investigation here – the degree to which exposure to a counter narrative related to American exceptionalism will produce a sense of psychological discomfort within individuals. The basis for this contention lies in Festinger’s initial theory, as well as in a revision made by Aronson in 1960.

Prior to Aronson’s (1960) revision, dissonance research had “demonstrated that human beings engage in all kinds of cognitive gymnastics aimed at justifying their own behavior” (Aronson, 1999, p. 108). In fact, research had repeatedly shown that the self-persuasion occurring in the dissonance experiments was more powerful and persistent than any other persuasive technique being examined (e.g., reward, punishment, source credibility; see also Freedman, 1965). The reason, according to Aronson (1999), is that “the arousal of dissonance always entails relatively high levels of personal involvement and, therefore, the reduction of dissonance requires some form of self-justification” (p. 109). Aronson’s (1960) revision thus tightened the boundaries of cognitive dissonance by formalizing the influence of the self-concept.
To be brief, when an important aspect of the self (e.g., a valued attitude, a core characteristic, a firmly established moral) is violated, dissonance is aroused. Such violations and the dissonance that is subsequently generated have been found in almost every country (Beauvois & Joule, 1996; Joule & Beauvois, 1998; Sakai, 1999), but the effect appears particularly pronounced in countries like the United States where individualism is highly valued (Kitayama, Snibbe, Markus, & Suzuki, 2004). In short, Aronson (1999) argued that dissonance theory made “its strongest predictions when an important element of the self-concept is threatened…” (p. 110), and subsequent elaborations of this revision have concluded that efforts to reduce dissonance involve self-justification because dissonance is, more often than not, the result of engaging in actions that leave individuals feeling “stupid, immoral, or confused” (Aronson, 1999, p. 112). In order to restore a positive sense of self (e.g., the self as moral), then, individuals construct self-justifying cognitions and engage in self-justifying behavior(s) in order to reduce and/or eliminate their psychological discomfort.

This dissertation thus proposes the following: to the extent the master narrative of American exceptionalism has been cultivated as an integral element of Americans’ identity, exposure to a counter narrative in the form of political satire (e.g., horatian or juvenalian) that directly threatens the viability of that perception is likely to engender cognitive dissonance. More formally, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a: Participants exposed to satire (horatian or juvenalian) will report higher levels of cognitive dissonance compared to participants exposed to a control message.

H1b: Participants exposed to juvenalian satire will report higher levels of cognitive dissonance compared to participants exposed to horatian satire.
H2a: Participants who self-report a greater identification with American exceptionalism will report higher levels of cognitive dissonance when exposed to satire compared to exposure to a control message.

H2b: Participants who self-report a greater identification with American exceptionalism will report higher levels of cognitive dissonance when exposed to juvenalian satire compared to horatian satire.

Once dissonance is generated, however, individuals are motivated to eliminate this aversive psychological state by using whatever means of dissonance reduction are most accessible (i.e., the reduction opportunity that is presented first; Aronson, Blanton, & Cooper, 1995; Simon, Greenberg, & Brehm, 1995). Given today’s media environment, one of the primary means by which individuals are motivated to reduce dissonance created by exposure to a media message is by turning to other media messages.

However, the type of message offered is important because as Festinger (1957) originally suggested, cognitive dissonance theory specifies the conditions under which a person will seek out or avoid information. Specifically, individuals experiencing dissonance will (a) seek out information expected to increase consonance and (b) avoid information expected to increase dissonance. Several early studies (Ehrlich, Guttman, Schonbach, & Mills, 1957; Mills, Aronson, & Robinson, 1959) of selective exposure to information supported the former assumption, with individuals showing a preference for consonant information, and although much current debate regarding selective exposure focuses on the type(s) of media outlets people tend to gravitate to (i.e., messages that reinforce pre-existing attitudes) and whether citizens proactively disengage from counter-attitudinal messages (see Bennett & Iyengar, 2008, 2010; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Holbert, Garrett, & Gleason, 2010), scholars engaged in this debate tend to agree that people will, more often than not, seek out media content that reinforces. Given the uniformity of
opinion in current select exposure research that people gravitate toward that which reinforces, the following hypotheses are posited:

H3: Participants who self-report stronger feelings of cognitive dissonance will select more narrative headlines that reflect active dissonance reduction strategies.

H4a: Participants exposed to satire (horatian or juvenalian) will select more narrative headlines that reflect active dissonance reduction strategies.

H4b: Participants exposed to juvenalian satire will select more narrative headlines that reflect active dissonance reduction strategies compared to participants exposed to horatian satire.

H5: Participants who self-report stronger feelings of American exceptionalism will select more narrative headlines that reflect active dissonance reduction strategies.

The experience of dissonance is also likely to have a direct effect on participants’ identification with the master narrative of American exceptionalism, leading to the following hypothesis:

H6: Participants who self-report stronger feelings of cognitive dissonance will report increased levels of identification with American exceptionalism.

Finally, exposure to political satire that directly assails the master narrative of American exceptionalism should have a direct effect on participants’ identification with the master narrative of American exceptionalism, leading to the final two hypotheses:

H7a: Participants exposed to satire (horatian or juvenalian) will report increased levels of identification with American exceptionalism.

H7b: Participants exposed to juvenalian satire will report higher increases in identification with American exceptionalism compared to participants exposed to horatian satire.
Chapter 2: Method

Design

A three-condition (horatian satire, juvenalian satire, control) between-subjects experiment design was employed in order to assess the influence of political satire on perceptions of American exceptionalism. Two separate studies were run using the same design, with stimuli from two separate mainstream television programs utilized to represent (a) more traditional political satire (i.e., The Newsroom) and (b) racial satire (i.e., Chappelle’s Show). Two videos were thus created for each satire condition (juvenalian versus horatian) along with a single control video, resulting in a total of five video stimuli (2 horatian, 2 juvenalian, and 1 control).

Participants

Students enrolled in communication courses at one large Midwestern university, one medium Midwestern university, and a small, private Liberal Arts college also located in the American Midwest, were recruited to participate in this study in exchange for a chance to win either a) an Amazon gift card ranging from $25 to $75 or b) an Apple iPod shuffle. Chances of winning one of the aforementioned gifts were 1 in 15.

Participants ($N = 243$) were almost equally distributed across the five video stimuli ($\text{Newsroom Horatian}: n = 46$, $\text{Newsroom Juvenalian}, n = 49$, $\text{Chappelle Horatian}, n = 47$, $\text{Chappelle Juvenalian}, n = 51$, $\text{Control}, n = 50$), as well as across program ($\text{The Newsroom}: n =$}
145; Chappelle’s Show = 148). On average, participants were 21 years old ($M = 21.31$; $SD = 4.09$), 57.6% ($n = 140$) were females, and 76.5% ($n = 186$) self-identified as Non-Hispanic White.

**Procedure**

Data for this study were collected between February and April 2013. The study, an online experiment, was created and administered using Qualtrics Survey software and took approximately 30 minutes to complete. Student participants entered the study by receiving a live web link from the researcher via an email request. Once sent by the researcher, the link directed participants to the study’s consent page, which indicated participants would be answering questions and viewing a video regarding political satire. Given the nature of the experiment, all participants were able to complete the study on their terms (e.g., in their desired location, at their desired time), provided they had access to the Internet.

Upon consenting to participate in the study, participants were asked to complete several demographic questions, as well as questions regarding their perceptions of America (e.g., “The United States should be the role model of the world”). Participants were then randomly assigned to one of the five video stimuli associated with each experimental condition (described below). After watching the video clip, participants were asked to respond to an additional battery of questions, including their reactions to the video (e.g., “How much enjoyment did you feel while watching this clip?”), their desire to read additional media stories (e.g., “Included here is a set of headlines taken from various mainstream news sources. Please take a few moments to select any headlines that are of interest to you at this moment”), and a second assessment of their perceptions of America (e.g., “Lifestyles in other countries are just as valid as in the United States”). In the next section, the stimuli are described in detail as are the items used in the
instrument. Please refer to Appendix H for the details regarding the demographic items and to Appendix I for the psychological scales utilized.

Stimuli

Given the study’s focus on (a) entertainment media, (b) political satire and (c) American exceptionalism, choosing stimuli that represented each focus area in a roughly equal manner was integral. Finding representative material was initially challenging, however, as a majority of the potential stimuli fit one or two categories but not all three.

As luck would have it, the researcher saw a promotional trailer for a new program to air on HBO in June 2012. Previews for the show, The Newsroom (Sorkin & Mottola, 2012a), included the main character, network news anchor Will McAvoy (played by actor Jeff Daniels), engaged in a diatribe against American exceptionalism. Airing on June 24, 2012, the premiere episode was titled, “We Just Decided To” (Sorkin & Mottola, 2012b). Ostensibly taking place on April 20, 2010, the episode focuses on the following:

Will McAvoy comes back to his national news anchor desk two weeks after a PR disaster at a college forum. He discovers that most of his staff is following his executive producer to another show, and his boss has hired Mackenzie MacHale as the new EP. McAvoy wants nothing to do with her and talks to his agent about getting her fired. While he and MacHale hash things out in his office, the news wire carries a report about a fire at BP's Deep Horizon oil well. McAvoy's old EP dismisses the intelligence that MacHale's assistant is discovering. How will McAvoy handle the opportunity to devote an hour to this news - and can the team put a show together on the fly? (“Plot Summary for The Newsroom – We Just Decided To”, n.d.)

Of critical importance to this dissertation was the show’s first eight minutes, during which, as the summary alludes, the show’s lead character, Will McAvoy, engages in a public relations disaster at a college forum. More specifically, during a routine question and answer session, McAvoy is pressed by the forum’s moderator, a college professor, to provide a response to the following question raised by a female audience member: what makes America the greatest
country in the world? As he ponders his response, McAvoy sees a woman in the audience hold up a sign that reads, “It’s not.” Perhaps triggered by the sign, McAvoy finally responds by saying: “It’s not the greatest country in the world, professor. That’s my answer.”

The professor, like the audience in attendance, is initially stunned by McAvoy’s response, but seeks clarification before quickly attempting to move on to a new topic. McAvoy, emboldened, continues unabated, turning first to his two co-speakers to denigrate comments each made earlier in the forum before leveraging the full weight of his criticism against the female audience member who initially posed the question. He forcefully asserts:

And, yeah, you…sorority girl. Just in case you wander into a voting booth one day, there are some things you should know. One of ’em is there’s absolutely no evidence to support the statement that we’re the greatest country in the world. We’re 7th in literacy, 27th in math, 22nd in science, 49th in life expectancy, 178th in infant mortality, 3rd in median household income, number 4 in labor force and number 4 in exports. We lead the world in only three categories: number of incarcerated citizens per capita, number of adults who believe angels are real, and defense spending, where we spend more than the next 26 countries combined, 25 of whom are allies. Now, none of this is the fault of a 20-year-old college student, but you, nonetheless, are, without a doubt, a member of the worst period generation period ever period, so when you ask what makes us the greatest country in the world, I don’t know what the fuck you’re talking about! Yosemite?!

At the end of his outburst, McAvoy attempts to temper the cynicism of his comments by suggesting:

It sure used to be. We stood up for what was right. We fought for moral reasons. We passed laws, struck down laws, for moral reasons. We waged wars on poverty, not on poor people. We sacrificed, we cared about our neighbors, we put our money where our mouths were and we never beat our chest. We built great, big things, made ungodly technological advances, explored the universe, cured diseases, and we cultivated the world’s greatest artists AND the world’s greatest economy. We reached for the stars, acted like men. We aspired to intelligence, we didn’t belittle it. It didn’t make us feel inferior. We didn’t identify ourselves by who we voted for in the last election and we didn’t scare so easy. We were able to be all these things and do all these things because we were informed...by great men; men who were revered. First step in solving any problem is recognizing there is one. America is not the greatest country in the world anymore.
In short, McAvoy offers, in no uncertain terms, two interrelated counter narratives regarding American exceptionalism. The first, dominated by a string of inescapable statistics, is an aggressive and biting critique of the notion of American supremacy (i.e., juvenalian satire), whereas the second points to a forgotten past, “a vaguely defined Golden Age…,” when the United States fulfilled its ideal nature (i.e., horatian satire; Bloom & Bloom, 1979, p. 221). Both approaches are aimed at provoking and challenging the assumption of American exceptionalism, but the first adopts a much more caustic and antagonistic tone while the second treads more carefully, referring to a beloved past in the hopes of persuading us to return to our ideals. The first eight-minutes of “We Just Decided To” thus highlight, in spades, each of the three focal areas of interest: (a) a focus on political issues via an entertainment format, (b) the use of satire (juvenalian and horatian), and (c) American exceptionalism.

Having established The Newsroom as a viable stimuli source, the first eight-minutes were then edited to conform to horatian and juvenalian standards. In the horatian satire condition (see Appendix A for a full transcript), the episode’s content prior to Will McAvoy’s initial controversial statement regarding American greatness remains untouched. After the statement, however, the video clip was edited to transition directly to McAvoy’s final speaking sequence, beginning with the statement, “It sure used to be.” In this regard, the horatian condition eliminates, in its entirety, McAvoy’s diatribe against the female audience member. Doing so eliminates the most abrasive statements in his monologue while preserving his main point – that “America is not the greatest country in the world anymore.” In sharp contrast, the juvenalian satire condition (see Appendix B for a full transcript) not only eliminates one of McAvoy’s initial jokes regarding the New York Jets (i.e., a more lighthearted element), which occurs prior to McAvoy’s initial controversial statement, but also eliminates his gentler post-script before concluding at the end of his tirade. As a result, the juvenalian condition excludes a portion of the
video clip’s initial lightheartedness and focuses exclusively on McAvoy’s contemptuous outburst at the college forum.

Once selection and editing of *The Newsroom* was complete, the researcher then moved on to select material focusing on racial satire. The researcher zeroed in on *Chappelle’s Show* (Brennan & Chappelle, 2003). Although clip selection was made easier by the show’s constraints (i.e., selection was, a priori, limited to two seasons of material), determining which skits would be applicable to the selection criteria *and* representative of horatian and juvenalian satire, respectively, remained difficult. Given the show’s average skit length and structure, editing a single clip to represent both types of satire was considered untenable. After much consideration, the researcher selected two skits from the same *Chappelle’s Show* episode (Season 2, Episode 2).

Airing on January 28th, 2004, the first skit is titled, “Calvin Gets a Job at WacArnolds” (Brennan & Chappelle, 2004b). The skit is done in three-parts, during which Dave Chappelle plays Calvin (see Appendix C for an image of Calvin), an inner city youth who gets a job at WacArnolds (i.e., McDonalds). The sketch (see Appendix D for a full transcript) is developed as a parody of old McDonalds commercials and asks the question: Is getting a job at a fast food establishment a positive step toward community development, or simply another dead end for poor, working class, black youth, living in the inner city? Dave Chappelle introduces the sketch by stating the following:

Have you seen this commercial where a guy, Calvin, gets a job at a fast food restaurant? You know, that commercial where the guy, Calvin, gets a job at a fast food restaurant and they act like that’s the best thing that can happen to a guy in the ghetto, like the whole neighborhood is excited, like this is gonna end poverty. *[Audience laughs.]* Calvin, you getting this job is a signpost to a new era in the black community! Thank you fast food restaurant. That’s not what it’s like to work in fast food. People aren’t proud of you. Let’s see what would happen to Calvin if he really had a job in fast food.

The WacArnolds skit tackles a serious issue but does so with an horatian approach. Addressing the economic disenfranchisement of African Americans, the skit offers an
unflattering, yet comic take on (a) the persistent economic disparities in America that remain tied to longstanding racial inequalities, (b) the failure of the master narrative of American exceptionalism to completely conceal such inequalities (i.e. the difference between prescription and description), and (c) satire’s ability to exploit the gaps in this narrative.

The second skit, airing later in the same January 28th episode, is titled, “The Niggar Family” (Brennan & Chappelle, 2004a). This sketch (see Appendix E for a full transcript) asks the question: If we re-contextualize the N word, will it influence our perception of its offensiveness? (Gray & Putnam, 2009; Lee, 2009). To answer this question, Dave Chappelle creates a sketch in which a white family has the last name, Niggar, to see how the word plays in this new environment. Chappelle introduces the sketch by making note of another controversial sketch that aired during the show’s first season. He states:

All right, last season we started the series off with a sketch about a black white supremacist. Very controversial… [Audience applause.] Yes, very. It sparked this whole controversy about the appropriateness of the N word, the dreaded N word. Then, when I would travel, people would come up to me, white people would come up to me, like, “Man, that sketch you did about them niggars it was hilar…” [Audience laughing.]

Chappelle goes on to say:

Take it easy. I was jokin’ around. You start to realize these sketches, in the wrong hands, are dangerous. You know, and that N word is a doozie, especially for us black folks. You know, a lot of different feelings come up when they hear that word. But I’m thinking, is it because black people actually identify themselves as N words? No. I don’t know. Maybe. But, what if we just use the word for other people? Would it be so bad? I don’t know…So I made a sketch. It’s about a white family, whose last name happens to be Niggar. That’s all…. Let’s see how offensive the word sounds now.

The skit’s principal focus on the use of the N word in American culture establishes a sobering ground against which the satiric figures of the Niggar family are exposed. Tackling the issue of racism head on, Chappelle’s skit inverts the assumptions underlying the N word and, in doing so, offers a biting (i.e., juvenalian) critique of the connection between power and race in America. Chappelle takes this critique a step further by filming the sketch in black and white,
thereby satirizing race’s distorted nature in both dominant culture (i.e., the real world) and the television world (i.e., parodying such 1950s television classics as *Leave It to Beaver*; Lee, 2009). The skit thus exposes the “constructed nature of whiteness and its reliance upon racial ‘Othering’” (Lee, 2009, p. 137), while simultaneously underscoring the alienation felt by those outside the dominant point of view (i.e., when the black milkman, Clifton, played by Chappelle, pointedly states, “This racism is killing me inside.”; see Appendix F for an image of Clifton with the Niggar family).

Finally, for control purposes, an episode of the popular CBS television series *The Big Bang Theory* (Lorre & Prady, 2007; see Appendix G for a full transcript) was selected. The researcher selected this episode because it fit the entertainment criteria while lacking any references to political satire or American exceptionalism. Specifically, the episode, titled “The Weekend Vortex,” (Lorre, Prady, & Cendrowski, 2012) focuses on a dilemma facing one of the main characters (Sheldon Cooper). Sheldon must decide between joining his girlfriend (Amy) at her aunt’s birthday party and playing videogames all weekend with his male friends.

Furthermore, the control condition was included to ensure that any observed effects occurred as a result of the manipulation and were not exhibited by participants assigned to the control condition. More simply, the inclusion of the control condition helped in comparing the effect of the horatian and juvenalian satire conditions on perceptions of American exceptionalism.

*Manipulation.* To be clear, the manipulation for this study focuses on exposure to a video clip illustrating either (a) horatian satire or (b) juvenalian satire. Two video clips were created for each program of study (*The Newsroom* and *Chappelle’s Show*, respectively), while an additional video clip was created as a control condition. Each video clip was created by editing one of the aforementioned program’s full-length episodes. After editing, the video clips were the
following lengths: *Newsroom Juvenalian* (6:18); *Newsroom Horatian* (6:27); *Chappelle Juvenalian* (5:26); *Chappelle Horatian* (4:19); *Control* (4:41).

**Measures**

*Condition.* Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (horatian, juvenalian, or control) across two-studies (*The Newsroom* and *Chappelle’s Show*).

*American Exceptionalism.* American Exceptionalism was measured pre- and post-stimulus. Prior to exposure to one of the five video clips, participants were asked the following eight randomized items: “I would rather be a citizen of America than of any other country in the world”; “The world would be a better place if people from other countries were more like Americans”; “Generally speaking, America is a better country than most other countries;” “People should support their country even if the country is in the wrong”; “The United States should be the role model of the world”; “Other countries should model themselves after the United States”; “The United States is a poor role model for other countries” (reverse-coded during analyses); and “Other countries really should not use the United States as a role model” (reverse-coded during analyses).

The first four items were taken from the 1996 General Social Survey (GSS), whereas the last four items were taken from Neuliep and McCroskey’s (1997) United States Ethnocentrism Scale (USE). Because there is no generally accepted measure of American Exceptionalism, the researcher supplemented the 1996 GSS items with four items from the USE scale. The four items selected best reflected the core notion of American Exceptionalism, which focuses on the United States as an exemplar, or chosen nation, destined to be the leader of the world. Specifically, each of the four items referred to the United States as a model that other countries should follow, with the only difference arising relative to wording (i.e., the final two items are reverse-coded).
Additionally, relative to the other 12 items in the USE scale, which tap lifestyle and morality dimensions, the four selected for use here focused solely at the level of country, thereby maintaining consistency with the 1996 GSS items.

All eight items were measured on a 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree) scale and subjected to exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using SPSS Version 20 (Principle axis factoring with direct oblimin rotation). Examination of the scree plot and structural factor loadings indicated a failure to obtain simple structure, with items 1 and 4 failing to load on a single factor and items 7 and 8 (i.e., the reverse-coded items) loading on a separate factor. After excluding these four items, a second EFA was run. Examination of the scree plot and structural factor loadings suggested one dominant articulated factor with primary factor loadings exceeding the recommended value of .60 (Kaiser, 1970; 1974).

Subsequent examination of each of the four remaining items, however, indicated items 5 and 6, which were initially taken from Neuliep and McCroskey’s (1997) USE scale, retained the highest factor loadings (.803 and .829, respectively) and made the most conceptual sense given the proposed role of the construct in this study. Specifically, these two items explicitly referred to the United States as a model that other countries should follow, which, as noted above, best reflects the core notion of American Exceptionalism. The other two items referred more generally to the United States being a “better” country (item 3) and the world being a “better place” if people were more like Americans (item 2). Although related, these items do not directly speak to the core notion of exceptionalism as articulated in this study (i.e., the U.S. as a chosen nation with a mission to act as the force of good against evil) and, therefore, in the interest of simplicity, comprehensiveness, and interpretability, the dominant factor was reduced to two components – items 5 and 6 – and computed into one index (r = .657, M = 3.80; SD = 1.34). This index represents the core attitude of American Exceptionalism (i.e., Core American Exceptionalism).
Exceptionalism), a sentiment reflected by each measure’s focus on the United States as the role model of the world.

The post-exposure measure of American Exceptionalism (see Appendix I for all items and wordings) was assessed using an extended battery of 19-items. All eight-items from the pre-exposure measure were included, as were eleven additional items taken from Neuliep and McCroskey’s (1997) USE scale. All 19 items were measured on a 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree) scale and subjected to exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using SPSS Version 20 (Principle axis factoring with direct oblimin rotation). Examination of the scree plot and structural factor loadings indicated a failure to obtain simple structure, with several items failing to load on a single factor (items 4, 12, 16, and 19) and several others loading across multiple factors (items 7, 8, and 18). After excluding these seven items, a second EFA was run. Examination of the scree plot and structural factor loadings appeared to indicate two factors (see Table 2).
Table 2. Scale Items and Factor Loadings for Post-Exposure American Exceptionalism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale Item</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would rather be a citizen of America than of any other country in the world.</td>
<td>.676</td>
<td>-.230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The world would be a better place if people from other countries were more like Americans.</td>
<td>.701</td>
<td>.313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally speaking, America is a better country than most other countries.</td>
<td>.794</td>
<td>-.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The United States should be the role model of the world.</td>
<td>.792</td>
<td>.285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other countries should model themselves after the United States.</td>
<td>.786</td>
<td>.112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People in the United States have just about the best lifestyles of anywhere else.</td>
<td>.684</td>
<td>.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people would be happier if they lived like people in the United States.</td>
<td>.713</td>
<td>.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries are smart to look up to the United States.</td>
<td>.783</td>
<td>.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life in the United States is much better than most other places</td>
<td>.668</td>
<td>-.227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People in the United States could learn a lot from people of other countries.</td>
<td>.083</td>
<td>.659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyles in other countries are just as valid as in the United States.</td>
<td>-.017</td>
<td>.539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy learning about the customs and values of other countries.</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.689</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subsequent examination of each factor thus suggested a single, core factor related to American Exceptionalism (Factor 1) and a secondary factor (Factor 2) derived from the USE scale regarding the degree to which Americans were receptive to learning about and from other countries. Ultimately, the items in the first factor were of greatest theoretical interest to this study and, therefore, a greater degree of scrutiny was placed on these items relative to their relationship to the core notion of American Exceptionalism. Careful consideration was given to using all nine items in a single index (Cronbach’s α = .910, M = 4.06; SD = 1.06). However, in order to clearly determine if participants’ perceptions of American Exceptionalism changed over time, the core American Exceptionalism measure needed to remain consistent pre- and post-exposure.

Consequently, a conservative approach was taken, with the post-exposure core American
Exceptionalism measure consisting of the same two items as the pre-exposure index ($r = .691, M = 3.60; SD = 1.24$).

The second factor that emerged during the EFA was composed of the following three items: “People in the United States could learn a lot from people of other countries”; “Lifestyles in other countries are just as valid as in the United States”; and “I enjoy learning about the customs and values of other countries.” Derived from Neuliep and McCroskey’s (1997) USE Scale, the items appeared to speak to a more inclusive understanding of the United States relative to the rest of the world. Although no formal hypotheses were articulated for this factor, its appearance and relationship to the core American Exceptionalism construct are of interest and, therefore, additional post-hoc analyses regarding this factor will be conducted following examination of the seven hypotheses that serve as the foundation of this dissertation.

**Cognitive Dissonance.** Cognitive dissonance was assessed using 3 items. Participants were asked to indicate on a 1 (*clearly does not describe my feelings*) to 5 (*clearly describes my feelings*) scale if they felt uncomfortable, uneasy, or bothered immediately after viewing the video clip. These three items were selected in response to Elliot and Devine’s (1994) measure of cognitive dissonance, which was created by averaging participants’ responses to these three items rather than the full set of 24 items originally measured in their study. The authors reported an acceptable level of reliability for the items (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .81$) and argued for the acceptability of this measure based on Festinger’s (1957) description of the dissonance state, as well as related research regarding affective responses to experimental manipulations (see Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink, & Elliot, 1991; Monteith, 1993). The measure proved robust here as well (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .883, M = 2.14; SD = 1.03$).

**Narrative Headline Selection.** After responding to the cognitive dissonance items, participants were asked to take a few moments to select any of 12 randomized headlines taken
from various mainstream news sources. Each narrative headline was selected to represent one of
three categories – active dissonance reduction, dissonance enhancement, or passive dissonance
reduction (i.e., headlines focusing on entertainment).

The active dissonance reduction headlines ($M = 1.51, SD = 1.19$) focused on positive
representations of the United States and, where possible, directly referenced exceptionalism in
some form. The headlines utilized were: “What Makes U.S. Exceptional”; “America: Love it or
be left behind”; “America the possible”; and “The US has a moral duty to block Iran nuclear
plans.” In sharp contrast, the dissonance enhancement headlines ($M = 1.65, SD = 1.26$) were
intended to feed respondents’ potential curiosity regarding America’s failure to live up to the
exceptionalism narrative. The headlines utilized in this category were as follows: “America: The
Best Country in the World at Being Last – How Can We Change that?”; “Collapsing U.S.
credibility: Condemning foreign governments for abusive acts while ignoring one’s own is easy.
But the U.S. leads the way”; “Is our patriotism moral?”; and “Thomas concedes that ‘we the
people’ didn’t include blacks.” The final set of headlines, categorized as passive dissonance
reduction, was offered as a potential escape from politics altogether, with headlines focusing
primarily on topics typically falling under the entertainment heading ($M = 1.26, SD = 1.29$). The
headlines utilized in this category were: “Justin Timberlake Brings Sexy Back with New Song”;
“Lance Armstrong confesses to Oprah Winfrey about his doping”; “Kim Kardashian reveals she
had fertility issues”; and “Golden globe winners shake up Oscar predictions.”

There were no maximum selection qualifications, so participants could select as few as 1
or as many as 12 headlines (see Appendix J for the complete list of headlines used). Of note, the
most selected headline (126 selections) fell under the dissonance enhancement category
(“America – The Best Country at Being Last”) whereas the least selected headline (57 selections)
fell under the passive dissonance reduction category (“Kim Kardashian reveals she had fertility
issues”). For a breakdown of the total number of headline selections by category, please see Table 2.

Demographic Variables

Party Identification. Participants were asked to self-report their political party identification as either Democrat (42.3%, \( n = 102 \)), Republican (32%, \( n = 77 \)), or Other (25.7%, \( n = 62 \)). For analyses, two dummy-coded variables representing Democrat – Other and Republican – Other were employed. Controlling for participants’ party identification was important given the important role political ideology has been shown to play in individuals’ processing of political satire (e.g., LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009), and given the strong association self-identified Republicans exhibited with the pre- (zero-order \( r = .225, p < .001 \)) and post-exposure measures of core American Exceptionalism (zero-order \( r = .166, p < .01 \)). The Democrat – Other measure was included to safeguard against any additional influence created by participants’ political affiliation.

Sex. Participants were asked to indicate their sex (57.6% female, 42.4% male). For analyses, males were coded high. The researcher controlled for sex given that past research indicates men consume more political media than women (Knobloch-Westerwick & Alter, 2007; Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2008; Verba, Burns, & Schlozman, 1997). This measure was also marginally correlated with the pre-exposure measure of core American Exceptionalism (zero-order \( r = .114, p = .076 \)) and significantly correlated with the post-exposure core American Exceptional measure (zero-order \( r = .151, p < .05 \)).

Affinity for Political Humor (AFPH). Affinity for Political Humor is a recently explicated measure designed to tap a specific individual-difference regarding the consumption of political entertainment media (see Hmielowski, Holbert, & Lee, 2011). Personal agreement for each of the measure’s 11 items was assessed using 7-point scales ranging from 1 (strongly
disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with the higher end of the scale indicating a greater affinity for political humor. The resulting index was reliable (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .919, M = 4.54; SD = 1.14$). Given this construct’s ability to positively predict exposure to televised political satire (see Hill, Tchernev, & Holbert, 2012), controlling for its influence helped to ensure that any observed effects occurred as a result of this study’s manipulation.

Moreover, AFPH was marginally correlated with the pre-exposure measure of core American Exceptionalism (zero-order $r = .121, p = .060$) and significantly correlated with the second factor of the post-exposure measure of core American Exceptionalism (zero-order $r = .207, p < .01$), suggesting the measure not only predicts exposure to political TV satire, but also influences the conclusions individuals draw from viewing; in this case, those with a predilection to consume televised political satire may be subsequently inclined to possess a more inclusive understanding of the United States relative to the rest of the world. Therefore, given its potential influence on the variables of interest to this study, AFPH was controlled during analyses.

**Manipulation Check**

**Enjoyment.** To make sure there was no difference between participants’ levels of enjoyment between the five conditions, a single item measuring enjoyment was utilized (i.e., “How much enjoyment did you feel while watching the clip?”). Specific details regarding this measure will be offered at the outset of Chapter 3.

Participants’ previous exposure to the clip, as well as their level of familiarity with the video clip, were also measured. 77% ($n = 187$) of respondents indicated no previous exposure to the videos. Of the remaining 23% ($n = 56$) of respondents, 50% ($n = 28$) indicated their familiarity with the clip was minimal.
Table 3. Frequency of Narrative Headline Selection by Headline Category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headline Category</th>
<th>Total Number of Selections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passive Dissonance Reduction</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Dissonance Reduction</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissonance Enhancement</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analytical Procedures

For all hypotheses that predict differences among message conditions (juvenalian, horatian, and control) separate analyses will be run for The Newsroom (N = 145; juvenalian = 49; horatian = 46) and Chappelle’s Show (N = 148, juvenalian = 51; horatian = 47), respectively. For all other hypotheses, analyses will be run using all participants (N = 243).

In order to assess the influence of satire (horatian or juvenalian) on cognitive dissonance (H1a), one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) will be conducted for each study. The ANOVAs will be followed by Games-Howell post hoc comparisons to determine if participants exposed to juvenalian satire experience higher levels of cognitive dissonance in comparison to participants exposed to horatian satire (H1b). The Games-Howell method is considered a robust test for pairwise comparisons because it does not assume equal sample sizes and equal variances across groups (Jaccard, Becker, & Wood, 1984; Hayes, 2005).

For hypotheses 2a and 2b, a series of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analyses will be run in SPSS Version 20 for each condition in each study. Dummy-coded partisan identification (Democrat – Other; Republican – Other), AFPH, and sex will be included as block 1 control variables, while pre-stimulus core American Exceptionalism will be inserted in block 2. Cognitive dissonance will be the outcome variable. The regression weights for each condition will then be compared using Fisher’s z test (Cohen & Cohen, 1983), which divides the difference
between the unstandardized beta weights being compared by the square root of the sum of the squared standard errors associated with the respective unstandardized beta weights (see p. 111 for equation). This equation allows for the comparison of beta coefficients obtained from independent samples and will be used to assess whether there is any statistically significant difference in the predicted relationship across experimental condition. A z-score less than 1.96 will indicate no differences across conditions, suggesting pre-exposure core American exceptionalism does not moderate the relationship between condition and cognitive dissonance (see Holbert, 2005b and Holbert & Benoit, 2009 for use of the same equation).

To assess H3, an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis will be run. Dummy-coded partisan identification, AFPH, and sex will again be included as block 1 control variables, pre-stimulus core American Exceptionalism will be entered in block 2, while cognitive dissonance will be inserted in block 3. The outcome variable for this analysis will be the selection of narrative headlines reflecting active dissonance reduction strategies.

To assess hypotheses 4a and 4b, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) will be conducted for each study. The ANOVAs will be followed by Games-Howell post hoc comparisons to determine if participants exposed to juvenalian satire selected more narratives that reflected active dissonance reduction strategies compared to those exposed to horatian satire.

For H5, an OLS regression analysis will be run. Dummy-coded partisan identification, AFPH, and sex will be included as block 1 control variables, while pre-stimulus core American Exceptionalism will be entered in block 2. The outcome variable will be selection of active dissonance reduction headlines.

In order to test H6, an OLS regression will be employed in which the same covariates (partisan identification, AFPH, and sex) will be inserted in block 1; core American exceptionalism (pre-stimulus) will be inserted in block 2; cognitive dissonance will be included in
block 3; and each narrative headline category will be entered in block 4. The outcome variable will be the post-stimulus measure of core American Exceptionalism.

Finally, to assess the degree to which exposure to satire (horatian or juvenalian) influences participants’ level of identification with the American exceptionalism master narrative (H7a and H7b), separate repeated measures ANOVAs will be conducted, with participants’ pre- and post-stimulus exposure measures of core American exceptionalism as the within-subjects variable and condition the between-subjects variable.

Post-Hoc Statistical Power Assessment

A statistical power analysis was performed for this study using the software package, GPower (see Erdfelder, Faul, & Buchner, 1996). In accordance with Cohen (1977, see chapter 8), GPower uses the effect size of $f$ when assessing power in a One-Way ANOVA. The alpha level for this analysis was pre-established at .05, and the sample size for the Study 1 (i.e., Newsroom) is 145. GPower, also in accordance with Cohen, suggests the following $f$ values for small, moderate, and large effects, respectively: .10, .25, and .40. These $f$ values translate to the following $\eta^2$ values, the most commonly reported effect size statistic in the communication sciences: .01, .06, and .14, respectively (see Cohen, 1977, p. 283, table 8.2.2). The number of groups in the Newsroom study is reflective of the three stimuli conditions. The following results were obtained for this power analysis: $f$ = .10, power = .17; $f$ = .25, power = .76; $f$ = .40, power = in excess of .99. Adequate power is deemed to exist at .80 or higher. As a result, the Newsroom study retains weak statistical power to detect a small effect, approaches adequacy for moderate effect detection, and retains more than adequate power for large effects.

The same power analysis was undertaken for a basic zero-order correlation given the use of regression-based analyses and also the assessment of two independent Pearson's correlations.
given the use of Fisher's z-score comparisons for specific hypotheses. The same alpha level ($\alpha = .05$) was used for both of these power assessments. The zero-order correlation assessment used a sample size of 50 given that several of the regression analyses are condition specific, and the two independent correlation assessments worked with a figure of 50 subjects in each sample. As per Cohen, the following was used for small, moderate, and large effects, respectively, for the zero-order correlations: $r = .10, r = .30, r = .50$ (two-tailed tests assessed). The following results were obtained for this power analysis: $r = .10$, power = .11; $r = .30$, power = .59; $r = .50$, power = .98.

As for the independent-samples power assessment (small, moderate and large effects (q) of .10, .30, and .50, respectively), the following results were obtained from the post-hoc power analysis (two-tailed tests assessed): $q = .10$, power = .08; $q = .30$, power = .31; $q = .50$, power = .68.

These assessments reveal weak power for small effects, like the ANOVA assessment, weak power for moderate effects as well (especially for the assessment of the Z-score comparisons), and decent power for large zero-order correlations (but still weak power for the detection of even large effects for the z-score comparisons).
Chapter 3: Results

Manipulation Check

Participants’ reactions to the five edited conditions were consistent in terms of enjoyment. Ratings of enjoyment, assessed on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (none) to 4 (a lot) \[M = 2.72, SD = 1.01\], did not differ significantly across the Newsroom Horatian \((M = 2.83, SD = .973)\), Newsroom Juvenalian \((M = 2.67, SD = 1.05)\), Chappelle Horatian \((M = 2.51, SD = 1.08)\), Chappelle Juvenalian \((M = 2.75, SD = 1.09)\), or Control \((M = 2.86, SD = .857)\) conditions, \([F(4, 238) = .897, p = .466]\). Thus, it appears that the edited programs did not differ in terms of their overall ability to entertain, with each condition falling close to the overall mean. Given that this study focuses on a comparison of perceptions of entertainment-based forms of political expression (i.e., satire), retaining consistent evaluations of the entertainment value of each condition was important. The fact that the conditions were consistent in terms of enjoyment suggests that any observed effects that arise cannot be attributed to differences in the entertainment quality of the video clips.

Hypotheses

Hypotheses 1a/1b

Hypothesis 1a posited that participants exposed to satire (horatian or juvenalian) would experience higher levels of cognitive dissonance compared to participants exposed to a control
message. Hypothesis 1b further suggested participants exposed to juvenalian satire would experience greater cognitive dissonance than participants exposed to horatian satire. As mentioned earlier, analyses were run separately for participants in The Newsroom and Chappelle’s Show studies.

The Newsroom. In an ANOVA with cognitive dissonance as the dependent variable and condition as the independent variable, results revealed a significant main effect of condition, \[ F(2, 142) = 6.012, p < .01 \]. Post hoc Games-Howell comparison revealed a significant difference between the amount of dissonance generated by the juvenalian condition (\( M = 2.36, SD = 1.05 \)) in comparison to the control condition (\( M = 1.73, SD = .78 \)), and between the horatian condition (\( M = 2.22, SD = 1.04 \)) and the control condition (\( M = 1.73, SD = .78 \)). However, there was no difference in the amount of cognitive dissonance generated by the juvenalian condition in comparison to the horatian condition. Thus, H1a was supported, but H1b was rejected.

Chappelle’s Show. In an ANOVA with cognitive dissonance as the dependent variable and condition as the independent variable, results again revealed a main effect of condition, \[ F(2, 145) = 5.029, p < .01 \]. Post hoc Games-Howell comparison revealed a significant difference between the amount of dissonance generated by the juvenalian condition (\( M = 2.35, SD = 1.16 \)) in comparison to the control condition (\( M = 1.73, SD = .78 \)), but no significant differences were found between the horatian (\( M = 2.06, SD = .96 \)) and control conditions or the juvenalian and horatian conditions, respectively. Thus, Hypothesis 1a was partially supported, but H1b was again rejected.

Overall, it is important to emphasize that three out of the four satiric conditions across both studies generated a significant amount of cognitive dissonance among participants, lending support to the notion that satire, as a counter narrative, has the ability to destabilize perception and thereby engender a sense of psychological discomfort. It is also important to note, however,
that overall levels of dissonance were not overly high (i.e., hovering between 1.7 and 2.5 on a 1 to 5 scale). Nevertheless, the dissonance associated with the consumption of satire was greater than that for the pure entertainment control for three of the four comparisons undertaken.

Hypotheses 2a/2b

Hypothesis 2a suggested that participants expressing a greater identification with American exceptionalism would experience higher levels of cognitive dissonance when exposed to satire compared to a control message, while hypothesis 2b further asserted that exposure to juvenalian satire would produce greater dissonance than exposure to horatian satire.

The Newsroom. For participants in the juvenalian condition, OLS regression results revealed core American exceptionalism was a significant predictor of cognitive dissonance, unstandardized \( B = .317 (SE = .147), p = .037 \) (see Table 4).

Table 4. OLS Regression Results: Predicting Cognitive Dissonance (Newsroom Juvenalian)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variables</th>
<th>( B ) (Standardized)</th>
<th>( SE )</th>
<th>( t )</th>
<th>( p )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Block 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFPH</td>
<td>.059 (.065)</td>
<td>.133</td>
<td>.444</td>
<td>.659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>.127 (.059)</td>
<td>.389</td>
<td>.327</td>
<td>.745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>-.006 (-.003)</td>
<td>.425</td>
<td>-.014</td>
<td>.989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>-.126 (-.060)</td>
<td>.320</td>
<td>-.395</td>
<td>.695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core American Exceptionalism</td>
<td>.317 (.329)</td>
<td>.147</td>
<td>2.149</td>
<td>.037</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. AFPH = Affinity for political humor.

For participants in the horatian condition, results revealed no significant predictors (see Table 5), and for participants in the control condition (see Table 6), results revealed AFPH [unstandardized \( B = -.215 (SE = .101), p = .040 \)] and Partisan Identification (Democrat – Other) [unstandardized \( B = .609 (SE = .258), p = .023 \)] were significant predictors of cognitive dissonance, while core
American exceptionalism was a marginally significant predictor, [unstandardized $B = .173$ ($SE = .094$), $p = .073$].

Table 5. *OLS Regression Results: Predicting Cognitive Dissonance (Newsroom Horatian)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variables</th>
<th>$B$ (Standardized)</th>
<th>$SE$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Block 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFPH</td>
<td>-.107 (-.128)</td>
<td>.130</td>
<td>-.817</td>
<td>.418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>-.481 (-.231)</td>
<td>.384</td>
<td>-1.253</td>
<td>.217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>-.307 (-.131)</td>
<td>.436</td>
<td>-.703</td>
<td>.486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>-.339 (-.162)</td>
<td>.331</td>
<td>-1.024</td>
<td>.312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Block 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core American Exceptionalism</td>
<td>.097 (.140)</td>
<td>.112</td>
<td>.871</td>
<td>.389</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To test the hypothesized moderating effect of core American exceptionalism on cognitive dissonance, three separate equations were computed using Cohen and Cohen’s (1983) $z$-score test. Once again, a $z$-score less than 1.96 indicates a non-significant interaction across conditions. All three of the resulting $z$-scores failed to reach significance (Juvenalian – Horatian, $z = 1.19$; Juvenalian – Control, $z = .83$; Horatian – control, $z = .52$). In short, the significant direct effect of satire condition on cognitive dissonance (H1a) cannot be attributed in any way to participants’ pre-exposure measures of core American exceptionalism. With none of the resulting $z$-scores approaching significance, the results indicate that pre-exposure core American exceptionalism did not moderate the relationship between condition and cognitive dissonance, thereby suggesting the rejection of both hypothesis 2a and 2b.
Table 6. *OLS Regression Results: Predicting Cognitive Dissonance (Control)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variables</th>
<th>B (Standardized)</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Block 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFPH</td>
<td>-.215 (-.329)</td>
<td>.101</td>
<td>-2.118</td>
<td>.040</td>
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<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>.609 (.394)</td>
<td>.258</td>
<td>2.364</td>
<td>.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>.308 (.183)</td>
<td>.295</td>
<td>1.045</td>
<td>.302</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>.268 (.172)</td>
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<td>1.277</td>
<td>.208</td>
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<td>Block 2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core American Exceptionalism</td>
<td>.173 (.286)</td>
<td>.094</td>
<td>1.838</td>
<td>.073</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chappelle’s Show. For participants in the juvenalian condition, OLS regression results revealed no significant predictors of cognitive dissonance (see Table 7), although partisan identification (Democrat – Other) was a marginally significant predictor [unstandardized \( B = .743 \ (SE = .418), \ p = .082 \)].

Table 7. *OLS Regression Results: Predicting Cognitive Dissonance (Chappelle Juvenalian)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variables</th>
<th>B (Standardized)</th>
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<tr>
<td>AFPH</td>
<td>-.177 (-.152)</td>
<td>.170</td>
<td>-1.045</td>
<td>.302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>743 (.319)</td>
<td>.418</td>
<td>1.777</td>
<td>.082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>.601 (.252)</td>
<td>.462</td>
<td>1.301</td>
<td>.200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>-.385 (-.168)</td>
<td>.354</td>
<td>-1.088</td>
<td>.283</td>
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<tr>
<td>Block 2</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core American Exceptionalism</td>
<td>.083 (.111)</td>
<td>.116</td>
<td>.716</td>
<td>.478</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For participants in the horatian condition, results revealed no significant predictors of cognitive dissonance (see Table 8). Because each study utilized the same control condition for comparison, results for participants in the control remained the same as those above (see Table 6), with AFPH [unstandardized \( B = -.215 \ (SE = .101), \ p = .040 \)] and Partisan Identification (Democrat – Other) [unstandardized \( B = .609 \ (SE = .258), \ p = .023 \)] significant predictors of cognitive dissonance.
and core American exceptionalism a marginally significant predictor, [unstandardized $B = .173$ ($SE = .094$), $p = .073$].

To test the hypothesized moderating effect of core American exceptionalism on cognitive dissonance, three separate equations were computed using Cohen and Cohen’s (1983) $z$-score test. Once again, however, all three of the resulting $z$-scores failed to reach significance (Juvenalian – Horatian, $z = .86$, Juvenalian – Control, $z = .60$; Horatian – Control, $z = 1.33$). In short, the significant direct effect of condition on cognitive dissonance (H1a) cannot be attributed in any way to participants’ pre-exposure measures of core American exceptionalism. With none of the resulting $z$-scores approaching significance, the results indicate that pre-exposure core American exceptionalism did not moderate the relationship between condition and cognitive dissonance, thereby suggesting the rejection of both hypothesis 2a and 2b.

Table 8. OLS Regression Results: Predicting Cognitive Dissonance (Chappelle Horatian)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variables</th>
<th>$B$ (standardized)</th>
<th>$SE$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
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<tbody>
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<td><strong>Block 1</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>AFPH</td>
<td>-.074 (-.086)</td>
<td>.135</td>
<td>-.548</td>
<td>.587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>.082 (.043)</td>
<td>.416</td>
<td>.196</td>
<td>.942</td>
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<td>Republican</td>
<td>.228 (.115)</td>
<td>.436</td>
<td>.522</td>
<td>.604</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>.022 (.012)</td>
<td>.306</td>
<td>.073</td>
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<td><strong>Block 2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Core American Exceptionalism</td>
<td>-.031 (-.041)</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>-.255</td>
<td>.800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hypothesis 3**

H3 stated that participants reporting stronger feelings of cognitive dissonance would select more narrative headlines reflecting active dissonance reduction strategies. Results from an OLS regression predicting the selection of active dissonance reduction headlines suggests a significant, positive relationship, unstandardized $B = .165$ ($SE = .076$), $p < .05$ (see Table 9). Thus, H3 was supported.
Table 9. Effect of Cognitive Dissonance on the Selection of Active Dissonance Reduction Headlines.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td><strong>Block 1</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFPH</td>
<td>.142</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>2.128</td>
<td>.034</td>
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<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.193</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>-.074</td>
<td>.211</td>
<td>-.351</td>
<td>.726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>-.219</td>
<td>.158</td>
<td>-1.385</td>
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<td><strong>Block 2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Core American Exceptionalism</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>.060</td>
<td>1.427</td>
<td>.155</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Block 3</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Dissonance</td>
<td>.165</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>2.171</td>
<td>.031</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypotheses 4a/4b

H4a predicted participants exposed to satire (horatian or juvenalian) would be more likely to select narrative headlines that reflected active dissonance reduction strategies, while hypothesis 4b further suggested that participants exposed to juvenalian satire would select more narrative headlines that reflected active dissonance reduction strategies than participants exposed to horatian satire.

The Newsroom. In an ANOVA with active dissonance reduction headlines as the dependent variable and satire condition as the independent variable, results revealed a main effect of condition, \( F(2, 142) = 3.805, p < .05 \), on headline selection. Post hoc Games-Howell comparison revealed a significant difference between the number of active dissonance reduction headlines selected by the horatian condition \( (M = 1.78, SD = 1.19) \) in comparison to the control condition \( (M = 1.14, SD = 1.09) \). However, there was no difference in the number of active dissonance reduction headlines selected by the juvenalian condition \( (M = 1.57, SD = 1.22) \) in
comparison to either the horatian or control conditions, respectively. Thus, H4a was supported, but H4b was not.

Additional post hoc analyses of the influence of condition on narrative headline selection revealed a main effect of condition, \[ F(2, 142) = 4.377, p < .05 \], on the selection of passive dissonance reduction headlines. Games-Howell comparison revealed a significant difference between the number of passive dissonance reduction headlines selected by the horatian condition \( (M = .913, SD = 1.19) \) in comparison to the control condition \( (M = 1.66, SD = 1.24) \). Again, however, there was no difference in the number of passive dissonance reduction headlines selected by the juvenalian condition \( (M = 1.18, SD = 1.33) \) in comparison to either the horatian or control conditions, respectively. Furthermore, analysis of the effect of condition on the selection of dissonance enhancement headlines indicated no main effect, \[ F(2, 142) = 1.334, p = .267 \], nor any differences across conditions in the selection of dissonance enhancement headlines.

After assessing the impact of condition on narrative headline selection, the researcher further determined whether there was a significant difference between the headline category means for each condition (see Figure 2). Using paired sample t-tests within each condition for each study, results suggested a significant difference between selection of passive dissonance reduction headlines and dissonance enhancement headlines for participants in the juvenalian condition, \[ t(48) = 1.972, p = .05 \]. For participants in the horatian condition, a significant difference appeared for both the selection of passive dissonance reduction headlines in comparison to dissonance enhancement headlines, \[ t(45) = 2.106, p < .05 \], as well as between the selection of active and passive dissonance reduction headlines, \[ t(45) = 3.196, p < .01 \].
Figure 2. Narrative Headline Selection for *The Newsroom*.

In sum, the only significant main effect of condition on narrative headline selection was driven by participants in the horatian condition, who selected more active and fewer passive dissonance reduction headlines in comparison to participants in the control condition. Subsequent analysis of the headline means, however, also indicated participants in the juvenalian condition selected more passive dissonance reduction headlines than dissonance enhancement headlines. Moreover, participants in the horatian condition selected more passive dissonance
reduction headlines than dissonance enhancement headlines, and perhaps most interestingly, also
selected more active dissonance reduction headlines than passive dissonance reduction headlines.

_Chappelle’s Show._ In an ANOVA with active dissonance reduction headlines as the
dependent variable and satire condition as the independent variable, results revealed no main
effect of condition, \([F(2, 145) = 1.995, p = .140]\). Post hoc Games-Howell comparison revealed
no significant differences between the number of active dissonance reduction headlines selected
across the horatian \((M = 1.51, SD = 1.18)\), juvenalian \((M = 1.57, SD = 1.22)\), or control \((M = 1.14,\nSD = 1.09)\) conditions, respectively. Thus, neither H4a nor H4b was supported.

Additional post hoc analyses of the influence of condition on narrative headline selection
revealed a main effect of condition, \([F(2, 145) = 3.804, p < .05]\), on the selection of passive
dissonance reduction headlines. Games-Howell comparison revealed a significant difference
between the number of passive dissonance reduction headlines selected by the horatian condition
\((M = .979, SD = 1.09)\) in comparison to the control condition \((M = 1.66, SD = 1.24)\). Again,
however, there was no difference in the number of passive dissonance reduction headlines
selected by the juvenalian condition \((M = 1.51, SD = 1.45)\) in comparison to either the horatian or
control conditions, respectively. Furthermore, analysis of the effect of condition on the selection
of dissonance enhancement headlines suggested a marginal effect, \([F(2, 142) = 2.424, p = .09]\).
Games-Howell comparison revealed a marginal difference between the number of dissonance
enhancement headlines selected by the horatian condition \((M = 1.91, SD = 1.18)\) in comparison to
the control condition \((M = 1.36, SD = 1.26)\). There were no other differences between conditions
for the selection of dissonance enhancement headlines.

After assessing the impact of condition on narrative headline selection, the researcher
also sought to determine whether there was a significant difference between the headline category
means for each condition (see Figure 3). Using paired sample t-tests, results suggested no
significant differences in headline selection for participants in the juvenalian condition. However, for participants in the horatian condition, there was a marginally significant difference between the selection of active dissonance reduction headlines and dissonance enhancement headlines, \( t(46) = 1.721, p = .09 \), as well as significant differences in the selection of active versus passive dissonance reduction headlines, \( t(46) = 2.280, p < .05 \), and the selection of passive dissonance reduction versus dissonance enhancement headlines, \( t(46) = 4.098, p < .001 \).

**Figure 3.** Narrative Headline Selection for *Chappelle’s Show.*

In short, there were no significant main effects of condition on narrative headline selection. However, post hoc analyses revealed significant differences in the selection of active versus passive dissonance reduction headlines for participants in the horatian condition, with participants
selecting more active than passive dissonance reduction headlines. Of note, this finding parallels the results for *The Newsroom*. Additionally, participants in the horatian condition also selected more passive dissonance reduction headlines than dissonance enhancement headlines and came close to selecting significantly more active dissonance reduction headlines than dissonance enhancement headlines.

**Hypothesis 5**

H5 suggested that participants who self-report higher levels of identification with American exceptionalism will select more narrative headlines reflecting active dissonance reduction strategies. Results suggest that participants’ initial level of identification with core American exceptionalism is a positive, marginally significant predictor of selecting active dissonance reduction headlines, unstandardized $B = .103$ ($SE = .060$), $p = .085$ (see Table 10). Thus, H5 is marginally supported.

**Table 10. Effects of Pre-stimulus Core American Exceptionalism on Narrative Headline Selection.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Block 1</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFPH</td>
<td>.132</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>.050</td>
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<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>.194</td>
<td>.192</td>
<td>.848</td>
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<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.211</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.873</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>-.24</td>
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<td><strong>Block 2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Core American Exceptionalism</td>
<td>.103</td>
<td>.060</td>
<td>1.729</td>
<td>.085</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hypothesis 6**

For H6, which predicted that participants reporting stronger feelings of cognitive dissonance would also report increased levels of identification with American exceptionalism,
results from an OLS regression suggest no significant effect, unstandardized $B = .049$, $SE = .051$, $p = .333$ (see Table 11). Thus, H6 was rejected.

**Table 11. Effect of Cognitive Dissonance on Increases in American Exceptionalism.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>AFPH</td>
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<td>.046</td>
<td>2.101</td>
<td>.037</td>
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<td>Democrat</td>
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<td>-.164</td>
<td>.870</td>
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<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>-.024</td>
<td>.142</td>
<td>-.166</td>
<td>.868</td>
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<td>Sex</td>
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<td>.108</td>
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<td>.099</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core American Exceptionalism</td>
<td>.701</td>
<td>.040</td>
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<td>.0001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cognitive Dissonance</td>
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<td>.051</td>
<td>.971</td>
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<td>Active Dissonance Reduction Headlines</td>
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<td>Passive Dissonance Reduction Headlines</td>
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<td>.046</td>
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<td>Dissonance Enhancement Headlines</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>.957</td>
<td>.340</td>
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</table>

**Hypotheses 7a/7b**

Finally, hypothesis 7a posited that exposure to satire (horatian or juvenalian) would increase participants’ identification with American exceptionalism, while hypothesis 7b further argued that participants exposed to juvenalian satire would experience greater identification with American exceptionalism than participants exposed to horatian satire.

**The Newsroom.** In a repeated measures ANOVA with pre – and post – stimuli exposure measures of core American exceptionalism as the within-subjects variable and condition as the between-subjects variable, results revealed a significant main effect of time, $F(1, 144) = 11.083$, $p < .01$, as well as a significant interaction between time and condition, $F(2, 143) = 4.682$, $p < .05$. Post hoc assessment of the interaction means indicated a significant decrease in the means.
for both juvenalian and horatian conditions (see Table 12); however, the difference was greater for the horatian condition. Thus, hypothesis 7a was supported but hypothesis 7b was not.

Chappelle’s Show. In a repeated measures ANOVA with pre – and post – stimuli exposure measures of core American exceptionalism as the within-subjects variable and condition as the between-subjects variable, results revealed no main effect of time, \(F(1, 147) = 1.687, p = .196\], as well as no significant effects for the interaction between time and condition \(F(2, 145) = 1.566, p = .212\]. Post hoc assessment of the interaction means does indicate, however, a decrease in the means for both the juvenalian and horatian conditions (see Table 12). Thus, neither hypothesis 7a nor 7b were supported, but post hoc analysis suggests participants did experience a decrease in their identification with American exceptionalism after exposure to both horatian and juvenalian satire, with participants in the juvenalian condition exhibiting a greater decrease than participants in the horatian condition.

Table 12. Mean Differences in Core American Exceptionalism by Time and Condition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>.185</td>
<td>-.317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenalian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.571</td>
<td>.165</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsroom</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.935</td>
<td>.191</td>
<td>-.435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horatian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.500</td>
<td>.170</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chappelle</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.853</td>
<td>.192</td>
<td>-.216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenalian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.637</td>
<td>.183</td>
<td>-.096</td>
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<td>Chappelle</td>
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<td>.200</td>
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<td>Horatian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.553</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Post-Hoc Analyses

In addition to the post-stimuli measure of core American exceptionalism, participants answered a series of questions from Neuliep and McCroskey’s (1997) United States Ethnocentrism (USE) scale. Four of these items, measured on a 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly
disagree) scale, were selected for their broad representation of the United States relative to the rest of the world. Specifically, the following four items were averaged to construct a scale (“US Receptiveness”; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .687, M = 5.18; SD = .928): “People in the United States could learn a lot from people of other countries”; “Lifestyles in other countries are just as valid as in the United States”; “I enjoy learning about the customs and values of other countries”; and “Although different, most countries have equally valid value systems.” The first three items emerged in the second EFA run for the post-exposure American exceptionalism measure (see p. 84-85). The last item initially loaded on more than one factor in the initial EFA and was thus excluded from the second analysis. However, the item clearly fit the notion of receptiveness touched on in the other three items and was therefore added to the final measure utilized in the post hoc analyses. Once the scale was constructed, a series of analyses were run to determine if (a) exposure to satire influenced participants’ beliefs in US-Receptiveness and if (b) any of the control variables (i.e., AFPH, dummy-coded partisan identification, and sex), cognitive dissonance, or narrative headline selections predicted US-Receptiveness.

To assess whether exposure to satire influenced participants’ beliefs in US-Receptiveness, separate one-way analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) were run for The Newsroom and Chappelle’s Show, respectively. Experimental condition was inserted as the fixed factor, with post-exposure core American exceptionalism as a covariate. Post-exposure core American exceptionalism was significantly correlated ($r = -.195, p < .01)$ with the dependent variable and was therefore included as a covariate in the analyses (Hayes, 2005).

Results for The Newsroom suggest no main effect of condition on beliefs in US-Receptiveness, [$F(2, 143) = .393, p = .675$]. There is, however, a significant effect of post-exposure core American exceptionalism on US-Receptiveness, [$F(1, 144) = 5.494, p < .05$]. Results for Chappelle’s Show follow the same pattern, with no significant main effect of
condition on beliefs in US-Receptiveness, \([F(2, 146) = .586, p = .558]\), but a significant effect of post-exposure core American exceptionalism, \([F(1, 147) = 8.161, p < .01]\), on US-Receptiveness.

To determine whether the control variables, cognitive dissonance, or narrative headline selections predicted US-Receptiveness, an OLS regression was run. Block 1 control variables included AFPH, sex, and dummy-coded partisan identification (Democrat – Other; Republican – Other); pre-exposure core American exceptionalism was inserted in block 2; cognitive dissonance was included in block 3; and all three narrative headline categories were inserted in block 4.

Results indicated a significant, negative relationship with cognitive dissonance, [unstandardized \(B = -.129 (SE = .056), p < .05\)], a significant, positive relationship with the selection of dissonance enhancement headlines, [unstandardized \(B = .196 (SE = .051), p < .001\)], and a significant, positive relationship with AFPH, [unstandardized \(B = .122 (SE = .051), p < .05\)]. Please see Table 7 for a complete assessment of the effect all predictor variables.

**Table 13. Predicting US-Receptiveness.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variables</th>
<th>(B)</th>
<th>(SE)</th>
<th>(t)</th>
<th>(p)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td><strong>Block 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>AFPH</td>
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<td>.016</td>
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The results of the post hoc analyses are significant in several respects. (1) US-Receptiveness initially emerged as a related, yet distinct construct during analyses of the post-
exposure American Exceptionalism measure. Derived from four items taken from Neuliep and McCroskey’s (1997) USE scale, US-Receptiveness is a measure of the degree to which participants are willing to put the U.S. on a more level playing field with other countries. Higher scores reflect a greater willingness to accept American culture as one of many equally valid ways of living and one that can benefit from the experiences and values of others. Importantly, US-Receptiveness was significantly, negatively correlated with post-exposure core American Exceptionalism, lending validity to its distinct character.

(2) The significant, negative relationship between cognitive dissonance and US-Receptiveness highlights the need for greater examination of dissonance relative to the impact of counter narratives, particularly satire. As exposure to satire generated dissonance, individuals sought to distance the U.S. from other countries, reducing their willingness to accept American culture as one of many equally valid ways of living. The concern relative to this relationship is, of course, the chance that satire regarding American exceptionalism not only increases faith in the master narrative but promotes a sense of isolation motivated by negative attitudes and/or behaviors toward others.

(3) Nevertheless, as selection of dissonance enhancement headlines increased, so, too, did US-Receptiveness, suggesting that greater exposure to information discounting the American exceptionalism master narrative promotes interest in learning about the values and customs of other countries. The tentative nature of this finding must be underscored, as participants were merely asked to select headlines of interest to them following exposure to satire. However, the implications of this finding speak to a different path of influence, whereby exposure to satire motivates individuals to select dissonance enhancing narratives that, in turn, promote knowledge that may ultimately increase their receptiveness to other countries and perspectives.
In sum, the post-hoc analyses highlight the need for additional research regarding the mechanisms by which political satire influences individuals’ attitudes, beliefs, and/or behavior(s), as well as greater attention to the wide array of potential outcomes. These findings not only suggest alternative paths of influence, but emphasize the need to examine satire’s influence on related constructs such as patriotism and nationalism, a point that will be focused on in greater detail in Chapter 4.
Chapter 4: Discussion

Consider once again the notion of the *American* century, of being predestined to be an exceptional country with a unique role in the world. Now, consider the swift and stern rebukes President Obama received after stating he believed in American exceptionalism just as the “Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism” (Stephens, 2012, para. 4). The friction generated by these two competing narratives directly relates to this dissertation’s core question: *How will individuals react when exposed to a narrative that directly challenges the master narrative of American exceptionalism?* Results support the basic premise that counter narratives generate dissonance and, perhaps, that such discomfort is inevitable (Kermode as cited in Abbott, 2008). After all, as McAdams (2006) has argued, even though “we are no longer Puritans…their story, for good and for ill, has been absorbed into our own,” (p. 108) and that story is one of an exceptional country filled with exceptional individuals. It is not surprising, then, that exposure to a narrative directly contradicting America’s unique character generated a sense of displeasure; simply put, “man [only] enjoys derision as long as it is not directed at himself” (Feinberg, 1967, p. 6). As a whole, this study’s results thus suggest that satirical messages engender dissonance, which, in turn, influences subsequent exposure to media narratives. Nevertheless, this study’s empirical findings also indicate that individuals are not beholden to the exceptionalism narrative. Rather, satire has the ability to provoke reflection and, under certain conditions, promote interest in learning about the very things the master narrative works to conceal.
Figure 4. Full Theoretical Model.
Among the important contributions this study makes to political entertainment research, perhaps none is greater than the fact that three out of the four satire conditions generated cognitive dissonance within participants (H1a; see Figure 4). This is the first time a mechanism has been offered to explain the influence of satire (horatian and juvenalian) and, therefore, its contribution is not only significant to this study but may also lend clarity to past, and future, research. Specifically, Holbert et al. (2011) not only found that different types of satire (horatian and juvenalian) produce divergent effects depending on the ability of the audience member, but their results suggested juvenalian satire worked more like a traditional rhetorical argument than its horatian counterpart. Perhaps, given this dissertation’s findings, the juvenalian condition generated dissonance among their participants, which, in turn, accounts for its differential impact in their study. Future research should continue to investigate the role cognitive dissonance might play in processes involving political entertainment media, particularly political satire.

Moreover, it is important to highlight that overall levels of dissonance were relatively low. Thus, although the video clips were able to generate some feelings of discomfort among participants, none of the clips were radically jarring. This finding may speak to a boundary imposed by mainstream television, which, in order to attract the largest and most diverse audience as possible is unlikely to approve, let alone broadcast, content that may offend the majority of viewers. The more acidic content of juvenalian satire, which is more likely to engender dissonance, is therefore more likely to be censored from television (e.g., Richard Pryor only lasted four episodes), while its more acceptable and light-hearted counterpart (i.e., horatian satire), which is less likely to engender significant dissonance, is more likely to be broadcast (e.g., The Flip Wilson Show lasted four seasons). At any rate, future research should consider the limitations placed upon satire by the medium in which it is distributed.
Specifically, if television is, as Gerbner argued, “an agency of the established order” that “serves primarily to extend and maintain rather than alter, threaten, or weaken conventional conceptions, beliefs, and behaviors” (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 175), then the dominant ideology communicated via television’s master narratives is unlikely to be seriously disrupted by exposure to a localized set of counter narratives. The diminished capacity of counter narratives to effect change, a criticism that has often been leveled against political satire (Fienberg, 1967; Schutz, 1977; Hart & Hartelius, 2007; Rosen, 2012), may thus be a contextual limitation of television. If so, one might ask what would happen if this limitation were eliminated; what effect would repeated exposure to counter narratives have on individuals’ understanding of how the world works? With regard to political satire, the answer remains unclear, for although satire is purportedly designed to teach, “its didactic program is continually compromised or even undermined by the competing demands of comedy” (Rosen, 2012, p. 4), suggesting satire’s effectiveness, and all it entails, remains inconclusive.

This dissertation’s results thus speak to the importance of refining the study of satire. Although most extent research has failed to distinguish political humor from other forms, let alone satire (e.g., Gruner, 1965, 1966; Powell, 1978), this study’s results add support to several recent calls for the refinement of political entertainment media messages, especially the differentiation and explication of the elements of satire (e.g., irony, parody; Holbert et al., 2011; Holbert et al., in press). As this study indicates, horatian and juvenalian satire may both contain an “inescapable aggresivity” (Bogel, 2001, p. 50) and may both attempt to challenge “comfortable and received ideas” (Griffin, 1994, p. 160), but the means by which these goals are achieved differ and cause divergent results, as was the case with participants’ selection of narrative headlines (Hypotheses 4a and 4b).
In *The Newsroom* study, for example, there was a significant difference in the number of active and passive dissonance reduction headlines selected by participants in the horatian condition in comparison to the control. Post-hoc analyses further suggested significant differences among the headlines selected within each condition, with participants in the horatian condition selecting more active than passive dissonance reduction headlines, as well as more passive dissonance reduction than dissonance enhancing headlines. Although the results for the *Chappelle’s Show* differed slightly, additional analyses also showed significant differences in the selection of active over passive dissonance reduction headlines, and passive over dissonance enhancing headlines for participants in the horatian condition.

Hence, this dissertation provides empirical support for conceptual differences between horatian and juvenalian satire; however, it is important to emphasize that these differences did not pan out as expected. For example, juvenalian satire did not generate more dissonance than horatian satire (H1b), nor did exposure to juvenalian satire motivate participants to select more narratives that reflected active dissonance reduction strategies (H4b). In fact, the greatest number of differences among headline selections emerged in the horatian conditions, which, again, underscores the need for greater attention, understanding, and fine-tuning in the study of satire. Hopefully, greater attention to these differences will help to explain why exposure to horatian satire sparked both active resistance to the counter narrative in the selection of active dissonance reduction narratives and a desire to escape politics altogether (i.e., the selection of passive dissonance reduction headlines), while exposure to juvenalian satire failed to motivate significant differences in the selection of narrative headlines.

In fact, this study suggests that continuing to focus solely on broad conceptual differences between horatian and juvenalian satire is an inadequate approach moving forward. Although productive thus far, research clearly indicates greater attention needs to be paid to specific
message elements that distinguish satiric forms from one another, particularly in regard to their use of “the typical weapons of satire – irony, paradox, antithesis, parody, colloquialism, anticlimax, topicality, obscenity, violence, vividness, [and] exaggeration (Feinberg, 1967, p. 18). Only by enhancing our understanding of the elements that constitute each form will we be able to pinpoint which of them augment and which erode satire’s utility.

Furthermore, this study suggests that increases in cognitive dissonance motivate participants to select headlines that will actively reduce its effects (H3). Indeed, in accordance with the foundations of cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), results indicated that participants were motivated to eliminate dissonance by turning to narrative headlines designed to reinforce their faith in the master narrative of American exceptionalism. Similarly, Hypothesis 5, which predicted that greater identification with the American exceptionalism master narrative would motivate individuals to select active dissonance reduction headlines, was partially supported, suggesting the more American exceptionalism has become a core aspect of one’s identity, the more narratives he/she is likely to select to bolster that belief.

By positing that cognitive dissonance is a mechanism by which satire influences individuals’ attitude(s), knowledge, and/or belief(s), this study has focused on consistency as an explanatory principle. However, the drive for consistency may be “a disguised version of hedonism” (Allport as cited by Pavitt, 2010, p. 46), which points to the need to consider alternative explanatory principles like the hedonic principle in the study of political entertainment media. Pavitt (2010) identifies several hedonistic-based communication theories (e.g., social learning/cognitive theory – Bandura, 1986; the extended parallel-processing model – Witte, 1992) as well as several understanding-based approaches (e.g., agenda-setting – McCombs & Shaw, 1973; elaboration likelihood model – Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) that would offer a diverse set of
insights into the study of political entertainment media and should therefore be investigated in the future.

With respect to American exceptionalism, this study offers the first empirical assessment of the core American Exceptionalism construct. In doing so, this dissertation not only suggests that American exceptionalism is cultivated through television exposure, but this study’s results indicate that perceptions of American exceptionalism can be influenced by exposure to satire. In fact, across all conditions participants’ scores on the core American Exceptionalism measure declined over time, with significant decreases found in *The Newsroom* study. Although these results should be received with caution, as these changes may not persist over time, the fact that change was detected is noteworthy, particularly given the importance and pervasiveness of the exceptionalism narrative. These results suggest that, at least in the short term, the subtle organizing power of the exceptionalism narrative can be interrupted, allowing individuals to peel back the lenses they’ve been using to view the world. Future research should seek to determine whether or not such reflection persists over time, as well as the degree to which such changes affect other attitudes (e.g., trust in the government).

Furthermore, given the importance of the exceptionalism construct to our understanding of America and American identity, it is imperative that a bridge be built to close the humanistic-social scientific divide in this area of research. While humanistic scholarship has focused on the roots of America’s uniqueness for over one hundred years, empirical assessment of the exceptionalism construct is only entering its infancy. Consequently, the construct needs to be validated across additional studies and differentiated from related constructs, such as patriotism and nationalism, which are also extensions of national identity. Research on these constructs, although marred by inconsistent definitions and terminology (Huddy & Khatib, 2007), has reached some consensus that nationalism is an uncritical acceptance or devotion to the nation
state (Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Schatz & Staub, 1997; Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950), while patriotism connotes a more rational identification with and attachment to one’s country (Schatz, Staub, & Levine, 1999; Schatz & Staub, 1997). Clearly, the degree to which exceptionalism is associated with these constructs is an important step in understanding its unique contribution to national identity. Perhaps like patriotism, which has been further conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct (i.e., blind versus constructive; Staub, 1991, 1997; Schatz, Staub, & Levine, 1999), exceptionalism signifies both critical (i.e., US-Receptiveness) and uncritical (i.e., Core American Exceptionalism) belief in the uniqueness of America. Additional research should seek to clarify these relationships, with future investigations of the core American Exceptionalism construct building on the initial findings presented in this dissertation.

It is important to note, however, that the core American Exceptionalism construct did not moderate the effect of satire on cognitive dissonance, as predicted (H2a/H2b), nor did cognitive dissonance, in turn, influence participants’ identification with American exceptionalism (H6). These results highlight the need for additional research in this area, as several of the predicted paths of influence operated as expected while several others did not. Thus, although it is clear that cognitive dissonance emerged as an important variable in understanding the process of satirical influence, it is equally apparent that its impact requires fine-tuning, particularly in relationship to the core American Exceptionalism construct.

It is also important to draw attention to the fact that this study’s results were derived from a college student sample. Although this type of sample is often a limitation, this demographic is not only the main audience for much political entertainment television content (e.g., Hill, Tchernev, & Holbert, 2012; Hmielowski, Holbert, & Lee, 2011; Young & Tisinger, 2006), but recent research from the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (2011) indicates that
the millennial generation is the least likely to believe in American exceptionalism, with only 32%
responding affirmatively to the following question: Is the United States the greatest country in the
world? Consequently, this sample provided perhaps the most robust test of the hypotheses under
investigation. Future studies, however, should utilize a more representative sample in order to
determine the extent to which the relationships found here hold true.

Looking beyond the specific results of this project, this dissertation also contributes to the
communication discipline in several respects. (1) Extant research on cultivation has
predominantly focused on empirically validating the notion that long-term, repeated exposure to
television cultivates a limited set of beliefs about the real world (first-order effects), as well as a
specific value system (second-order effects). By focusing on empirical precision, however,
attention has been diverted from the theory’s core focus on the power of stories and storytelling,
with the narrative element lost in a sea of variables like the prevalence, rate, and role of violent
acts in television content. In contrast, I have offered a re-conceptualization of cultivation as the
internalization of master narratives, which re-focuses attention on George Gerbner’s assertion
that, “Whatever else they do, stories confirm authority and distribute power in specific ways.

Storytelling fits human reality to the social order” (italics added; Gerbner, 1986, p. 255).

(2) In addition to returning cultivation to its narrative roots, this dissertation has
integrated narrative theory concepts (i.e., master and counter narrative) into mass communication
and political entertainment research. Although such cross-disciplinary connections are often
touted in academia, they remain fairly uncommon in practice. The connections made here may,
therefore, prove useful to scholars inside and outside of communication and will hopefully spur
additional cross-disciplinary collaboration. For example, much of our current understanding of
satire is derived from literary criticism work in English that outlines conceptual differences
between horatian and juvenalian satire. However, much of the satire consumed today is not print-
based and, because storytelling media (see Herman, 2009) are not created equal, different media are likely to generate different audience responses (i.e., humor crafted for television may not work as well in a pure textual form; see Nabi, Moyer-Gusé, & Byrne, 2007). Therefore, communication scholars can offer greater theoretical and empirical insights regarding how the means of expression (e.g., television/mass media) impact the meaning of satire, as well as how audience members perceive political satire (e.g., persuasion; see Holbert, et al., in press), while narrative theorists can, in turn, incorporate this information into their understanding of the impact of storytelling media on the production, distribution, and reception of satire. This is, of course, only one potential course of action. It is up to other scholars to capitalize on the way narrative cuts across disciplinary boundaries to improve our understanding of how stories and storytelling influence how individuals make sense of the world.

(3) This dissertation builds on Hill’s (2013) conceptualization of political satire as counter narrative by empirically assessing the hypothesized effect(s) of exposure to counter narratives. Cognitive dissonance was proposed as the mechanism by which exposure to counter narratives influences subsequent perceptions of a master narrative. This mechanism was analyzed and shown to be empirically significant.

(4) Two types of satire (horatian and juvenalian) were analyzed in relation to two mainstream television programs (The Newsroom and Chappelle’s Show). This is the first empirical assessment of the impact of horatian and juvenalian satire using real-world tele-visual stimuli from popular media outlets, as well as the first empirical assessment of Chappelle’s Show, which was previously dominated by critical-cultural scholarship (e.g., Bell-Jordan, 2007; Cobb, 2007; Haggins, 2007). Although the use of real-world stimuli introduces potential confounds, careful attention to the balance between ecological validity and stimuli precision can mitigate this noise while maintaining a more real-world viewing experience. As the first attempt to utilize
real-world stimuli, this study may not have achieved the ideal balance, but it does serve as a strong starting point for future research and, in terms of Chappelle’s Show, provides the first empirical assessment of viewers’ reactions to the program’s content. Although much has been written about how viewers might have perceived the show or the effect it may have had, the assumptions underlying such arguments have not been formally investigated. This study has begun that process.

(5) This dissertation expanded the study of political entertainment research by examining the core American exceptionalism construct. Given the proliferation of prime-time programs focusing on various aspects of the American narrative, such expansion is a necessary and important step in understanding the full impact of political entertainment on viewers’ perceptions of America and their relationship to it.

Limitations

One set of limitations concerns the stimuli. Although the manipulation check showed that the video clips were perceived quite equally in terms of enjoyment, there was tension in maintaining balance between ecological validity and experimental control that may have introduced some ambiguity in the study. Specifically, subsequent analyses of the degree of humor participants perceived in each clip indicated no differences between the Chappelle’s Show clips and the control condition, \( F(2, 145) = .380, p = .684 \), but a significant difference between The Newsroom clips and the control condition, \( F(2, 142) = 9.648, p < .001 \), with both the juvenalian \( (M = 2.12, SD = .88) \) and horatian conditions \( (M = 2.39, SD = .77) \) perceived as significantly less humorous than the control \( (M = 2.88, SD = .94) \). Thus, although participants found all five clips nearly equally enjoyable, the gratification received from viewing The Newsroom was likely not a result of the clips’ humor.
This difference in the gratifications received from viewing *The Newsroom* may speak to recent scholarship regarding eudaimonia (Oliver, 2008; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Oliver & Raney, 2011). According to Oliver (2008), scholarly inquiry into entertainment has been dominated by the assumption that entertainment selections are driven by individuals’ desire to maintain and maximize pleasure while minimizing pain (i.e., mood management theory; Zillmann, 1988; Zillman & Bryant, 1986). Such hedonistic motivations cannot explain, however, why people also enjoy sad films, or what might otherwise be characterized as tragic forms of entertainment (Oliver, 1993; Zillmann, 1998). To answer this seeming paradox, scholars have broadened their conceptualization of the entertainment experience to include the notion of meaningfulness or insight, also known as eudaimonic gratifications (Oliver, 2008; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Oliver & Raney, 2011). In contrast to the pleasure seeking associated with hedonic concerns, eudaimonic concerns “reflect greater introspection, seeking of insight, and more mixed affective reactions that likely accompany contemplations of life profundities” (Oliver & Raney, 2011, p. 988).

Discussion of eudaimonia thus highlights a second route by which exposure to satire may ultimately influence subsequent knowledge, attitudes, and/or beliefs. Rather than simply altering perception through the generation of a wry smile (Sander, 1971), which points to humor as the motivating factor in the enjoyment of satire, consumption of satire may also generate enjoyment by stimulating introspection. In short, although humor is most often associated with the consumption of satire, it may not be a “necessary component or distinguishing feature of satire” (Gray, Jones, & Thompson, 2009, p. 13). Instead, it is possible that the incongruities satire highlights (and that often produce laughter) also engender the type(s) of affect associated with personal growth and/or self-acceptance (e.g., recognizing human folly is inevitable). In pointing out life’s absurdities, then, satire may also be pointing to what makes life valuable (i.e., eudaimonia; Oliver, 2008) and, in doing so, generating similar levels of enjoyment.
In addition to the difference in perceived humor across studies, the comparison between *The Newsroom* and *Chappelle’s Show* is complicated by the fact that the horatian and juvenalian conditions in the Chappelle study came from two distinct clips as opposed to a single, edited clip, like that used in *The Newsroom*. This difference may account for the inability of the Chappelle horatian condition to provoke a significant amount of dissonance in participants, as its political content may have been too implicit or secondary (Holbert, 2005b) in comparison to the other manipulations. Nevertheless, participants in this condition mirrored their counterparts in *The Newsroom* in selecting significantly more active than passive dissonance reduction headlines, as well as more passive dissonance reduction than dissonance enhancing headlines, so the overall impact of this difference is difficult to determine.

What is clear is that such differences are not ideal and certainly introduce potential confounds in comparing results from *The Newsroom* and *Chappelle’s Show*. Unfortunately, finding a representative example of racial satire in popular media that could be edited to contain both horatian and juvenalian standards within a similar time frame as *The Newsroom* was problematic, to say the least. Frankly, Dave Chappelle’s departure from popular culture has created a void in this area that has yet to be filled and, as previously noted, the format of his show did not readily lend itself to the use of a single clip. Given these constraints, the differences across the clips, although imperfect, remain a positive step forward in the analysis of different satiric forms (e.g., juvenalian versus horatian; traditional versus racial). Future research should attempt to utilize more precise and controlled real-world stimuli in order to allow for greater specificity in the conclusions offered about core theoretical constructs (e.g., juvenalian versus horatian satire).

Moreover, it is important to discuss this study’s findings relative to Dave Chappelle’s concern that, at best, members of his audience were missing his point, and at worst, that his
critique was being “hijacked...to reinforce racial hierarchies and reify racial stereotypes” (Bao, 2009, p. 179). Although this study did not directly assess racism and, therefore, cannot speak directly to Mr. Chappelle’s fear, results do suggest that differences between The Newsroom and Chappelle’s Show were likely driven by message features more than the racial overtones of Chappelle’s Show. More specifically, as noted above, The Newsroom was perceived as significantly less humorous than either Chappelle’s Show or The Big Bang Theory. As an hour long political drama, The Newsroom operates under a different set of boundary conditions than either Chappelle’s Show or The Big Bang Theory, which, despite their notable differences, are both thirty-minute programs designed to generate laughter. To maximize popular consumption, the racial satire in Chappelle’s Show, however insightful and envelope pushing, never reached the same level of acrimony as Will McAvoy’s meltdown in The Newsroom, and it is this difference across format and genre that likely generated differences in this study. Nevertheless, more work needs to be done to clearly parse these differences and to offer a more definitive answer to Chappelle’s concern.

Similarly, additional attention needs to be paid to the satirist as source. Just as The Newsroom and Chappelle’s Show operate under different constraints, so, too, do Will McAvoy (Jeff Daniels) and Dave Chappelle. Because certain types of political humor (e.g., sarcasm, parody) are heavily reliant on the non-verbal cues offered by the satirist, it is important that audience perceptions of the satirist be taken into account when assessing the potential differential effects produced from treatment stimuli. Future work should take note of Cialdini and Sagarin’s assertion (2005) that, “We like people who are similar to us” (p. 156). Although this basic point has been most often associated with interpersonal contexts, it applies equally well to audience members who are consuming political satire. In fact, this point speaks directly to Bao’s (2009) contention that Chappelle’s growing audience contained both those “who found liberation in his
expression and representation of their racial disenfranchisement and dislocation,” (i.e., those similar to Chappelle) as well as “those who enjoy the bounties of racial privilege,” (i.e., those dissimilar) which meant “the effects of this sketch comedy…could be either ‘uplifting’ or tragically destructive” (p. 178-179). Future research exploring the influence of similarity, as well as other more entertainment related variables (e.g., identification, parasocial interaction) will help clarify (a) how viewers’ interpret satire and (b) the impact such interpretations have on related attitudes, knowledge, and/or beliefs.

Finally, some attention should be given to the limitations of the 1996 GSS data. Although analysis of this data supports the theoretical arguments made in this study regarding the cultivation of the American exceptionalism master narrative, the data is certainly not above reproach, particularly given its age. One may even ask if, given the complexity of the 21st century media environment, it is fair to argue that television is capable of exerting significant influence over how individuals view the world. Such concerns are not new, however. Critics have long suggested that diversity of technology is equivalent to diversity of content (Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2009). Yet, as Morgan et al. (2009) assert, “There is little evidence that proliferation of channels has led to any substantially greater diversity of content” (p. 45). Although the availability of channels and devices make the notion of diversity appear real, there has been no fundamental change in the “socio-economic dynamics that drive the production and distribution of programs” (p. 45). In fact, media ownership and control have actually become more concentrated, which means that even though channels have proliferated, “sources of original dramatic programming and perspectives [have] decline[d]” (p. 45)

In short, increasing the variety of media available for use is not tantamount to increasing the diversity of content on those devices and, therefore, in much the same way that television messages reflect a stock set of dominant cultural narratives, so, too, do new media (e.g., the
internet). Therefore, although the 1996 GSS data does not reflect today’s media environment, there is no reason to suggest that its findings are any less applicable. That being said, the challenge moving forward will be determining individuals’ degree of exposure within and across media platforms rather than simply their aggregate exposure to television. Doing so will not only provide a more concise conceptualization of media exposure but will help track the various manifestations of particular master narratives across media.

Future Research

Several suggestions for future research have already been touched on in the discussion thus far. These include: (1) continued assessment of cognitive dissonance as one of the mechanisms by which political satire influences individuals’ attitudes, knowledge, and/or beliefs, (2) formal, empirical investigation of eudaimonic motivations in the study of political satire, an argument that has previously been articulated by Holbert (2011, in press), (3) examination of the influence of satirist as source, (4) further explication and validation of core American Exceptionalism as a construct, and (5) replication of the results advanced in this study via a more diverse population.

Several other research projects are also warranted. One such project concerns an examination of American exceptionalism trends over time. As the Pew (2011) study highlighted, clear differences are emerging among the millennial generation relative to national identity. Not only are millennials the least likely to say the U.S. is the greatest country in the world (32%), they are also less likely to express strong patriotic sentiment. To be fair, a large majority (70%) still express agreement with the following statement: “I am very patriotic.” But, the number is comparatively low (86% - Generation X; 91% - Baby Boomers). Analysis of public opinion poll data over time could lend further insight into the ebbs and flows of the exceptionalism narrative.
Additional attention should be paid, however, to the generational differences outlined above. What, after all, accounts for the decrease in millennials’ attitudes regarding American exceptionalism? Can we expect this trend to continue over time? Is the millennials’ understanding of exceptionalism qualitatively different than older generations and, if so, how has the narrative changed? Answers to these questions should be sought via multiple methods, including but not limited to public opinion surveys, focus groups, and in-depth interviews.

Furthermore, the notion of exceptionalism should be investigated cross-culturally. As has been suggested several times in this dissertation, the United States is not alone in envisioning itself as exceptional. However, it is not clear if exceptionalism is composed of the same constituent elements across cultures. Future research should investigate (a) how other countries view American exceptionalism and (b) how they view their own exceptionalism.

Without a doubt, an additional study directly examining the impact of Chappelle’s Show on racism is necessary. Additional measures focusing on racism (e.g., The Modern Racism Scale; McConahay, 1986) could be incorporated into an experiment that utilizes the same Chappelle’s Show clips used in this study to determine the extent to which such beliefs predict responses to Chappelle, as well as the extent to which exposure to different forms of satire influence post-exposure attitudes. For a study of this kind, it will be important to recruit a diverse sample in order to investigate differences across a range of individual differences, including but not limited to race, class, gender, partisan identification, political ideology, region, and affinity for political humor.

Furthermore, as noted above, the results of this study should be replicated using a more representative sample, and a study doing exactly this is in preparation. Using the same question items and experimental stimuli, a study will be going live online using Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk). MTurk is a web-based platform that allows researchers to recruit and pay
participants to perform tasks (see Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2011; Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). The length and nature of these tasks, which Amazon calls Human Intelligence Tasks or HITs, is up to the requester. In the research context, this means that participants can use the MTurk website (http://www.mturk.com) to find studies they are willing to participate in and then receive their incentive through Amazon. Anybody can sign up to become an MTurk worker, but researchers can place restrictions on who participates. For purposes of comparison, the study in preparation will require participants to be U.S. residents who are at least 18 years old and have a high approval rating (i.e., the percent of previous tasks accomplished that were considered acceptable by other researchers) on MTurk. The latter requirement will reduce the risk that the sample will include fraudulent data. Data collected from MTurk should provide greater power to assess the moderate to small effects that this study was incapable of investigating (see p. 92).

Another prospective study idea that can be offered concerns recent anecdotal evidence regarding a transformation in the television viewing experience; specifically, the rise of what has been labeled binge viewing (Jurgensen, 2012; Chmielewski, 2013). Binge viewing involves the consumption of multiple episodes, even entire seasons, of a program in a single, marathon viewing session. The emergence of this phenomenon, enabled by services like Netflix and Hulu, as well as technology like digital video recorders (DVRs) and on-demand video, may afford individuals with an even greater opportunity to concentrate exposure to a particular narrative form. Examining viewers’ program selection process, as well as their reactions before, during, and after such marathon sessions would provide important insights into this growing trend. Moreover, research should investigate how writers and producers are approaching narrative construction as they create programming that will not only unfold week by week but be guzzled whole.
Clearly, this dissertation barely scratches the surface of the intersection between narrative theory, mass communication, and political entertainment media. Although this project has solidly advanced the literature on cultivation, political entertainment, and the intersection of communication and narrative theory, many more questions were raised than answers provided. Moving forward, it is imperative that answers continue to be sought, for “history shows that world orders, including our own, are transient. They rise and fall” (Kagan, 2012, p. 5). Unfortunately, the bigger they are, the harder they fall, and American influence has grown quite sizeable over the past two hundred years. Although the master narrative of American exceptionalism has proved resilient over that time, nothing lasts forever. In the meantime, political satire might just offer us the best chance at cushioning the fall.
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Appendix A: The Newsroom Horatian Transcript

[Season 1, Episode 1: We Just Decided To]

Original Air Date: June 24, 2012, HBO

Summary: April 20, 2010. Will McAvoy comes back to his national news anchor desk two weeks after a PR disaster at a college forum. He discovers that most of his staff is following his executive producer to another show, and his boss has hired Mackenzie MacHale as the new EP. McAvoy wants nothing to do with her and talks to his agent about getting her fired. While he and MacHale hash things out in his office, the news wire carries a report about a fire at BP's Deep Horizon oil well. McAvoy's old EP dismisses the intelligence that MacHale's assistant is discovering. How will McAvoy handle the opportunity to devote an hour to this news - and can the team put a show together on the fly? [“Plot Summary of The Newsroom – We Just Decided To”, n. d.]

[Scene: On stage at a college forum. Three speakers and one moderator, a professor, seated on stage. Clip fades in from a black screen.]

[Louis and Sharon talking over one another. Will sitting in between, listening, staring out into the crowd.]

Louis: Sharon is a very funny woman, but she has less faith in American individualism than I do…

Sharon: Hang on, I have plenty of faith. When did I ever express any lack of faith.

Louis: And, wait a second, by the way, I didn’t say, I never said, that Barack Obama was a socialist.

Sharon: Seriously?!

Louis: What I said, and what I have always said, is that his policies are.

Sharon: Louis, you are begging me to run a show package Monday that show’s you hundreds of times calling the President a socialist. I’ll read your column on air.
Louis: No, his policies are. The President’s policies are. Look up the definition, my friend, they’re socialist.

Sharon: By your definition, so are Ronald Reagan’s. What do you think taxes are? American individualism can’t build roads. An individual…

Louis: Go on, get it out. Get it all out.

Professor: Sharon.

Sharon: Thank you, since the question was addressed to me. An individual can’t build a school, or assemble an army…

Louis: No one’s talking about disbanding the army. On your radio show…

Sharon: So we can agree the government is good for that?

Louis: Yes, fine. On your show you talk about funding for the arts…

Sharon: Yes. A fire department. Good idea or bad idea? Good idea or bad idea on the fire department…

Louis: You are getting so worked up, Sharon.

Sharon: Or should it be a fire department that only comes to your burning house if you’ve paid your monthly fire bill?

Louis: I’m happy to pay for the fire department. I’m not happy to pay for a painting that I no longer look at; poetry I don’t want to read…

Sharon: Ahhhh! No. No. No. You can’t skip right to the NEA…

Louis: And you can’t skip right to the army because…

[Sounds fades out as the camera focuses on Will, staring into the audience.]

[Sound begins to fade back in.]

Sharon: Zero, zero, zero, zero four percent of the federal budget and is code for New York, Jewish, perverted, and gay.

Louis: Mumbling.

Professor: Will?

Will: Yes, sir.
Professor: Anything to add?

Will: I think we need a more precise definition of perverted.

[Audience laughs.]

Professor: Ok. We’ll go on to the next question. You, sir.

Stephen: My name’s Stephen. I’m a junior, and my question is for Will McAvoy. Do you consider yourself a democrat, republican, or independent?

Will: I consider myself a New York Jets fan, Stephen.

[Audience laughs.]

Professor: Since it's been brought up. You've almost religiously avoided stating or even implying a political allegiance. Is that because, as a news anchor, you feel the integrity of your broadcast would be compromised?

Will: That sounds like a good answer. I'll take it.

[Audience laughs.]

Professor: There was a short piece on Vanity Fair’s web site by Marshall Westbrook. You probably saw it. Where he calls you the Jay Leno of news anchors. Popular because you don’t bother anyone.

Will: Yeah.

Professor: How did you feel about that?

Will: Jealous of the size of Jay’s audience.

[Audience laughs.]

Professor: Are you willing to say, here, tonight, whether you lean left or right?

Will: I’ve voted for candidates run by both major parties.

Professor: Let’s move on to the next question. Go ahead.

Jenny: Hi. My name is Jenny. I’m a sophomore and this is for all three of you. Can you say in one sentence or less why…

[Audience laughs.]

Umm…you know what I mean. Can you say why America is the greatest country in the world?
Sharon: Diversity and opportunity.

Professor: Louis?

Louis: Freedom and freedom…so let’s keep it that way.

Professor: Will?


[Audience laughs. McAvoy looking into the audience. He sees a woman holding a sign that reads, “It’s not.” She then puts up another sign that says, “But it can be.”]

Professor: No, I’m going to hold you to an answer on that. What makes America the greatest country in the world?

Will: Well, Louis and Sharon said it. Diversity and opportunity and freedom and freedom.

Professor: I’m not letting you go back to the airport without answering the question.

Will: Well, our Constitution is a masterpiece. James Madison was a genius. The Declaration of Independence is, for me, the single greatest piece of America writing…

[Professor keeps staring.]

Will: You don’t look satisfied.

Professor: One’s a set of laws and the other’s a declaration of war. I want a human moment from you…what about the people? Why is America…

[McAvoy again looking to the audience. The same woman holds up the “It’s not” sign again.]

Will: It’s not the greatest country in the world, professor. That’s my answer.

[Silence. Audience stunned. Clip edited to move straight to McAvoy’s final speaking sequence.]

Will: It sure used to be. We stood up for what was right. We fought for moral reasons. We passed laws, struck down laws, for moral reasons. We waged wars on poverty, not on poor people. We sacrificed, we cared about our neighbors, we put our money where our mouths were and we never beat our chest. We built great, big things, made ungodly technological advances, explored the universe, cured diseases, and we cultivated the world’s greatest artists AND the world’s greatest economy. We reached for the stars, acted like men. We aspired to intelligence, we didn’t belittle it. It didn’t make us feel inferior. We didn’t identify ourselves by who we voted for in the last election and we didn’t scare so easy. We were able to be all these things and do all these things because we were informed…by great men; men who were revered. First step in solving any problem is recognizing there is one. America is not the greatest country in the world anymore…
[Looking directly at the Professor.]

Will: Enough?

[End clip. Total Clip Time: 6:18]
Appendix B: The Newsroom Juvenalian Transcript

[Season 1, Episode 1: We Just Decided To]

Original Air Date: June 24, 2012, HBO

Summary: April 20, 2010. Will McAvoy comes back to his national news anchor desk two weeks after a PR disaster at a college forum. He discovers that most of his staff is following his executive producer to another show, and his boss has hired Mackenzie MacHale as the new EP. McAvoy wants nothing to do with her and talks to his agent about getting her fired. While he and MacHale hash things out in his office, the news wire carries a report about a fire at BP's Deep Horizon oil well. McAvoy's old EP dismisses the intelligence that MacHale's assistant is discovering. How will McAvoy handle the opportunity to devote an hour to this news - and can the team put a show together on the fly? [“Plot Summary of The Newsroom – We Just Decided To”, n. d.]

[Scene: On stage at a college forum. Three speakers and one moderator, a professor, seated on stage. Clip fades in from a black screen.]

[Louis and Sharon talking over one another. Will sitting in between, listening, staring out into the crowd.]

Louis: Sharon is a very funny woman, but she has less faith in American individualism than I do…

Sharon: Hang on, I have plenty of faith. When did I ever express any lack of faith.

Louis: And, wait a second, by the way, I didn’t say, I never said, that Barack Obama was a socialist.

Sharon: Seriously?!

Louis: What I said, and what I have always said, is that his policies are.

Sharon: Louis, you are begging me to run a show package Monday that show’s you hundreds of times calling the President a socialist. I’ll read your column on air.
Louis: No, his policies are. The President’s policies are. Look up the definition, my friend, they’re socialist.

Sharon: By your definition, so are Ronald Reagan’s. What do you think taxes are? American individualism can’t build roads. An individual…

Louis: Go on, get it out. Get it all out.

Professor: Sharon.

Sharon: Thank you, since the question was addressed to me. An individual can’t build a school, or assemble an army…

Louis: No one’s talking about disbanding the army. On your radio show…

Sharon: So we can agree the government is good for that?

Louis: Yes, fine. On your show you talk about funding for the arts…

Sharon: Yes. A fire department. Good idea or bad idea? Good idea or bad idea on the fire department…

Louis: You are getting so worked up, Sharon.

Sharon: Or should it be a fire department that only comes to your burning house if you’ve paid your monthly fire bill?

Louis: I’m happy to pay for the fire department. I’m not happy to pay for a painting that I no longer look at; poetry I don’t want to read…

Sharon: No. No. No. You can’t skip right to the NEA…

Louis: And you can’t skip right to the army because…

[Sound fades out as the camera focuses on Will, staring into the audience.]

[Sound begins to fade back in.]

Sharon: Zero, zero, zero, zero four percent of the federal budget and is code for New York, Jewish, perverted, and gay.

Louis: Mumbling.

Professor: Will?

Will: Yes, sir.
Professor: Anything to add?

Will: I think we need a more precise definition of perverted.
[Audience laughs.]

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[Audience laughs.]

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Will: That sounds like a good answer. I’ll take it.
[Audience laughs.]

Professor: There was a short piece on Vanity Fair’s web site by Marshall Westbrook. You probably saw it. Where he calls you the Jay Leno of news anchors. Popular because you don’t bother anyone.

Will: Yeah.

Professor: How did you feel about that?

Will: Jealous of the size of Jay’s audience.
[Audience laughs.]

Professor: Are you willing to say, here, tonight, whether you lean left or right?

Will: I’ve voted for candidates run by both major parties.

Professor: Let’s move on to the next question. Go ahead.

Jenny: Hi. My name is Jenny. I’m a sophomore and this is for all three of you. Can you say in one sentence or less why...

[Audience laughs.]

Umm…you know what I mean. Can you say why America is the greatest country in the world?
Sharon: Diversity and opportunity.

Professor: Louis?

Louis: Freedom and freedom…so let’s keep it that way.

Professor: Will?

[Clip edited. McAvoy’s initial quip regarding the New York Jets removed.]

Professor: …I’m going to hold you to an answer on that. What makes America the greatest country in the world?

Will: Well, Louis and Sharon said it. Diversity and opportunity and freedom and freedom.

Professor: I’m not letting you go back to the airport without answering the question.

Will: Well, our Constitution is a masterpiece. James Madison was a genius. The Declaration of Independence is, for me, the single greatest piece of America writing…

[Professor keeps staring.]

Will: You don’t look satisfied.

Professor: One’s a set of laws and the other’s a declaration of war. I want a human moment from you…what about the people? Why is America…

[McAvoy again looking to the audience. The same woman holds up the “It’s not” sign again.]

Will: It’s not the greatest country in the world, professor. That’s my answer.

[Silence. Audience stunned.]

Professor: You’re saying…

Will: Yes.

Professor: Let’s talk about…

Will: Fine.

[Will turns to Sharon.]

Will: Sharon, the NEA is a loser. Yeah, it accounts for a penny out of our paycheck, but he…

[Gestures to Louis.]

Will: …gets to hit you with it anytime he wants. It doesn’t cost money…it costs votes. It costs
airtime and column inches. You know why people don’t like liberals? Cause they lose. If liberals are so fucking smart, how come they lose so God damn always?

Sharon: Hey…

[Will turns to Louis.]

Will: And with a straight face, you’re gonna tell students that America is so star-spangled awesome that we’re the only ones in the world who have freedom? Canada has freedom. Japan has freedom. The UK, France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Australia…Belgium has freedom! So…207 sovereign states in the world…like 180 of ‘em have freedom.

Professor: Alright…

[Will turns to Jenny.]

Will: And, yeah, you…sorority girl. Just in case you wander into a voting booth one day, there are some things you should know. One of ‘em is there’s absolutely no evidence to support the statement that we’re the greatest country in the world. We’re 7th in literacy, 27th in math, 22nd in science, 49th in life expectancy, 178th in infant mortality, 3rd in median household income, number 4 in labor force and number 4 in exports. We lead the world in only three categories: number of incarcerated citizens per capita, number of adults who believe angels are real, and defense spending, where we spend more than the next 26 countries combined, 25 of whom are allies. Now, none of this is the fault of a 20-year-old college student, but you, nonetheless, are, without a doubt, a member of the worst period generation period ever period, so when you ask what makes us the greatest country in the world, I don’t know what the fuck you’re talking about! Yosemite?!

[Audience stunned.]

Will: First step in solving any problem is recognizing there is one. America is not the greatest country in the world anymore…

[Looking at the Professor.]

Will: Enough?

[Clips ends. Total Clip Time 6:27].
Appendix C: Dave Chappelle as Calvin
Appendix D: Chappelle’s Show, Horatian Transcript

[Season 2, Episode 2: Calvin Gets a Job at WacArnolds.]

Original Air Date: January 28, 2004, Comedy Central

Summary: This is a three-part sketch in which Dave Chappelle plays Calvin, an inner city youth who gets a job at WacArnolds (i.e., McDonalds). The sketch is developed as a parody of old McDonalds commercials and asks the question: Is getting a job at a fast food establishment a positive step toward community development, or simply another dead end for poor, working class, black youth, living in the inner city?

[Scene: Dave Chappelle standing on stage, setting the scene for the skit.]

Dave Chappelle: Have you seen this commercial where a guy, Calvin, gets a job at a fast food restaurant. You know that commercial where the guy, Calvin, gets a job at a fast food restaurant and they act like that’s the best thing that can happen to a guy in the ghetto, like the whole neighborhood is excited, like this is gonna end poverty.

[Audience laughs.]

Dave Chappelle: Calvin, you getting’ this job is signpost to a new era in the black community! Thank you fast food restaurant. That’s not what it’s like to work in fast food. People aren’t proud of you. Let’s see what would happen to Calvin if he really had a job in fast food.

[The show cuts to the opening credits of the first part of the skit. The logo for WacArnolds appears before giving way to Calvin, played by Dave Chappelle, walking down the street.]

Miss Harvey: Look at that. Calvin’s got a job. Hey, Calvin!

Man: Way to go, young blood, way to go.

[Scene: Clips of the local community playing as the announcer talks.]

Announcer: WacArnolds is proud to give young African Americans an opportunity to serve their communities, making them feel responsible for the welfare of their own environment.
[Scene: Calvin approaches two women standing on the street.]

Calvin: Afternoon, ladies.

Woman: Eww, nigga, you smell like French fries.  
[Audience laughs.]

[Chorus: WacArnolds. Scene ends as Calvin walks away.]

[Applause.]

[Scene: Dave Chappelle back on stage.]

Dave Chappelle: Well, see, hold up. Now, that just a week into it. Let’s see what happens with Calvin, like, three weeks into it.

[The show cuts to the opening credits of the second part of the skit. The logo for WacArnolds appears before giving way to Calvin having a conversation with his boss.]

Boss: Well, here you go, Calvin.

Calvin: My first check. Thank you, sir. 

[Audience laughing as the camera pans to his boss, a young white male with terrible acne.]

[Scene: Calvin leaves the restaurant. Clips of the local community play as the announcer talks.]

Announcer: WacArnolds is proud to give African Americans an opportunity to serve their communities, making them feel responsible for the welfare of their own environment.

[Scene: Calvin walking down the street again.]

Miss Harvey: Look at that, Calvin’s got a job. Hey, Calvin.

Calvin: Hey, Miss Harvey, got my first paycheck.

Miss Harvey: That’s good, Calvin, very good.

Man: Way to go, young blood. Gettin’ paid, gettin’ paid.

[Scene: Three black males standing together next to a building.]

Young black male 1: Hey, yo, I hear Calvin got a job.

Young black male 2: Man, I’m proud of him.

Young black male 3: Let’s rob that nigga, man.
All three: Yeah, son.

[Chorus: WacArnolds.]

[Applause.]

[Scene: Dave Chappelle back on stage.]

Dave Chappelle: Pretty rough. Why don’t we check in with Calvin two months later?

[The show cuts to the opening credits of the final part of the skit. The logo for WacArnolds appears while the announcer speaks.]

Announcer: WacArnolds is proud to given young African Americans an opportunity to serve their communities, making them feel responsible for the welfare of their own environment.

[Scene: Calvin is again walking down the street, but this time he experiences some rough play with a few neighborhood members before heading down the street on this own.]

Calvin: Hey, where’s Miss Harvey?

Woman: Oh, she died, Calvin…of high cholesterol. Too much WacArnolds.

[Audience laughing.]

Man: Damn, Calvin, you look beat the hell up.

Two women: What’s up, fry guy?

Woman: Punk bitch.

Young black man 1: Corny-ass nigga.

Young black man 2: Yo, Calvin, it’s a thin line between fries and shakes.

[Audience laughing.]

Young black man 2: …the leanest burger in the world, could be the meanest burger in the world, if you cook it. I need to stop smokin’ this shit here, brother.

[Audience laughs.]

[Scene: Calvin arrives at his apartment.]

Calvin: Hey, brought y’all home some dinner from work.
Woman: Calvin, you can’t keep feedin’ me and your baby hamburgers and French fries every goddamn night.

Calvin: What the hell do you expect me to do?

Woman: Nigga, get a real job.

Calvin: Bitch; WacArnolds has given me an opportunity to serve my community and feel responsible for the welfare of my own environment.

Woman: Don’t give me that triflin’ ass bullshit.

Calvin: I’m under a lot of pressure, hey! And whose gloves are these? Huh? Who you fuckin’, OJ? What is this?

[Audience laughs.]

Woman: Well, Calvin, you’re always working.

Calvin: Ohhh, you’re fuckin’ Defari! I seen that African leavin’ here when I was comin’ in.

Woman: Well, shit, if you was here a little bit more.

Calvin: WacArnold’s is tearing this family apart! You know Miss Harvey died…oh…the baby.

[Baby crying.]

Calvin: The baby’s crying. See, and guess what? The rib sandwich is comin’ back on Tuesday. Guess who ain’t gettin’ one?

Woman: I don’t eat pork, anyway.

Calvin: You damn right you don’t eat pork ‘cause I ain’t givin’ you none. I ain’t givin’ you no hamburgers, no apple pies. I ain’t givin’ you shit. Calvin got that all locked down. If you want some WacArnold’s, you gots to go through me. You’re cut off! You’re cut off! I’m Calvin around here. You know about me? Everybody know I got a job.

[Scene cuts again to the WacArnolds logo and ends, along with the clip. Total Clip Time: 4:19]
Appendix E: Chappelle’s Show, Juvenalian Transcript

[Season 2, Episode 2: The Niggar Family Skit.]

Original Air Date: January 28, 2004, Comedy Central

Summary: The Niggar Family sketch asks the question: If we re-contextualize the N word, will it influence our perception of its offensiveness? To answer this question, Chappelle creates a sketch in which a white family has the last name, Niggar, to see how the word plays in this new environment.

[Scene: Dave Chappelle standing on stage, setting the scene for the skit.]

Dave Chappelle: All right, last season we started the series off with a sketch about a black white supremacist. Very controversial…

[Audience applause.]

Dave Chappelle: Yes, very. It sparked this whole controversy about the appropriateness of the N word, the dreaded N word. Then, when I would travel, people would come up to me, white people would come up to me, like, “Man, that sketch you did about them niggers it was hilar…”

[Audience laughing.]

Dave Chappelle: Take it easy. I was jokin’ around. You start to realize these sketches, in the wrong hands, are dangerous. You know, and that N word is a doozie, especially for us black folks. You know, a lot of different feelings come up when they hear that word. But I’m thinking, is it because black people actually identify themselves as N words? No. I don’t know. Maybe. But, what if we just use the word for other people? Would it be so bad? I don’t know…So I made a sketch. It’s about a white family, whose last name happens to be Niggar. That’s all.

[Audience laughing.]

Dave Chappelle: (Chuckles.) Let’s see how offensive the word sounds now.
The show cuts to the opening credits of the skit. White letters appear against a black background, spelling the family’s name. (Reminiscent of Leave it to Beaver). Chorus: N-i-g, g-a-r, It’s the Niggar family. We all know who they are, Frank, Tim, and Emily. Teaching Tim how to ride a bike, These are the Niggars that we like. N-i-g, g-a-r, It’s the Niggar family, It’s the Niggar family. The entire skit is shot in black and white.

[Scene: In the Niggar family’s kitchen. Mrs. Niggar is serving breakfast.]

Mrs. Niggar: Breakfast is served.

Mr. Niggar: Look, hon, my sister just had another baby. Look at this little bundle of joy.

Mrs. Niggar: She’s got those niggar lips.

[Audience laughing.]

Mr. Niggar: I know, so thin.

[Audience laughing.]

Mr. Niggar: Is Tim still asleep?

Mrs. Niggar: I think so.

Mr. Niggar: He sure is one lazy Niggar.

[Audience laughing.]

[Tim enters the kitchen.]

Tim: Good morning, Mom. Morning, Dad.

Mr. Niggar: Morning. You know, Tim, we’re having a dinner party tonight. I trust you’ll be there.

Tim: Oh, I can’t. I have my first big date with Jenny Halstead.

Mr. Niggar: Oh.

[Scene shifts to the Halstead’s home, where Mrs. Halstead is serving Mr. Halstead and Jenny breakfast.]

Mrs. Halstead: Jenny has a date tonight with the Niggar boy from school.

Mr. Halstead: What? Oh, God, no!

Jenny: No, daddy, that’s his name. Timmy Niggar.
[Audience laughs.]

Mr. Halstead: Oh, of course. I like that Niggar. He’s a very good athlete and so well spoken. That family’s going places. I mean, we’re rich. They’re Niggar rich.

[Audience laughing.]

Mrs. Halstead: Oh, Bill.

[Scene shifts back to the Niggar family’s kitchen, where the milkman, Clifton, played by Dave Chappelle, enters.]

Clifton: Mornin’, Niggars!

Mr. Niggar: Why, its Clifton, our colored milkman.

Clifton: And this is my favorite family to deliver milk to. The Niggars!

[Audience laughs.]

Clifton: Mm-mmm! Something sho’ smells good. You Niggars cookin’?

Mrs. Niggar: We sure are. There’s some leftover bacon if you’d like some.

Clifton: Ooh, none for me. I know better than to get between a Niggar and their pork. Might get my fingers bit. (Laughs.) Here you go. I hate to bother you about this. But, uh, well, you didn’t pay your bill last week. And I know how forgetful you Niggars are when it comes to paying bills.

[Audience laughs.]

Mr. Niggar: Golly, Clifton, it slipped my mind. Here you go. Sorry about that.

Clifton: Oh, Niggar, please. Niggar, please! Well, take care, Mr. “N” word. I have a hot date with the wife tonight.

Mr. Niggar: All right, take care.

Clifton: All right. Peace, Niggar.

[Audience laughs.]

[Clifton leaves the scene for a few seconds before re-entering.]
Clifton: Niggars!

[Scene shifts to the outside of a restaurant where the maître d can be heard calling names.]

Man: Stevenson, party of four.

[Scene shifts inside the restaurant.]

Man: Ah, Stevenson, party of four. Table five, please. Bon appétit. Niggar, party of two, Niggar, party of two.

[Clifton and his wife appear.]

Clifton: Looky here, Jack! Just because we’re colored doesn’t mean we came out here to be disrespected, ok?!

[Tim Niggar and his date appear.]

Tim Niggar: Uh, we’re the Niggar family. Oh, hi, Clifton.

Clifton: Oh, well, hello, little Niggar.

[Audience laughs.]

[Clifton gestures to his wife.]

Clifton: These are the Niggars I was telling you about.

Clifton’s wife: Are you the niggar that broke the bottle over Ronnie’s head at the dice game?

Clifton: No, no, not that niggar. The niggar from work. The milk route.

Clifton’s wife: Oh, ok. Have a nice meal.

Clifton: I bet you’ll get the finest table a niggar’s ever got in this restaurant.

[Clifton and his wife laughing.]

Clifton: Ooh, whee!

[Tim and his date laughing.]

Clifton: Oh, Lord, this racism is killing me inside.

[Scene shifts back to the Niggar home.]
[Doorbell rings.]

Mr. Niggar: Well, honey, put your dinner-party face on.

[Opens front door.]

Mr. Niggar: Hello.

Mrs. Niggar: Well, you must be the wetbacks.

Man: It’s Sanchez. And don’t call us wetbacks, niggar. We find it offensive…I’m just kidding.

We are the wetbacks.

[All laughing.]

Mr. Niggar: Wait’ll we tell the Jews.

Mrs. Niggar: Oh, you’re one crazy niggar.

[Scene: Outside of the Niggar home. Chorus: N-i-g-g-a-r, It’s the niggar family. It’s the niggar family.]

[Scene shifts to the Niggar kitchen again. Clifton enters.]

Clifton: Niggars!

[The words The End appear. The entire clip then ends. Total Clip Time: 5:26]
Appendix F: Clifton with the Niggar Family
Appendix G: *The Big Bang Theory* Transcript

*Season 5, Episode 19: The Weekend Vortex*

*Original Air Date: March 8, 2012, CBS*

*Summary:* Sheldon must choose between joining Amy at her aunt's birthday party or playing videogames all weekend with the guys. [From imdb.com]

*Scene: The stairwell*

Raj: Hey, want to spend some time playing the new Star Wars game this weekend?

Leonard: Oh, I don’t know. I kind of promised myself I’d get off the computer, be more physically active. Get some exercise.

Howard: You’re about to walk up three flights of stairs.

Leonard: Good point, I’m in.

Raj: You know what would be great? Let's do it like the old days.

Leonard: You mean, are you talking gaming marathon?

Raj: Yeah. Start Saturday morning, go 48 hours, sleeping bags, junk food.

Howard: Turn off our phones so our moms can’t call.

Leonard: It would be like our World Of Warcraft a few years ago when the neighbors called the cops on us.

Howard: They called the cops because of the smell. They thought we were dead.

Raj: We were badass back in the day.

Leonard: All right, let’s do it.
Howard: 48 hours of Star Wars gaming.
Raj: It’s on like Alderaan.
Leonard: Hey, Sheldon, clear your weekend. Starting Saturday morning, Star Wars marathon
Raj: Woo-hoo!
Leonard: We are going to play the online game.
Sheldon: The online game? Bully!
Amy: Gentlemen, as much as I’m sure Sheldon would enjoy playing intergalactic make-believe, he and I have other plans. We are attending my Aunt Flora’s 93rd birthday party.
Sheldon: Just tell her I can’t come.
Amy: She’ll be disappointed if we don’t show up.
Sheldon: She’s 93. She won’t be disappointed for very long.
Amy: No, hang on. I followed all the protocols set forth by you in the relationship agreement. I made a written record request 72 hours in advance. I checked the tire pressure on the car. I even contacted the Centers For Disease Control to find out what shots they recommend for travel to Orange County. FYI, it’s none.
Sheldon: Amy, the relationship agreement was not designed for either one of us to get our way.
Amy: You use it to get your way.
Sheldon: I use it to get the right way. The fact that the right way is also my way is a happy coincidence.
Amy: You gave me your word. You’re coming with me.
Leonard: We’ll miss you, Sheldon.
Sheldon: Yeah, well, who wants to spend the whole weekend, running around a bunch of pretend
planets battling made up monsters. That’s for babies.

Howard: Yeah, but it’s got light sabers.

Sheldon: Yeah, please, Amy! It’s got light sabers!

[Big Bang Theory Transition Frame, Credit Sequence Edited Out.]

[Scene: The comic book store.]

Sheldon: Hello Stuart.

Stuart: Hey Sheldon. Help you with anything?

Sheldon: Yes. I’m attending a party this weekend, for a 93-year-old woman. Can you recommend a gift?

Stuart: Uh, I don’t know. Could put a tennis ball on the end of Excalibur. Make a pretty badass cane.

Sheldon: Do you supply the tennis ball?

Stuart: No.

Sheldon: Then no. What else?

Stuart: Hmm. Oh, I have this collectors edition Batman utility belt. Maybe she can use it as a wearable pill caddy.

Sheldon: Well, she’d just look silly wearing that without the rest of the costume.

Stuart: I’m sorry Sheldon, that’s it. That’s all I got.

Sheldon: Oh, it’s not your fault. I’ve been to the model train store. I’ve been to Radio Shack. This woman is impossible to shop for.

Leonard: I’d make fun of Sheldon for having girl problems if I wasn’t in shock that Sheldon has girl problems.

Sheldon: No, Leonard, go ahead and mock. Like my daddy always said, Shelly, women aren’t anything but flippin’ pains in the bottom.
Leonard: That’s what your father used to say?

Sheldon: Well, I took out the bad words and the yeehaw, but you get the gist.

Howard: Look, if you don’t want to go to the party, just don’t go. You’re a grown man. Act like one. Tell Amy you want to spend the weekend having a sleepover and playing video games with your friends. Maybe she’ll dig it. Women like a firm hand on the tiller.

Raj: I can never find the tiller. I got a book; it didn’t help.

Sheldon: Yeah, I always thought if I were ever enslaved, it would be by an advanced species from another planet, not some hotsy-totsy from Glendale.

Howard: Now, I downloaded an app that might be helpful in this situation. *(Phone makes whip sound)*

Sheldon: You’re right. I’m smart as a whip. I should be able to figure this out.

*[Total Clip Time: 4:41]*
Appendix H: Demographic Questions

Instructions
This section asks you to provide some basic demographic information.

What is your biological sex? (please select one)
Male ______
Female ______

What is your age? ______ (in years)

[Note: The following statement had response options from (1) “Extremely liberal” to (5) “Extremely conservative.”]

Generally speaking, would you describe your political views as:

[Note: The following statement had response options from (1) “Not at all interested” to (5) “Very Interested.”]

Generally speaking, how INTERESTED are you in what is going on in government and public affairs?

Do you identify yourself as:
Democrat ______
Republican ______
Independent ______
Other __________________ (please list)

[Note: The following statement had response options from (1) “Very weakly” to (5) “Very strongly.”]

How strongly do you identify with your political affiliation?

What race do you consider yourself? (check one)
African-American ______
Asian- or Pacific Islander ______
Native American ______
Non-Hispanic White ______
Spanish or Hispanic Origin ______
Multi-racial or mixed race ______
What country do you most identify with?

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Appendix I: Psychological Scales

Instructions
Political humor comes in many forms. The following set of questions asks about various ways in which you may appreciate political humor.

Affinity for Political Humor
1. I appreciate political humor because it can reveal the weaknesses of our political leaders and institutions.
2. I appreciate political humor because it can make me feel more knowledgeable about politics.
3. I appreciate political humor because it can aid me in reinforcing my political beliefs.
4. I appreciate political humor because it can reveal when our political system is dysfunctional.
5. I appreciate political humor because it can help me express my political opinions.
6. I appreciate political humor because it can reduce the anxiety I feel toward politics.
7. I appreciate political humor because it can help me make better sense of why our political system is dysfunctional.
8. I appreciate political humor because it can help me better cope with awkward situations.
9. I appreciate political humor because it can help me effectively criticize politics and politicians.
10. I appreciate political humor because it allows me to be friendly with people who hold political views that are different from my own.
11. I appreciate political humor because it allows me to form stronger bonds with people who hold similar political views as my own.

Instructions
Below is list of statements that have been made about the United States. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

American Exceptionalism [Pre-Stimulus]
1. I would rather be a citizen of America than of any other country in the world.
2. The world would be a better place if people from other countries were more like Americans.
3. Generally speaking, America is a better country than most other countries.
4. People should support their country even if the country is in the wrong.
5. The United States should be the role model of the world.
6. Other countries should model themselves after the United States.
7. The United States is a poor role model for other countries.
8. Other countries really should not use the United States as a role model.
Instructions
Below are a few words that can describe different types of feelings. For each word, please indicate how much it describes how you are feeling right now. Don't spend much time thinking about each word. Just give a quick, gut-level response.

[Note. For the following scale, responses were labeled from (1) “Clearly does not describe my feelings” to (5) “Clearly describes my feelings.” For formatting purposes, the numerical scale options were deleted.]

Cognitive Dissonance
1. Uncomfortable
2. Uneasy
3. Bothered

Instructions
Listed below are several statements regarding the United States. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement.

Combined American Exceptionalism [Post-Stimulus] and United States Ethnocentrism Scale

1. I would rather be a citizen of America than of any other country in the world.
2. The world would be a better place if people from other countries were more like Americans.
3. Generally speaking, America is a better country than most other countries.
4. People should support their country even if the country is in the wrong.
5. The United States should be the role model of the world.
6. Other countries should model themselves after the United States.
7. The United States is a poor role model for other countries.
8. Other countries really should not use the United States as a role model.
9. People in the United States have just about the best lifestyles of anywhere else.
10. People in the United States could learn a lot from people of other countries.
11. Most people would be happier if they lived like people in the United States.
12. Most other countries are backward in comparison with the United States.
13. Lifestyles in other countries are just as valid as in the United States.
14. Countries are smart to look up to the United States.
15. Life in the United States is much better than most other places.
16. A lot of other countries are primitive compared to the United States.
17. I enjoy learning about the customs and values of other countries.
18. Although different, most countries have equally valid value systems.
19. The United States would be better if it were like other countries.
Appendix J: Narrative Headline Choices

Instructions
Included here is a set of headlines taken from various mainstream news sources. Please take a few moments to select any headlines that are of interest to you at this moment.

___ Collapsing U.S. credibility: Condemning foreign governments for abusive acts while ignoring one's own is easy. But the U.S. leads the way.
___ Is Our Patriotism Moral?
___ What Makes Us Exceptional
___ America: The Best Country in the World at Being Last -- How Can We Change That?
___ America: Love it or be left behind.
___ America the Possible
___ Thomas concedes that ‘we the people’ didn’t include blacks
___ US has moral duty to block Iran nuclear plans
___ Lance Armstrong Confesses to Oprah Winfrey about his doping
___ Golden Globe Winners Shake Up Oscar Predictions
___ Kim Kardashian reveals she had fertility issues
___ Justin Timberlake Brings Sexy Back with New Song