

Fun With Frames:
Exploring Metacommunication and Real Media Frames in South Park's Fake News

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Abstract

The popular cable show *South Park* has steadily entertained audiences since its debut in 1997. Much of the show's humor and entertainment value comes from its satirical treatment of public figures, institutions, and timely trends. One of the institutions often lampooned on the show is that of television news broadcasting. This thesis project seeks to shed light on entertainment media portrayals of television news journalists and television news journalism as a whole by examining the issues covered, how those issues are framed, and how the journalist is used as a figure on the border of entertainment and information in one show. A content analysis was performed on all news broadcasts contained within all 181 episodes of *South Park* through its twelfth season. Results indicate that Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) five generic frames penetrate well into the entertainment realm; a broadcast's "relationship to reality" is framed significantly differently when *Conflict* and *Speculation* frames are employed; news broadcasters are not portrayed as exemplars of the media's "liberal bias;" and that *South Park* has used significantly more reality-based storylines in recent years than in its early years.

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To my wonderful wife and baby boy

To my supportive parents and parents-in-law

And to Dan and Betty Huffman, without whom my graduate career would not have happened

I love and appreciate you all

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I. Statement of Purpose

For some time now, a major paradigm of communication research, or according to D'Angelo (2002) a "dominant theory," has involved the process of media framing and its effects on audiences (Entman, 1993; Gitlin, 1980; Iyengar, 1991; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Originally focused toward political communication and news media, framing research has begun to expand into the entertainment realm (Baym, 2005; Cass, 2008; Holbert, Tschida, Dixon, Cherry, Steuber and Airne, 2005).

While this is a trend that broadens the horizons of framing research, thus far the predominant foci of such works are shows that are inherently political in nature, such as *The West Wing* and *The Daily Show*. *The West Wing* was an NBC offering that ran from 1999-2006 and involved fictionalized depictions of the United States presidency. *The Daily Show* is a wildly popular Comedy Central cable program which has so far enjoyed a 13-year run using current events, politics, and media as its satirical playground (Feldman, 2005). While some studies, including the National Annenberg Election Survey, have shown that entertainment programs such as *The Daily Show* actually increase viewer knowledge and efficacy as much or more than traditional political media (Young, 2004), little credence has been given the informational and even persuasive power (Mills, 2005) of entertainment programs that are not manifestly based entirely in politics, such as another longtime cash cow for Comedy Central, *South Park*.

Mills (2005) writes, "[s]itcom has a broader social and industrial significance than merely that contained within specific episodes or series. It is also used by television to say something about specific channels and their relationship with their audiences" (p. 5). So not only are

sitcoms recognized for their popularity, but it is known to academia that the genre is worth studying for its social commentary and ability to impact the social condition.

Metacommunication, like framing, is a politically-based construct. The term has been used to describe media coverage of political events and campaigns, and it is defined as the news media's "self-referential reflections on the nature of the interplay between political public relations and political journalism" (Esser, Reinemann and Fan, 2001, p. 16). The authors proceed to note that "there is no full consensus on the precise concept of metacommunication" (p. 20), which has allowed researchers such as Constantinescu and Tedesco (2007) to take the concept in new directions, such as including it in a new frame classification set. This thesis proposes that the horizons of metacommunication be broadened alongside those of framing theory, to include entertainment media's notions of other media as well.

This project seeks to extend entertainment-based framing literature into the sitcom genre by exploring the use of real media frames in the news broadcasts contained within *South Park*, thus melding the news-based framing literature with that of the entertainment genre. Based on Entman's (1993) definition of framing and its four places in the communication process – *communicator, text, audience, and culture* – one central aim is simply the exploration of whether recognized frame classifications, such as Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) five generic frames and Constantinescu and Tedesco's (2007) macro-frames fit into the study of entertainment framing. Other recognized frame classifications are also used, as are issue-specific frames that emerge from this particular examination. Another aim is to explore *South Park's* role as infotainment, a designation given to shows such as *The Daily Show* and, in a more derogatory sense, more traditional news programs. A final aim in the discussion section is to begin the inquiry into what this program and others like it are cultivating in society.

The choice of *South Park* as the grounds for this exploration is based in several factors, including the success of the show among a very desirable demographic (Albiniak, 2004; Kissell, 2008) and a perceived increase in the material it presents that is based directly upon reality and which seems to indicate a strong opinion – this will be explored further in a research question and discussion later in the project. The entire run of the show – 181 episodes for the purposes of this project – is also very easily accessible online through the official South Park webpage, so this ease of access combined with the show’s continued popularity and the opportunity to take framing research in a new direction serve as justifications for pursuing this project.

II. South Park Overview

The animated series *South Park* has been one of cable channel Comedy Central’s biggest draws since the show’s introduction in 1997, still captivating more than 3 million viewers per episode (Kissell, 2008, p. 15). The show follows the lives of a group of foul-mouthed, animationally-challenged 4th-graders as they take on everything from completely fantastic scenarios - sometimes involving “Towelie,” the marijuana-smoking towel, or “Mr. Hankey, the Christmas Poo” – to real-life, up-to-the-minute situations. For example, the once clean-cut Saddam Hussein was captured in real-world Iraq by the actual U.S. military on December 13, 2003 sporting a scruffy beard and unkempt hair. The *South Park* episode entitled “It’s Christmas in Canada,” which aired four days later, featured the new-look Hussein as a character (Parker & Stone, 2003).

This kind of immediate turn-around between real events and non-live broadcasts is, in itself, a new phenomenon that *South Park* has pioneered. It has also fostered a connection

between the cultural environment and the material produced on the show, because shows can deal with the events that are, in some cases, still unfolding when the show is aired.

No topic is off-limits, and the show's sustained success among the coveted 18 to 34 year-old demographic has ensured it will run through at least 2011 (Halbfinger, 2007). This demographic represents the *audience* referred to earlier by Entman (1993), and it is considered to be among the most desirable demographics in television due to numbers and buying power. According to one media trade publication, "*South Park* outperforms even the broadcast networks among young men in its Wednesday 10 p.m. time slot" (Albiniak, 2004, p. 21). As one researcher put it, "One thing's for sure, *South Park* sells" (Johnson-Woods, 2007, p. 59).

South Park History

South Park began innocently enough, as a 1992 student project entitled "Jesus vs. Frosty," for Trey Parker and Matt Stone, then film students at the University of Colorado, Boulder. The animated short featured primitive versions of the four main characters, as well as a battle royale between a monstrous Frosty the Snowman and Santa Claus. When Frosty quickly dispatches Santa, killing several onlooking children in the process, one child prays to Jesus, who then materializes in adult form from a nearby manger scene. Jesus defeats Frosty, and all is right with the world. This short was carried over into an animated Christmas card entitled "The Spirit of Christmas" from Parker and Stone to FOX executive Brian Graden in 1995, in which Jesus and Santa fought for holiday supremacy. Word of the hilarious short spread via the internet, and Parker and Stone became a sought-after commodity (Gournelos, 2009).

These shorts feature many of the clichés *South Park* has used since its mass media inception – the death of "Kenny" followed by the rebuke "You bastard!" from one of the

surviving children; the dialogue between the children, reminiscent of the antagonistic one-upmanship which can be observed within any pre-pubescent group of boys; and the closing remark “I learned something today,” followed by a moral lesson gleaned from the twisted events just prior.

After fielding many offers for the show, Parker and Stone chose to air their program on the fledgling Comedy Central, a cable channel previously known for *Saturday Night Live* reruns, British comedies, and an up-and-coming new satirical program, *The Daily Show*, hosted by Craig Kilborn at the time. The show quickly became the flagship program of the cable channel due to its irreverent humor and daring use of social taboos. Some even billed the show as “why they created the V-chip” (Gournelos, 2009, p. 145).

The main characters of the show are four young boys who generally begin most episodes waiting for the bus in their perpetually-snowy little mountain town. Stan Marsh is generally considered the primary protagonist, as he and his family – including their first names – are based on creator Trey Parker, who grew up in nearby Conifer, CO, and his real-life family. Stan is the level-headed emotional leader of the group. However, Stan’s weakness for girls (one in particular makes him vomit with young love every time they talk), his dim-witted but eager father and bully of an older sister give him some built-in weaknesses. Kyle Broflovsky is Stan’s right-hand man, the intelligent Jewish boy whose temper occasionally flares with hilarious results. Predictably, Kyle and his family are based directly on co-creator and Littleton, CO, native Matt Stone and his family, first names and all. Responsible for most of Kyle’s troubles is Eric Cartman, the anti-Semitic, ever-scheming fat kid whose deeply-imbedded insecurities lead him to strive constantly for dictatorial power within the group and, occasionally, the world. Finally, Kenny McCormick is the poor kid, whose death in nearly every episode through the first

six seasons may have been a blessing in comparison to life with his alcoholic father, redneck mother and ever-expanding family. Kenny's is the foulest of mouths; his vast knowledge of obscene vocabulary and sexual exploits always available for the other boys but never for the viewer, because his ever-present parka muffles his voice at all times.

Those four provide the foundation for the show, but they would be little without their supporting cast. Leopold "Butters" Stotch has gained favor as a fifth wheel in recent years, his timidity and submissiveness making him a perfect anti-Cartman. Mr. Garrison, the boys' third-grade teacher, represses his homosexuality for years but finally comes out, only to change his mind and decide he is really meant to be a woman. After undergoing the necessary operation to become Ms. Garrison, he changes his mind once again and decides he really is a man. His never-ending struggles with his true sexuality comprise a large part of the gender and sexuality roles that some academics have chosen to study (Gardiner, 2005; Gournelos, 2009).

Ridiculously childish and illiterate Officer Barbrady, huge-headed guidance counselor Mr. Mackey, talk show host Jesus, African-American love guru Chef, handi-capable fellow students Timmy and Jimmy, and the token Black child named, of all things, Token Black, have all played major roles in the dynamic of the show over the years.

The characters comprise an important, but not completely primary, part of the show. The creators of *South Park* shy away from nothing. No topic is sacred, no institution too powerful for Parker and Stone to ridicule. In perhaps the most daring example of their willingness to offend, Parker and Stone created a two-part episode (episodes 1003 and 1004, "Cartoon Wars" parts I and II) which would have depicted the Muslim prophet Muhammad in the aftermath of Dutch newspaper *Jyllands-Posten's* publishing of cartoon versions of the prophet, which sparked an international controversy (BBC, 2006). Though the *South Park* production crew did include

the image as part of the show, Comedy Central stepped in and broadcasted a black screen with the message “Comedy Central has refused to broadcast an image of Mohammed on their network” during the scene (Malkin, 2006). This serves as an example of Parker’s and Stone’s willingness to join hot-button current issues, even against the wishes of their network bosses.

The characters of special note for this study are those faces on the cartoon news on the cartoon televisions in the cartoon living rooms of the cartoon town of South Park, CO. These broadcasters play a relatively minor overt role in the show, but the stereotypical “breaking news” music that precedes their appearances, the urgency in their voices, and their broadcast topics often set the tone for where the action will commence within the show. Whether the news is local or national, the anchor is nearly always named “Tom,” and we know this because every on-the-scene reporter, from a bikini-wearing midget (# 107 “Pinkeye”) to a quadriplegic Swiss man (# 112 “Mecha-Streisand”) to someone named Creamy Goodness (# 208 “Summer Sucks”) generally begins his package with “Thanks, Tom...”

Sometimes dead serious, sometimes completely off-the-wall, the broadcasters who deliver South Park citizens their daily dose of news seem to play off of well-worn broadcasting stereotypes. However, their most important role is giving the show realistic context, sometimes serving as the gateway between that which is currently in our real nightly news and that which the cartoon residents of *South Park* must face. It is in this role that I propose the broadcasters and the institution of television news itself are worthy of study as possible reflections of media in real society.

III. Framing Theory

Defining Framing

Framing is a complex concept that has no single unifying definition (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Scholars have instead formulated their own definitions, many of which share characteristics. What we are left with, then, is a solid core of characteristics shared by many definitions, as well as some aspects that may remain unique to particular researchers' definitions. Though this may be unsettling to some researchers, such as Entman (1993), who called for clarification of the "fractured paradigm," D'Angelo (2002) argues that "knowledge about framing has accumulated because the research program encourages researchers to employ and refine many theories about the framing process under the guidance of distinct paradigmatic perspectives on the relationship between frames and framing effects" (p. 871). Thus, in D'Angelo's view, part of the success of framing comes from its multiparadigmatic nature and the fact that researchers are studying it from many unique angles.

At its most basic, framing essentially involves selection and salience of topics. One often-cited definition which neatly and concisely sums up most of the core points of framing comes from Entman (1993), who defined framing this way:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (Entman, 1993, p. 52, italics in original).

Entman's definition allows frames to serve different purposes, and he also says frames exist in four different parts of the communication process: the *communicator* (journalist) who "make(s) conscious or unconscious framing judgments" (p. 52); the *text* (news story) which may contain certain frames; the *receiver* (audience) whose conclusions after exposure to the story

may or may not reflect the frames presented; and the *culture* in which both the communicator and the receiver live and exchange meaning (Entman, 1993).

These four purposes play into this project because the role of the *communicator* is an easily-overlooked aspect of a show in which there are no live humans on screen. The creators of *South Park* have complete control over their messages, both verbally and visually, so every aspect that the audience encounters is quite intentional. Of course, the *text* is important because it is what comes into contact with the audience, making it the truly interactive part of this media experience. The *audience* is important because it is upon audience members to understand the text as it is presented, and their understanding or lack thereof can then affect the other parts of the framing process. Finally, the *culture* is hugely important because the show employs real-life situations to provide context for their message, as examples will illustrate.

Entman's definition is also important to a content-based framing study because it allows the researcher to view framed content for what it is, as opposed to the reactions it causes. This is important in this content analysis, because this project examines what is manifestly present, i.e. what is being directly presented to the audience. Because of this view, the central focus of this project is the text – all data come directly from this part. Hopefully, as results emerge, these data may lead to a better understanding of exactly what the communicators are attempting to get across to their audience through the use of the text.

Gamson and Modigliani (1987, p. 43) define a frame as “the central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events.” Frames allow the world to be organized, both for the media reporting and the audience consuming the information, but for the most part are “largely unspoken and unacknowledged” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). So frames, in

essence, are difficult to distinctly define, but they are generally understood to be present in communicating texts.

Other research includes that of Pan and Kosicki (1992), who concluded that “frames are negotiated and framing involves interactions between texts, text producers, and audience members operating in the environment of various social influences” (p. 5). In this way, framing involves an *interaction*, which is by definition not a one-way process, between texts, communicators, and the audience, all within a particular cultural situation. This definition is useful because it identifies the give-and-take of the framing process, which helps when establishing media effects upon an audience.

Gamson and Modigliani (1989) also point out that one way to recognize framing is through some of its devices. The authors offer five of them, in the form of metaphors, exemplars (“historical examples from which lessons are drawn”), catchphrases, depictions, and visual images (e.g. icons). These devices “suggest how to think about the issue” (p. 3). This falls directly in line with and extends one step further Bernard Cohen’s statement that “the media are stunningly successful in telling readers what to think *about*” (1963, p. 13), by suggesting that they can also tell readers or viewers how to think about an issue.

Scheufele (1999) also helps provide a guiding definition in the form of a framing process model. Media select topics after the frame-building process, then choose which aspects of the topic to present (make salient) to the public. This step is called frame-setting. These frames then affect the audience’s attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors about the topics presented, which in turn play a part in the frame-building process again (Scheufele, 1999, p. 115). In this way, framing is not so much an occurrence as it is an endless cycle. This is important here because it helps us see the creation of *South Park* as an ongoing interaction between creators and audience. The

creators know what message they would like to put out, and they try to fit it to their audience. The way the audience reacts may then play a part in the material that is exchanged through later shows.

Media Framing Research

Media frames are defined by Gitlin (2003) as ways to organize the world, and they are also defined by Entman (1991) as “attributes of the news themselves” (p. 7). According to de Vreese (2003), one way to differentiate between media frames is to split them into issue-specific frames and generic frames.

Issue-specific frames are applicable only to particular topics or events. In this way, every issue has its own issue-specific frames. For example, Constantinescu and Tedesco (2007) investigated several frames that emerged from Romanian news coverage of the kidnapping of Romanian journalists in 2005. Among the frames specific to the media coverage and reader forum response to the issue were corruption, terrorism, the Romanian President’s handling of the situation, negotiations for the captors’ release, and so on (Constantinescu & Tedesco, 2007).

Generic frames, on the other hand, can be identified across issues and contexts, which has allowed them a certain level of favor among researchers. The most widely-recognized generic frames come from Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). They proposed five generic frames, based upon earlier studies: *Conflict*, *Economic Consequences*, *Human Interest*, *Morality* and *Responsibility*.

The *Conflict* frame emphasizes a disagreement between groups or individuals, and the struggle for dominance is the focus. Previous works that discussed *Conflict* include Patterson (1993) and Cappella and Jamieson (1997). The *Economic Consequences* frame presents an issue

in economic terms, i.e. the way in which an event will affect the economic health of a region, and it is based upon works by Neuman, Just and Crigler (1992) and Graber (1993). Neuman et al. (1992) also played a role in introducing the *Human Interest* frame, which seeks to put a human face or an emotional touch on an issue. It focuses on a specific person or group, and the event or circumstance is often viewed through the lens of that person or group. The *Morality* frame also comes courtesy of Neuman et al (1992), and it presents the issue from an ethical or moral perspective, possibly dictating the proper course of action. Finally, the *Responsibility* frame focuses on the attribution of blame for causing a situation or giving credit for solving a problem. Iyengar (1991) discussed episodic and thematic framing (which will be explained later), and he pointed out that episodic framing by news outlets tended to “encourage...individual-level explanations for social problems” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). This helped lead to the inception of *Responsibility* as a generic frame. These frames have served as a basis for many works since their inception, but the jury remains out on whether these are all-encompassing or if other generic frames should perhaps be added to the mix.

This is perhaps what led Constantinescu and Tedesco (2007) to propose the existence of *macro-frames*, which “are different from the generic frames in that they function as the foundation upon which the generic frames are constructed” (p. 450). In their content analysis of Romanian media and online forum coverage of a major political crisis, the authors proposed three macro-frames: *Cynicism*, *Speculation*, and *Metacommunication*. *Cynicism*, for their purposes, was defined as being “associated with powerlessness or sarcasm/irony” (p. 452). *Speculation* was defined as either “predicting a course of action or providing hypothetical explanations for what happened” (p. 452).

Metacommunication is a construct previously outlined by Esser et al. (2001), who defined it as “the news media’s self-referential reflections on the nature of the interplay between political public relations and political journalism” (p. 16). The concept can take either of two forms: *self-referential* news, which is “the tendency for reporters and media decision makers to turn the spotlight inward and to treat themselves as the subjects of their own political stories” (p. 18), or *process* news, which “reports about the backstage maneuvers of campaign operatives to guide or influence journalists” (p. 19). This idea was assimilated into the macro-frame classification as an over-arching theme which referred to “communication about others’ communication (i.e. other media sources or other individuals)” (Constantinescu & Tedesco, 2007, p. 452), and extended through this study to investigate media outside of political campaigns.

A distinction should be made here to prevent confusion: *Metacommunication* as a macro-frame and metacommunication as a broader journalistic concept as used in this project are slightly different, and the distinction begs clarification. As a macro-frame, *Metacommunication* for the purposes of this study refers to the cartoon journalists’ texts only when they insert themselves into the news stories they cover; the cartoon characters represent Entman’s (1993) communicator and what they say is the text. This would be an internal application of metacommunication. However, from an external view as a basis for this study, metacommunication is a concept that encompasses all of the broadcasts, because the creators of *South Park* become the communicators and the cartoon broadcasters become part of the text. To aid in distinguishing the two, *Metacommunication* as a macro-frame will be capitalized and italicized, while the broadened concept will be referred to normally.

According to Constantinescu and Tedesco, a macro-frame may encompass any one of the five generic frames. For example, the *Cynicism* macro-frame can accommodate the *Responsibility* or *Conflict* generic frames as specific instances of a cynical outlook of media or audience...a journalist [may choose] the

Cynicism macro-frame for a story about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (*Conflict* generic frame). Another journalist may employ the *Metacommunication* macro-frame to depict the human elements of a dramatic child kidnapping case (*Human Interest* generic frame). Finally, another journalist may construct an overall speculative macro-frame as the premise for assigning responsibility in a high-profile corruption case (*Responsibility* generic frame) (p. 450).

Other theorists have studied different ways to classify frames. Instead of judging media frames only by their subjects, these researchers look at *how* those generic or issue-specific frames are presented. Williams and Kaid (2006) proposed that news frames be classified by the amount of information contained within the frames. If the frame is detailed and informative, that frame is considered a *substantive* news frame. A substantive frame would “inform the audience and advance understanding about the facts involved...instead of just merely acknowledging the event” (p. 302). If a frame is “vague and indistinct, providing little to no context or clear information,” then that frame would be considered *ambiguous*. Thus far, given the relative youth of this classification, substantive and ambiguous frames have not received much attention from the framing studies community, but this study will use them to see if these frames produce significant differences between them in their use within *South Park*.

Another dichotomous distinction between news frames separates them into prognostic and diagnostic frames. Snow and Benford (1988) describe diagnostic framing as problem identification and attribution, whereas prognostic frames emphasize resolution or solution to a problem. Prior research has examined prognostic and diagnostic frames in war coverage (Eilders & Luter, 2000) and in election coverage (Landreville, 2006), but these frames have yet to be extended to entertainment media.

The final news frame classification being used here is that of *episodic* and *thematic* frames. Iyengar (1991) suggests that network news frames can be classified this way: episodic frames focus only on specific events and incidents, whereas thematic frames emphasize abstract

ideas and provide broader information. Another way to consider this distinction is that thematic frames will provide a context in which to understand the story, whereas episodic frames leave the topic to be understood without a broader context. As briefly mentioned earlier, these two types of frames tend to have different effects on the audience. Episodic frames tend to put responsibility on specific groups or individuals, whereas thematic frames attribute responsibility to societal and/or political forces.

De Vreese and Boomgaarden (2003) state that “frames have inherent valence by suggesting, for example, positive or negative aspects, solutions, or treatments. Given this valence, news frames can be expected to influence public support for various policy measures” (p. 362). Their study was one of the first to apply valence to political issues, though valence had been a part of health communication for some time already. This thesis will apply the same valence examination to the rhetoric of the fake news broadcaster within entertainment media.

All of the prior framing classifications have pertained to verbal and written framing, taking into account what is said and how it is said. There is another important area of framing in television news especially – visual framing. Messaris and Abraham (2001) studied the visual portrayal of African Americans in the news, concluding that “pictorial framing is worthy of investigation not only because images are capable of conveying un verbalized meanings, but also because awareness of those meanings may be particularly elusive” (p. 225). This visual framing can also be compared to the verbal framing to see if the same messages are really being communicated to the audience, or whether there might be some dissonance between the two. Even as far back as 1980, Gitlin left room for visual framing in his definition of media frames as organizing discourse, concluding the definition with the phrase “whether verbal or visual” (1980, p. 1).

IV. Political Bias

The notion of political bias in the media has garnered plenty of attention in the United States, especially since the advent of cable news broadcasting saw CNN and FOXNews achieve enormous popularity in completely different political directions. This is supported by Watts, Domke, Shah, and Fan's (1999) contention that "poll data reveal that an increasing number of citizens believe there is an ideological bias in news content" (p. 145). With programs such as *The O'Reilly Factor*, FOXNews has been deemed representative of right-wing political values, while CNN has been dubbed by some the "Clinton News Network" because of its "supposed favorable treatment of President Clinton while he was in office" (Weatherly, Petros, Christopherson & Haugen, 2007, p. 91). For the purposes of this project, it makes sense to see exactly how this supposed media bias plays out in the form of the cartoon news broadcasters. It might make sense for the creators of *South Park* to play off the notion of the "liberal media" in order to provide some of the chuckles they need to keep their audience entertained.

Watts et al. (1999) studied that perception of bias over the course of the 1988, 1992, and 1996 elections. This study came on the heels of 1996 Republican Party candidate Bob Dole's direct accusation of news media coverage for his inability to overcome incumbent Bill Clinton's lead in the polls. The researchers sought to explore the factors that led to the rise in the public perception of bias. Their findings suggest that the rise in public perception that news media are liberally biased is "not the result of bias in valence news coverage of the candidates, but, rather, due to increasing news self-coverage that focuses on the general topic of bias in news content" (p. 144). Furthermore, they found that the increased claims of media bias were asserted

“primarily from conservative elites” who viewed the entire industry as biased against them (p. 144).

Weatherly et al. (2007) studied the headlines offered by FOXNews and CNN during the 2004 presidential campaign, and their findings reinforced that the perception of bias exists, though it makes no definitive claims about these networks’ actual biases. Interestingly, even allegedly right-wing FOXNews used headlines that were perceived as slightly left of center (p. 91), but the CNN headlines were, as expected, perceived as even further to the left, indicating what is perceived as a liberal bias.

V. Entertainment Media

Academic Literature on Entertainment Media

One area that still has not garnered much attention from practitioners of this framing paradigm is television sitcom. According to Mills, there could be many causes:

a belief that the sitcom is simple and already understood; the belief that, as a comedic form, it has little to ‘say’ about social concerns and the cultures it entertains; the belief that the examination of more ‘serious’ forms is more pressing; the belief that it’s ‘only sitcom’ (2005, p. 3).

Lack of research on the sitcom genre is a problem that begs researcher attention.

Numerous sources tout the sitcom as being of major importance in society. Morreale writes, “Perhaps more so than any other fictional television genre, sitcoms have provided fodder for major cultural controversies and conversations” (2003, p. xii), going all the way back to a National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) boycott threat of the television version of *Amos ‘n’ Andy* when the show was set to debut in 1951. This phenomenon continued into the 1970’s, which witnessed formerly taboo topics like death, alcoholism and

divorce showing up as storylines in *Mary Tyler Moore* and *All in the Family* (Morreale, 2003, p. 152), and it continues today in shows such as *South Park*.

Similarly, Mills continues, “sitcom has a broader social and industrial significance than merely that contained within specific episodes or series. It is also used by television to say something about specific channels and their relationship with their audiences” (2005, p. 5). So while sitcoms are recognized for their popularity, they are not always deemed worthy of study. Yet at the same time, these statements indicate that it is known to academia that the genre is worth studying for its social commentary and ability to impact the social condition.

It must be clarified, then, that *South Park* is in fact a sitcom, not just a traditional cartoon.

Mintz (1985) defines the sitcom as:

a half-hour series focused on episodes involving recurrent characters within the same premise...the most important feature of sitcom structure is the cyclical nature of the normalcy of the premise undergoing stress or threat of change and becoming restored...This faculty for the ‘happy ending’ is, of course, one of the staples of comedy, according to most comic theory. (1985, pp. 114-115)

While most cartoons prior to 1989’s introduction of *The Simpsons* were considered children’s programs, animated shows like *The Simpsons* and *South Park*, among many others now, represent the sitcom just as accurately as *The Honeymooners*, *I Love Lucy*, or *Seinfeld*. The humor in all these shows is geared toward an adult level of understanding, so in order to be appreciated to the fullest, each must be viewed by someone with at least a near-adult level of reason.

The adult humor and adult-level of reasoning required to understand the show to its fullest has been addressed directly by the show’s creators. Amidst a controversy in Australia over the nature of the show, critics of *South Park* claimed that the show blatantly targets young children. Schools banned its merchandise and urged their students not to watch. One “morals

campaigner,” Fred Nile, ironically referred to *South Park* as “Canadian kiddie porn,” apparently not recognizing the show’s country of origin. *South Park* creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone “deny that the programme was aimed at children and as the programme itself suggests, it is adults, not just the media, who influence children’s attitudes and behaviours” (Quigley, 2000, p. 48).

Framing and Entertainment Media

Framing theory at work in entertainment media is not a completely uncharted territory. The primetime drama *The West Wing*, an NBC show that ran from 1999-2006, is the basis for multiple framing studies because of its depiction of the U.S. Presidency. Holbert, et al. (2005) completed a content analysis to study the framing in *The West Wing*, concluding that the role of President was framed substantially in each of three different roles: chief executive, political candidate, and private citizen. This study was a pioneering endeavor into the world of political communication as seen through the lens of fictional television programming. Holbert et al.’s study, on a more general scale, examined the framing of content in a prime time entertainment show. One justification for this study was that “there is a need to understand the ways in which entertainment-based television content communicates messages about the American political system and those who serve as public officials” (p. 516).

Cass (2008) also studied *The West Wing* by exploring the way the show portrayed the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Cass noted the fact that *The West Wing* “has frequently used ‘real’ storylines that reflect contemporary political discourse to its primary domestic audience” (p. 31). The author questions what kind of portrayals the *The West Wing* makes regarding Arabs and Israelis, and concludes that “although it sometimes portrays Arabs negatively, it is usually well

intentioned and makes genuine, if occasionally clumsy, attempts to portray Arabs in a favourable light” (p. 31). Cass’s (2008) approach and findings apply to this current study because this thesis, in part, examines *South Park*’s use of similar reality-based storylines. While *The West Wing* represents the drama genre and *South Park* is clearly comedy, both often use the realistic understory as a foundation upon which to build their entertainment-based fictional programming.

Another popular show that regularly appears as the topic of study in scholarly journals is *The Daily Show*. Hosted by comedian Jon Stewart, this show is currently enjoying what is so far a 13-year-long run on Comedy Central, the same cable network that airs *South Park*. Though the show makes no attempt at real investigative journalism, its pointed political remarks and thorough, if sarcastic, coverage of current affairs actually make it a credible source of political information for those turned off by the idea of watching C-SPAN or the supposedly biased coverage offered by CNN and FOXNews (Weatherly et al. 2007).

Baym (2005) discusses the “reinvention of political journalism” indicated by the success of *The Daily Show*. He examines the show’s description, coined by Stewart himself, of being “fake news” and concludes that, rather than being “fake news,” the show is actually “alternative journalism” (p. 261). While *South Park* is not necessarily alternative journalism in the same vein, the blurring of the line between real and fake is evident in the show, just like in *The Daily Show*. It seems that in *South Park*, just like in *The Daily Show*, “the silly is interwoven with the serious” (p. 273).

Other studies, such as Feldman (2005), Warner (2007), and Holbert, Lambe, Dudo & Carlton (2007) explore the political communication and evolving notions of journalism exhibited by *The Daily Show*. Works like these are included to further indicate the impact that “other” broadcast media can have on the attitudes of the public.

The same could be said for the way entertainment-based television content communicates messages about other parts of American culture. With media widely referred to as the “fourth estate,” or the “fourth branch of government,” referring to its place within the checks and balances system, the importance of the mass media in this country and many others cannot be overstated. The institution of news broadcasting is one that has changed over time, from a role as the basically unquestioned familiar voice of authority and reason (e.g. Walter Cronkite) to a role as an oft-lampooned, biased source of ridicule (e.g. Dan Rather, Katie Couric). To illustrate this, when Couric recently won a journalism award named for Cronkite, there was quite a sarcastic uproar among many (Kenny, 2009).

There is also the ongoing question of whether the news exists truly to inform, or if it has now taken on more of an entertainment value in our “if it bleeds, it leads” culture (Wicks, 2001, p. 124). This concept, often called “infotainment,” has gained attention in recent years. Also known as soft news, infotainment refers to sensationally-packaged material, often based on personality or celebrity, as opposed to hard news, defined as “coverage of breaking events involving top leaders, major issues, or significant disruptions in the routines of daily life” (Nisbet, 2001). This shift is based on economic performance pressures that lead networks to show less of the hard news and more of what they think viewers want to see, although Nisbet argues that the “continued embrace of soft journalism will ultimately lead to the end of journalism” (2001).

Specifically South Park

Academic literature about *South Park* exists in limited but ever-expanding amounts. Most communication literature regarding the show has concentrated on race roles (Chaney,

2004) and gender/sexuality roles (Gardiner, 2005; Gournelos, 2009). Not much research explores *South Park's* -- or the sitcom genre's -- use of the institution of news media as a reflection of attitudes and opinions toward that institution, although the genre is beginning to be assimilated into the political discussion along with *The Daily Show* and *The Onion* (Gournelos, forthcoming). This is one area that this project seeks to address. By analyzing the show's use of television media in *South Park* (the show within the show), more specifically the use of "real-life" frames within the fictionalized news reports, this thesis aims to tease out some real-world reflections of society's view of news media.

Chaney (2004) examines race roles in not only *South Park*, but also animated shows *Static Shock* and *King of the Hill*, reporting that "*Static Shock* and *King of the Hill* represent white appropriations of styles commonly deemed black" (p. 172). Chaney's highly critical point is that each of the locations within the shows -- "the mall in *Static Shock*, the ethnic geographies of states in *King of the Hill*, and the flattened terrain of Internet visuality in *South Park*" -- serve as a sort of reinforcement of the superiority of "whiteness" because all of these regions are "imagined as constitutive of whiteness" (p. 167). The shows occur in environments comfortable and familiar to whites, and feature depictions of blackness through the lens of whiteness, and Chaney argues that this is inherently negative.

Gardiner (2005) examines the 1999 movie entitled "*South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut*," looking specifically at the masculinity roles played by characters like Satan and Saddam Hussein, who were gay lovers in the film. The film, not only a cartoon but also a musical production, features Hussein as the dominant, oppressive masculine participant in the relationship, while Satan, though physically larger, stronger and the "Dark Lord" himself, is clearly the submissive, weaker partner, which would stereotypically lead him to be classified as

the “feminine” participant in the relationship. Gardiner leaves as many questions as answers, determining that “*South Park* uses some parallel strategies, championing sexual liberation and free speech while reinforcing masculinism and ethnocentrism, centered in the abjected figure of a gay Saddam Hussein” (p. 61). That the show is a contradiction in itself is a theme that is also referenced in more politically-based works (Gournelos, 2009).

More recently, a spate of conference papers and a recently published journal article have re-energized the show’s standing in the academic community. Scott (2007) looks at the show’s views on religiosity, concluding that it reinforces the postmodern religious culture of personal religious worship at the expense of traditional religiosity. Emergent *South Park* expert Gournelos, in the first of what would prove to be several installments of related *South Park* papers and articles, looks at *South Park*’s assimilation of post-9/11 pro-war rhetoric with humor and how that process helps produce a “critical, and perhaps anarchic, sensibility” (2007, *abstract*).

Gournelos continues with the theme of *South Park* as a form of political activism in another work (2009). In this piece, the show’s gender and sexuality roles are again scrutinized and shown as an example of how “*South Park* is evidence of an *allusive* political strategy, in which it continually engages taboos, ‘common sense,’ popular media, current events, and its own history, production and influences in order to highlight and destabilize cultural norms” (2009). An important general remark to recall comes near the end of the piece, in which Gournelos states “*South Park*...cannot be understood within a vacuum. It cannot be understood from a single episode or character, and it most certainly cannot be understood from single scenes or themes, as is the approach taken by most of its critics” (p. 162). This statement represents a direct challenge to Chaney (2004) for his scathing critique of the racism (though that word is not directly

mentioned) implicit in the show. Gournelos points out that Chaney's main example, a scene in which Cartman dresses up in blackface, is too reductive because the scene is not used to reinforce the primacy of whiteness, but rather ridicules Cartman for his insensitivity (p. 166).

Finally, Gournelos contributes one more *South Park*-related piece, though this as-yet-unreleased book chapter focuses more on satirical news outlets *The Daily Show* and *The Onion*. In contrast to the *allusive* political strategy referenced in the previous work, Gournelos shows how *South Park* uses the character of Mr./Ms. Garrison in a *responsive* way – one that “relies primarily on contemporary culture rather than general taboos, popular culture, references, or singular events/policies. In other words, the responsive extends the power of the allusive through a set of active engagements and discursive shifts” (Gournelos, forthcoming, p. 1). In this way, the show can be seen as using a multifaceted approach to its political critiques. In fact, the show is compared to established satirical news outlet *The Onion* in that they share an “unwillingness to be ‘sincere’ in any traditional way” (forthcoming, p. 14), meaning that even in “serious” interview sessions or documentaries about their products, the creators often pull hijinks like staying “in character” and basically refusing to delve deeply into serious topics with any sincerity.

VI. Framing and Entertainment Media Opportunities

Perhaps the most exciting part of authoring this study is that it is one of a small number of projects that has participated in the application of the widely-known and used theory of media framing to a newer subject area in entertainment media. While *The West Wing* and *The Daily Show* are already well covered in academic literature, and *The Daily Show* will likely continue to spawn numerous future studies, they are both based overtly in purely political subject matter.

South Park provides a wonderful opportunity to break from that norm and escape into a program that is still highly political and often quite scathing in its views toward accepted institutions in our American society, yet is not so overtly based in politics as to make them inescapably the foundation of each and every show.

This is also an exciting area because the creators of *South Park* do not shy away from controversy or adversaries. They instead use their show as a tool to expose perceived injustices, contradictions, and outright misuses of the American system and confront anyone who might challenge them. Interestingly, those challenges have been few and far between – partially because much of the controversy generated by the show has been embraced as part of the show’s narratives. In that way, “it is also true that *South Park* opens up spaces for potential challenge in a continual interrogation of its own ideology” (Gournelos, 2009, p. 144). The show is similar to *The Daily Show* in its self-deprecating tendency to place its own neck on the proverbial chopping block of criticism, but it could be argued that this tendency gives both shows that much more credibility.

This study will hopefully serve future researchers as an initial foray into the realm of framing studies of entertainment programs that are independent of overtly political foundations. The argument may still arise that the all-important question “Why?” makes studies like this irrelevant, but with the changing face of media today, viewers are looking ever further for their real-world information. Any program that earns a full 22 minutes (plus commercials) worth of attention in this day and age is likely to affect attitudes and knowledge among its audience. We already know this applies to *The Daily Show* and lends it credence, and it is possible that the same could apply to *South Park* as well.

VII. Research Questions

Once again, Entman's (1993) definition of framing forms the bedrock upon which this research was built. His complete definition states that

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (p. 52, italics in original).

Entman's definition also includes the four parts of the communication process in which framing can occur – *communicator* (broadcaster), *text* (news broadcast), *receiver* (audience), and *culture* (1993). In this project, the communicator and the text are the main units of analysis, while receiver and culture are understood but not particularly central.

From an internal perspective, the communicator is viewed as the cartoon broadcaster, with his broadcast being his text. That is the standpoint from which these broadcasts were analyzed and coded. However, when the results are in and discussion of the broader ramifications for entertainment media occurs, it will then be necessary to also consider the situation from a broader, external perspective – one in which the communicators become the creators of the show, Trey Parker and Matt Stone, and the text becomes not only the broadcasts themselves but also expand to include the cartoon broadcasters and the rest of the episode as well. At this point, the audience and culture come into play in a more manifest way for discussion and for suggestions for future research.

With all of this in mind, the following research questions are presented:

RQ1a: What generic and macro frames are most frequently used in the news broadcasts within *South Park*?

RQ1b: How prevalent are generic/macro frames in the news broadcasts within *South Park*?

RQ2a: What subjects are most often framed within *South Park*?

RQ2b: How are those subjects usually framed within *South Park*?

RQ3a: Are reality-based topics framed any differently than purely fictional topics?

RQ3b: Has the frequency of use of reality-based situations increased over the course of the show?

RQ4: Is there a significant difference between the valences of the news coverage among the five generic frames when they are dominant?

RQ5: Given the existing idea of the existence of a liberal media bias, is the news broadcaster in *South Park* being used as a tool to illustrate or lampoon this phenomenon through the use of politically-slanted language?

RQ6: Is there a difference in the frames used when the broadcaster is being treated seriously as opposed to when he/she is being used absurdly?

VIII. Research Methodology

The area of interest for this study is media content framing as opposed to media framing effects. Consequently, it makes more sense to approach a study using a content analysis as opposed to an experimental setup. While an experimental setup could be used successfully to augment this project, the content analysis format should prove a litmus test to see what is worthy of further study in the entertainment framing realm.

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) and de Vreese (2003) both mention that there are two approaches one can use when identifying news frames – deductive and inductive. The inductive approach involves beginning with a clean slate and seeking to reveal the range of frames that emerge from the sample. There is little structure, though, and this can lead to replicability issues. The deductive approach, conversely, is based upon predetermined sets of frames, such as

Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) five generic frames or Constantinescu and Tedesco's (2007) three macro-frames.

Due to the preceding factors, the deductive approach is generally favored in framing research. Researchers have been warned to avoid what is considered *ad hoc* framing – “By *ad hoc* we mean frames defined specifically for a single study with little or no attention to explicating either their basic characteristics or theoretical context” (McCombs & Ghanem, 2003, p. 79). However, according to Williams and Kaid (2006), “it is acknowledged that scholars may benefit by evaluating both issue specific and generic media frames” (p. 296).

With all of the above in mind, this project combines inductive and deductive tactics. The lion's share of data will focus on the deductive, pre-existing frame classifications. However, it will be necessary to pull out the issue-specific material and examine it as well. Thus, this project is a multifaceted examination of the content of media frames used by cartoon news broadcasters within the show *South Park*.

Sample

The units of analysis for this project are the television news broadcasts that occur within *South Park*. This unit was chosen because it should provide a large sample frame and cover a broad variety of topics throughout the first 12 seasons of the show. In fact, the broadcasts used do not constitute a sample but rather the entire population of news broadcasts within the show. The researcher and an assistant combed through all 181 episodes of the show through the first 12 seasons via the official *South Park* website, www.southparkstudios.com. Though it was a time-consuming process to view every episode of the show, the benefits should prove to outweigh the time expenditure. For one thing, other than the possibility of a very small number of missed

broadcasts due to human error, every single broadcast that has ever aired within *South Park* was found and coded, and the early combing process also led to reduced time pressures later in the study, as coders were able to omit episodes that were known to contain no news broadcasts.

One important consideration for this project is the definition of “news broadcast.” If one were to consider *South Park* to constitute its own internal reality, then the news broadcast would be the local, national, or cable news programs watched by its citizens. Anytime the polished anchor sits behind the desk and reads into the “camera,” anytime a reporter is “on the scene” and gives a report, or anytime the scene is being shown through the news “camera lens” with a voice-over behind it, the situation is considered a news broadcast. Omitted from this study for the purposes of keeping the focus on the practice of pure journalism (at least in its cartoon sense) are shows like *Larry King Live*, *Jerry Springer*, *Dateline*, and public access specials which occasionally appear on the television sets of the cartoon families of *South Park*. Though some of these shows often have journalistic sensibilities, they do not constitute the same essence of what it means to be a “news” program: short, relatively superficial snippets providing coverage of the happenings of the day.

Variables

The content analysis examined the presence or absence of 27 variables for each news broadcast. The first set of variables was used largely for classification and heuristic purposes only: original episode air date, time in (beginning time of the broadcast within the episode), and length of broadcast were all recorded. One of these, original air date, proved very useful in determining the broadcast’s basis in reality, which will be discussed later.

The second set of variables included those that differentiated between news broadcasts and broadcasters. The level of news (local, national), broadcaster(s) featured, and treatment of broadcaster (serious, absurd) were all recorded to detect differences in how the creators of the show were using the institution of news broadcasting to communicate their messages. The next major variable classification included only one variable: broadcast topic. This item was to be answered in the form of a brief, written-out summary of the main subject of the broadcast. After the original coding occurred, these topics were retroactively placed into categories that reflected their common subject areas for the evaluation of issue-specific frames.

The next grouping of variables provided the aforementioned deductive research section: the frame classifications. First, all broadcasts were coded for all existing generic frames (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) and macro frames (Constantinescu & Tedesco, 2007), and then for the single dominant generic frame and single dominant macro frame. The dichotomous frame classifications followed: substantive/ambiguous (Williams & Kaid, 2006), prognostic/diagnostic (Snow & Benford, 1988), and episodic/thematic (Iyengar, 1991). The valence of each broadcast was then coded to round out this section.

The final grouping could be referred to as the “wild card” section, as these items were not related by a common theme, but each one represented a variable that was considered to be exploratory. The first item asked if the “visual framing” matched the verbal framing offered by the broadcaster. The results could then be run alongside items such as broadcaster treatment to determine how realistically or seriously the creators of the show were using the broadcasters. The next item was “relationship to reality,” which again was to be answered “yes” only in the event that the topic of the broadcast was recognizable as directly based on a specific event that had happened and could have been seen on real mainstream media. Usually, due to the creators’

ability to produce *South Park* episodes within days, if not hours, of the events they reference, the basis in reality is fairly direct and easy to discern, if present at all.

However, situations can arise in which it may be difficult to discern between a basis in reality or pure fiction, and it is in these instances that other variables such as “original air date” were of assistance. For example, in episode #408 (“Chef Goes Nanners”), which originally aired July 5, 2000, it may not have been immediately obvious that the in-show controversy over the South Park flag was based on a direct, specific instance of reality without a historical check. The town’s flag featured a black stick figure being hung from a gallows by four white stick figures, and a debate ensued between those who believed the flag was racist and should be changed and those who believed it represented the town’s “heritage” and should be left alone. In fact, an all-too-similar conflict was playing out at that time in South Carolina, where a legal battle (with the same “racism vs. heritage” battle lines) was in progress involving the removal of the Confederate battle flag from the state capitol (Brunner, 2000). Just days before the airing of this episode, the flag was removed from atop the statehouse, but another version was erected near a monument honoring fallen Confederate soldiers. The parallels between the real event and the *South Park* version were far too strong to be mere chance, so the broadcasts that dealt with the racist flag issue were coded as reality-based.

To provide contrast, an example in which a broadcast perhaps straddled the line between realism and pure fiction and was deemed purely fictional comes from episode #216 (“Merry Christmas Charlie Manson”). The kids visit Cartman’s family in Nebraska for the holidays, and while they are there an urgent broadcast interrupts the end of a big football game to break the news that Charles Manson has escaped from a nearby prison. Clearly, that broadcast is based upon the true supposition that the real Charles Manson is incarcerated; however, Manson’s

escape was obviously quite fabricated, not to mention the fact that Manson is in the Corcoran facility in California (nowhere near Nebraska). With “Manson escapes” being the main point of the broadcast, rather than “Manson is in prison,” the determination had to be made to classify the broadcast as not being based in reality as defined in this study.

Finally, political slant was coded to see if the broadcaster was being used in a pundit role for either of the major political orientations: liberal or conservative. It would make sense for the character occasionally to latch on to a political orientation and make his views known, so this variable was checked to see if that happened and, if so, how frequently.

Coding procedures

An online codesheet was set up at www.survey.vt.edu. A second coder was trained on the basic points of the project as well as the variables on the codesheet. That person was then assigned one episode per season from seasons 1-10 and directed to code all broadcasts within that particular episode based entirely upon manifest content and not pre-existing knowledge of the show. The episodes assigned to the coder were chosen randomly from the episodes known to contain at least one broadcast in each season. The total number of news broadcasts cross-coded ended up at 21, which comprised 13.5% percent of the final number of broadcasts (N=155). Intercoder reliability was assessed on the 21 cross-coded news broadcasts and reached an overall agreement of +.94 across all categories, with a range from .86 (18 of 21 agreement for substantive/ambiguous codes) to 1.00 (several categories) using Holsti’s formula of agreement.

After establishing inter-coder reliability, a single coder watched every episode of *South Park* from seasons 1 through 12 that had been pre-determined through the “combing” process to contain at least one news broadcast. The data was organized by assigning each broadcast a Unit

number based upon the episode number and the number of the broadcast within the episode (see codebook, Appendix B). Once coding was complete, all data were checked for completeness and then the data file was imported into the SPSS statistical software program. In order to answer the research questions, basic frequencies, crosstabs, chi-square tests, and Fisher's exact test were performed.

IX. Results

Research Question 1 Results

Research question 1a asked what generic and macro frames are most frequently used in the news broadcasts within the *South Park*. Basic frequency results show that while all of Semetko & Valkenburg's (2000) five generic frames and Tedesco and Constantinescu's (2007) three macro-frames appeared in at least some broadcasts, some were used frequently and others were very rarely used.

As Table 1.1 shows, of the generic frames, *Human Interest* manifested itself in over half of the total broadcasts ($N=155$) over the course of the first 12 seasons of the show, appearing 94 times, or in 60.6% of the broadcasts. *Conflict* and *Responsibility* were also frequently used, with 60 and 59 appearances, respectively, or just over 38% of the total broadcasts each. *Economic Consequences* and *Morality* made very few appearances. *Economic Consequences* showed up in five total broadcasts, or 3.2% of the total, and *Morality* appeared in just seven, or 4.5%.

Of the macro-frames, *Speculation* was the most frequently used, appearing in 55 broadcasts, or 35.5% of the total. *Metacommunication* was also used often, in 46 broadcasts (29.7%). *Cynicism* was a distant third, showing up in only 16 broadcasts, or 10.3% of the total.

As Table 1.2 shows, basic frequencies were also run to determine how often each generic and macro-frame manifested itself as the singular dominant frame in each individual broadcast.

These numbers were proportionally similar to those in Table 1.1.

Human Interest was the dominant generic frame 64 times, or 42.7% of the time that any generic frame was listed as dominant ($N=150$). *Conflict* and *Responsibility* were again close behind with 43 and 42 times, or 28.7% and 28.0% respectively. *Economic Consequences* was never coded as the dominant frame, and *Morality* was dominant only once, for a total of 0.7% of the dominant frames.

Speculation was again the most widely-used macro-frame, with 52 appearances for 54.7% of the total dominant macro-frames used in broadcasts that featured any ($N=95$).

Metacommunication comprised 32.6% of the total dominant macro-frames with 31 total, and *Cynicism* had 12 dominant appearances for 12.6% of the total.

Research question 1b asked how prevalent the generic and macro-frames were in the *South Park* news broadcasts. This was investigated to establish how well these different framing classifications carry over into entertainment media, at least in this particular show. Results show, based on Table 1.1, that generic frames are quite prevalent. When coders were instructed to mark all generic frames that appeared, the frames appeared a total of 225 times, or 1.45 generic frames per broadcast. That number is based on a total of 155 broadcasts, but there were five broadcasts that seemed to display no generic frames, producing a number of exactly 1.5 generic frame found per broadcast that contained any ($N=150$).

Macro-frame results were different. Of the 155 total broadcasts, only 95 contained the presence of a macro-frame, with a total of 117 macro-frame appearances. That produces a figure of 0.75 macro-frames per broadcast, but 1.23 per broadcast that contained any macro-frames.

Still, with 60 broadcasts, or 38.7% of the total of 155, not exhibiting the presence of any macro-frames at all, the prevalence of macro-frames in this particular entertainment situation are not as regular.

Research Question 2 Results

Research question 2a asked what subjects are most often framed in the broadcasts within *South Park*. In order to answer research question 2a, a dominant topic for each broadcast unit was recorded on the codesheet. After analysis, the 16 categories that emerged were collapsed to nine total topic areas: “environment/natural disaster,” “supernatural/science fiction,” “religion,” “breaking news/discovery,” “disease/death,” “war/foreign affairs/terrorism,” “chaos/social unrest,” “law/court/crime,” and “celebrity/pop culture.” Of the 155 total broadcasts, 154 clearly exhibited topics that could be grouped into these areas, giving each topic a minimum of five representative broadcasts. Any situation in which a broadcast contained more than one of these topic areas was coded for the single dominant or main topic.

As shown in Table 2.1, the most frequently framed topic area was “law/court/crime,” (n=38) which occurred in almost a quarter of the total number of broadcasts (24.7%). “chaos/social unrest” appeared 23 times, “celebrity/pop culture” appeared 18 times, and “war/foreign affairs/terrorism” appeared 17 times. “Religion” was the only topic that appeared fewer than 11 times, with a total of five, or only 3.2% of the total.

Research question 2b asked how these subjects were framed. To answer this question, the valence, dominant generic frames, and dominant macro-frames were revealed for each of the nine topic areas. For the most prevalent topic, “law/court/crime,” 28 of the 38 appearances had a negative valence, and only three were positive. “Law/court/crime” was presented predominantly

with *Responsibility* generic frames and *Speculation* macro-frames, as 19 of the 38 “law/court/crime” situations (50%) were dominated by the *Responsibility* generic frame, and *Speculation* was the dominant macro-frame 19 times as well (50%).

The next-most prevalent topic area, “chaos/social unrest,” was framed negatively in 11 of the 23 total instances in which it appeared (47.8%), and *Conflict* appeared as the dominant generic frame 11 of those 23 times (47.8%). *Speculation* and *Metacommunication* were used 7 and 6 times, respectively, but “none of the above” was the most common response, with 9 occurrences.

“Celebrity/pop culture” was framed neutrally 8 of the 18 total times it appeared, with an even distribution of positive and negative valence with 5 each. The dominant generic frame was overwhelmingly *Human Interest*, with 13 of 18 instances registering that frame, and the dominant macro frames were almost even, with 4, 3, and 3 instances of *Cynicism*, *Speculation* and *Metacommunication* respectively.

The “war/foreign affairs/terrorism” frame appeared 17 times, and 8 of them were negatively framed while 10 of those 17 instances were dominated by *Conflict*. *Speculation* was also among the leading dominant macro frames, appearing five times with the “war/foreign affairs/terrorism” frame.

Some interesting information from the lesser-used frames included “environment/natural disaster” being framed negatively 12 of the 14 times it appeared, with 7 instances of *Responsibility*-dominated framing and six instances of *Speculation*. The “breaking news/discovery” topic featured 11 of the 14 appearances being framed positively, with 11 stories dominated by *Human Interest*. Under “disease/death,” only half of the instances were framed negatively. The “supernatural/science fiction” frame featured mostly negative or neutral

coverage, and 5 instances of *Human Interest* dominance. Finally, 3 of the 5 appearances of religion were framed neutrally, with 1 positive and 1 negative; 4 of the 5 were dominated by the *Human Interest* generic frame; and 3 featured the dominance of *Speculation* among macro-frames.

Research Question 3 Results

Research question 3a asked if the portrayal of reality-based topics differs from the portrayal of purely fictional topics. Again, a reality-based situation is defined as an instance where the show has clearly taken material in the form of characters and/or storylines, from a specific situation that has happened or is happening in reality. This is contrasted with situations that are clearly fictitious or situations that are ambiguous enough that they cannot be viewed as definitely coming from a particular situation in reality. For example, episode 104, entitled “Volcano,” involves the boys being trapped on a volcano when it erupts. Though similar situations have likely happened in reality, there were no widely-known instances that occurred, especially any time in the recent past before the episode aired, nor were there any references in the episode that might refer to Mount Saint Helens, Krakatoa, or Pompeii, for example. In contrast, episode 904, entitled “Best Friends Forever,” involved a right-to-die debate over one character who was in a persistent vegetative state, and this episode aired during the period of time in which the real Terry Schiavo right-to-die case dominated the headlines (MSNBC, 2005).

To answer research question 3a, each generic and macro-frame classification was put up against “relationship to reality” in a crosstab examination. Results varied by frame. There was no significant difference between the portrayals of reality-based versus fictional situations in regards to *Economic Consequences*, *Human Interest*, *Morality* or *Responsibility* from the generic

frames, however there was a significant difference in the way *Conflict* frames were used in reality-based versus fictional situations. As shown in Table 3.1, the *Conflict* frame appeared 60 times in all, with 22 of those occurrences being in reality-based situations, which means 36.7% of appearances of this frame occurred in reality-based situations. Reality-based situations only accounted for 16.8% of the total broadcasts that did not include *Conflict* however, so there is a significantly higher occurrence of *Conflict* frames in reality-based situations, $X^2 = 7.81 (1), p = .005$.

Among the macro-frames, there were no significant differences for *Cynicism* or *Metacommunication*, but there was a significant difference within *Speculation*. Much like the *Conflict* frame, *Speculation* appeared significantly more often in broadcasts that were reality-based, at $X^2 = 8.60 (1), p = .003$. Of the 55 broadcasts that contained *Speculation*, 21 (38.2%) were reality-based, in contrast to the 17% of broadcasts that did not contain *Speculation* that were reality-based.

Relationship to reality was also measured against the prognostic/diagnostic and substantive/ambiguous frame designations, but no significant differences resulted.

Research Question 3b asked if the frequency of use of reality-based situations has increased over the course of the show's run. In order to determine the answer, the 12-season run of the show was median-split into two groups, seasons 1-6 and seasons 7-12, to see if there was a difference in the frequency of reality-based situations based simply upon that division. As shown in Table 3.3, though there are more reality-based situations used in seasons 7-12 ($n=23$, 29.9%) than in 1-6 ($n=15$, 19.2%), these results approached but did not reach significance, $p=.123$.

In addition to the median split for episode years, comparison of reality-based portrayals was assessed using September 11, 2001 (9/11) as a measuring point. 9/11 occurred in the middle of season 5, so this set the number of pre-9/11 broadcasts at 52 and post-9/11 broadcasts at 103. Using the Fisher's Exact 1-sided test of significance, this difference is significant, $X^2=3.526$ (1), $p=.044$.

Research Question 4 Results

Research Question 4 asked if there is a significant difference in the valences of the news coverage among the five generic frames when they are dominant. To answer this question, a crosstab examination was performed comparing each of the five generic frames to the valence each broadcast exhibited. A Chi-square test showed that there was a significant difference in the valences exhibited by the broadcasts according to their generic framing, with $X^2 = 30.81$ (6), $p \leq .001$, $N=150$ (five broadcasts showed no clear generic framing).

Conflict frames made up 28.7% of the total generic framing with 43 total, and 53.5% of those *Conflict*-dominated broadcasts showing a negative valence. *Human Interest* accounted for the highest individual number of total broadcasts, with 64, or 42.7% of the total number of broadcasts seen as dominated by any generic frames. 39.1% of these 64 broadcasts were actually framed positively, making *Human Interest* the only generic frame exhibiting more positive valence than negative, which was at 31.2%. In fact, 78.1% of all broadcasts with a positive valence were dominated by *Human Interest*. Only one instance of *Morality*-dominated framing occurred, and it had a negative valence. Finally, 42 *Responsibility*-dominated broadcasts were found, with 76.2% of them being framed negatively. *Conflict* and *Human Interest* also showed a fair amount of neutrality, with 37.2% and 29.7% of their broadcasts, respectively, exhibiting

relative broadcaster neutrality, whereas only 16.7% of *Responsibility*-dominated broadcasts exhibited neutrality.

Overall, just over half of the broadcasts (50.7%) were framed with a negative valence, while 28% were framed neutrally and 21.3% received positive valence, a number which would have been much lower had the high number of *Human Interest*-dominated broadcasts not contained predominantly positive framing.

Research Question 5 Results

Research question 5 asked whether or not the news broadcaster in *South Park* is being used as a tool to illustrate or lampoon this phenomenon through the use of politically-slanted language, based upon the existing idea that most media have a liberal bias. In order to answer this question, one does not need to look beyond simple frequencies to find the answer, perhaps surprisingly, is a resounding “no.” In only eight of the 155 broadcasts does the manifest content include a clearly politically slanted commentary from the broadcaster, and five of those had a conservative slant rather than a liberal bias. Almost 95% of all broadcasts included no manifest political commentary whatsoever.

Research Question 6 Results

Research question 6 asked if there is a difference in the frames used when the broadcaster is being portrayed seriously versus when the broadcaster is being portrayed as an absurd figure. To answer this question, the broadcaster’s portrayal (“serious,” “absurd,” or “both”) was measured against the dominant generic frames and dominant macro frames in each episode. The dominant generic frames produced no significant results. In the case of each dominant generic

frame ($N=150$), the “both” designation appeared more times than either the “serious” or “absurd.” The *Conflict* generic frame exhibited a higher likelihood of the broadcaster being portrayed seriously (39.5%, $n=43$) than any other frames, but this was not enough for these results to reach significance ($p=.164$).

The dominant macro-frames did produce significant results, although with a much smaller sample ($N=95$). The *Cynicism* macro-frame was the only one in which the “both” treatment was outnumbered by any other, with “absurd” outnumbering it six to five ($n=12$). The most striking finding was that the *Speculation* macro-frame ($n=52$) was much more likely to be used in a situation in which the broadcaster’s treatment was listed as “serious.” A total of 34.6% of *Speculation*-dominated broadcasts, 18 in all, were listed as “serious,” which is well above the “serious” percentage in each other macro-frame, $X^2= 10.093 (4)$, $p=.039$.

X. Discussion

Research Question 1

Research question 1a asked what generic and macro-frames are most frequently used in the news broadcasts within *South Park*. Basic frequency tests showed that *Human Interest* was by far the most widely-used generic frame, with *Conflict* and *Responsibility* right behind. *Economic Consequences* was used very sparingly and never once appeared as the dominant generic frame in any of the news broadcasts within *South Park*.

Morality was listed as dominant only once. In that particular instance, in episode 208 (“Summer Sucks”), the townspeople celebrated Independence Day by lighting a giant ash snake firework after all other fireworks had been banned. The world-record sized snake soon overtook the town as it grew and grew, prompting a short broadcast snippet the anchor closed out by

saying “Police are advising all citizens to stay indoors, not breathe the ashen air, and not ever light any giant snakes in the near future” (Parker & Stone, 1998). It is safe to say that other directives for how to act were issued by news broadcasters in other situations, often in the form of “passing the message along” from police (episode #216 [twice]) or the government (episode #1210), but in all other situations *Morality* failed to register as the dominant overall generic frame in the specific situation, having been overshadowed by another frame, usually *Conflict*.

These results indicated the strong presence of three of the generic frames in entertainment media portrayals of television news broadcasting. *Conflict*, *Human Interest*, and *Responsibility* were used very frequently. *Economic Consequences* and *Morality* were less prevalent. I think taking the comic nature of the show into account helps these results make sense; in other words, find the frames most likely to be used in “real” news, and it is likely that the use of those frames will be embellished while the use of lesser frames will be diminished or completely ignored. One study that sheds light on generic frame usage in the media is Igartua, Cheng & Muniz, (2005). The researchers analyzed the use of generic frames in several Central and South American countries, and they found that in every country but one (Brazil), the two least-used generic frames were *Economic Consequences* and *Morality* (p. 368). Similarly, Constantinescu and Tedesco (2007) found that *Morality* appeared in 8.6% of their sample Romanian news stories (p. 455). They did find a higher prevalence of “Consequences” than this study, but that was operationalized to encompass more than our *Economic Consequences* frame. At any rate, this shows that media studies in several countries indicate a similar generic frame usage ratio as this study. Based on these numbers Semetko and Valkenburg’s (2000) five generic frames seem to have penetrated quite well into the entertainment genre, with three in particular used quite frequently.

The macro-frames were not as prevalent as generic frames in this study, as they only clearly manifested themselves in 95 of 155 broadcasts (61.3%), versus 150 of 155 for generic frames (96.8%). While this is only one study putting the very new macro-frames to the test and in an unconventional way at that, this does seem to indicate that perhaps the jury is still out on macro-frames as over-arching frames in media articles and broadcasts, given how the frames in *South Park* are so far lining up relatively well with “real-life” news frames.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 dealt with the issue-specific portion of the codesheet, asking what subjects are most often framed and how they are framed. The “law/court/crime” grouping was most frequently used of all the groups. It was framed negatively $\frac{3}{4}$ of the time, and in terms of *Responsibility* and *Speculation* exactly half of the time. Pairing *Responsibility* with this topic area seems to make perfect sense, and the negative valence attached to it is reasonable as well, although one would hope that real broadcasters would attempt to skew more toward neutrality than “Tom” and friends. The prominent use of the *Speculation* macro-frame also falls in line with the use of *Responsibility*, as the identification of a potential culprit in a crime situation would by definition be a use of both of these frames. “Environment/natural disaster” also featured this *Responsibility/Speculation* pairing a large percentage of the time, as did “disease/death.”

“Chaos/social unrest” was the second most frequently featured topic (n=23), followed by “celebrity/pop culture” (n=18) and “war/foreign affairs/terrorism” (n=17). All of these most frequently-used topic areas, other than “celebrity/pop culture,” are in the top four highest percentages of negative valence by topic – i.e. “law/court/crime” is negatively-valenced in

73.7% of its appearances. Only “environment/natural disaster” features a higher percentage of negative valence use than these. This is one talking point, because predominantly-negatively-framed topics are used more frequently than less-negative topics. This leads one to consider if something really has to be negative to be news (unless it’s the obligatory “feel good” human interest story of the program).

The “breaking news/discovery” topic was the most likely to be framed positively, with 11 of 14 (78.6%) fitting that description. Fittingly, 11 of the 14 were also dominated by *Human Interest*, which appears to be far and away the most likely generic frame to have a positive valence. This will be further discussed in the research question 4 section.

Research Question 3

These questions dealt with the relationship of these fictional broadcasts to reality. These results showed that, though there was no significant difference in the usage of most generic and macro-frames based upon the broadcast’s basis in reality, there were significant differences in the use of *Conflict* and *Speculation*. This means that when these frames were employed, the broadcast topic was significantly more likely to be based in reality than when these frames were not used. Interestingly, some of *South Park*’s most memorable reality-based episodes employed both of these frames in a dominant fashion – episodes 1003 and 1004 (“Cartoon Wars,” parts I and II) were the creators’ take on the “Muhammad comic” controversy. Episode 904 (“Best Friends Forever”) was directly based upon the Terry Schiavo “right to die” controversy; coincidentally, Schiavo, whose feeding tube had been removed two weeks prior, actually passed away within hours of this episode’s original airing on March 30, 2005. These storylines and

some others relied heavily upon the conflict inherent in the subject matter, and each featured a broadcaster more than willing to offer possible causes or outcomes to the problems.

It was expected that “relationship to reality” would possibly play a significant role in the determination of other frame classifications, such as “prognostic/diagnostic” and “substantive/ambiguous,” but no significant differences resulted when these data were processed. As the show has progressed through the years, the frequency of broadcasts that are based in reality as defined herein has gotten significantly higher, meaning that *South Park* is relying upon more reality-based storylines than during its early years. It was assumed, for example, that reality-based broadcasts might be more substantive than purely fictional broadcasts, due to the amount of information available about the topics in the “real world,” which could then be transferred by the creators into the episodes and broadcasts within the episodes. Apparently the humor involved in the show does not necessarily rely on that connection, so this idea turned out not to be true.

Research Question 4

This question dealt with valences among the dominant generic frames, and it indicated that there are significant differences. These results are perhaps to be expected. Applying real-world expectations to these broadcasts, it would make sense that the most positive framing would occur in *Human Interest* stories, and that holds true in this situation. It came as a surprise that *Human Interest*-dominated broadcasts comprised over 78% of all positive broadcasts. *Responsibility* was the most intensely negative of the five generic frames, and this would perhaps be expected because of the *Responsibility* frame’s association with attribution of blame for a problem to a particular entity. This is also evidenced by the very low neutrality numbers for

Responsibility. Conflict was also framed negatively more than half the time, however it also contained the highest relative percentage of neutral broadcasts. So while some conflicts may cause immediate danger and thus might be framed negatively, others are being “left alone” by the broadcasters valence-wise for the disputants to fight. Whether the broadcasts reflect literal reality or not, these results would seem to mirror real-world expectations for news broadcasters.

The fact that over half of the total broadcasts carried a negative valence might be surprising in reality, because there are expectations of some semblance of neutrality from our news broadcasters. However, in the case of a show playing on the foibles of society, it would seem natural to emphasize the negative as a way of making a caricature of the news broadcaster.

Research Question 5

This question dealt with the use of the broadcaster as a pundit for a particular political orientation, and it indicated that the overwhelming majority of broadcaster appearances did not feature this. These findings are surprising, not just because they are unreflective of the supposed liberal bias, but also because *South Park* is a show that has never shied away from controversy or political commentary on its own. It would be easy to use the broadcaster within the show as a vessel to deliver commentary, either with serious undertones or in such a ridiculous way as to be easily recognizable as the “wrong” side of the argument. However, this does not happen as a rule.

Only three broadcasts in two episodes contained the so-called “liberal bias,” and both of those episodes are based directly upon recent liberal talking points. Episode 702 (“Krazy Kripples”) is based upon the stem cell debate, following an ever-strengthening Christopher Reeve as he returns from his devastating paralysis. Episode 908 (“Two Days Before the Day

After Tomorrow”) sees a major flood wreak havoc in a neighboring town, and the broadcaster’s tone turns to alarm when he reports that the flood was caused by global warming. While the broadcaster’s (as *communicator* - internally) text reflects the liberal ideology, this particular situation exemplifies the merits of considering the episode in its proper context, as noted in Gournelos (2009). The hysteria that ensues could be construed as a conservative argument by the creators (as *communicators* – externally) against the panic-driven global warming rhetoric in reality.

Research Question 6

One result that stood out was that the news broadcast characters, when they appear, are predominantly used as both serious and absurd figures, meaning that their broadcasts contain elements of both serious journalism as well as complete absurdity, be it in a piece of the broadcaster’s commentary or in the material being presented. This would seem to parallel the notion that television broadcasting today could be considered “info-tainment.”

The lone statistically-significant finding comes from the comparison of “broadcaster portrayal” to “dominant macro-frame.” The significance likely comes largely from the fact that speculation frames are disproportionately likely to come from a broadcaster being portrayed as completely serious. This could be a more serious commentary on the part of the creators of the show – do they really view journalism as a vessel for speculation?

Overall Discussion

One question to ask of all these findings is, “What attitudes/beliefs about television journalism is this show cultivating?” To revisit Gerbner’s cultivation theory, it can essentially be

summed up by saying “[h]umans are the only species that lives in a world erected by the stories they tell” (Gerbner, 1998, p. 175). The show *South Park* is created from the ground up each week, and the storyline is often built around a parallel or analogy to the real world, if not on the direct real-world story itself. The makers of the show, from the lowest animator to creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone themselves, take pains to create every detail of every show – what is drawn, how it is drawn, what words are used, etc. No detail is accidental. This means that the creators are working diligently to put out a message in the exact way they want to, so we must consider what stories they are telling and what they are cultivating with each detail. As research question three indicates, the show is using significantly more reality-based storylines since 9/11 as well, so there is compelling reason to study the ways that these situations are being portrayed in this show.

One interesting facet of the framing used in *South Park* is that, according to both Igartua et al.’s (2005) results, as well as Constantinescu and Tedesco’s (2007) results, the show uses very similar framing patterns in terms of the frequency of use of particular generic frames as the actual media outlets in those studies. This would seem to indicate that the show has a deeper basis in reality than just what was used for this study. Research question four also seemed to reflect realistic expectations, showing that *Human Interest* accounted for the vast majority of positively-valenced generic frames, and *Responsibility* was the most intensely negative. Whether intentional or not, the portrayal of generic framing in *South Park* is actually consistent with reality, which could reinforce the utility value of future entertainment-based framing studies. Though this project is perhaps an unorthodox way to study framing, the resulting frames do seem to parallel reality in a way that was not necessarily expected.

In the case of the news broadcasters, the creators seem to use them as figures on the border between entertainment and information. Johnson-Woods (2007) sums it up similarly by noting “[i]n its critique of the ‘news,’ the series questions the role of the media, is it there to entertain or to inform” (p. 115)? The results from research questions five and six seem to indicate that the news broadcaster characters here, more often than not, contain elements of both seriousness and absurdity, but that they are not being used as tools to lampoon the media’s assumed liberal stance. It seems fair to say that Parker and Stone are playing upon the notion of broadcasters as “info-tainers,” and focusing more strongly upon that aspect of news media than the “easy target” of political punditry among broadcasters. Research question two reinforces this by showing that the most frequently-used issue-specific frames are for the most part the most negatively-valenced ones as well, supporting the “if it bleeds, it leads” assertion.

XI. Limitations

Though this is a relatively thorough initial investigation into the use of television news media within entertainment media, there are some issues that could be addressed better by using a different study format. This project seems to address that specific topic pretty well, but some of the initial goals included the ability to discover more about *South Park*’s overall political and social commentary. In order to arrive at that, it would be necessary to study the content and surrounding cultural contexts for each episode, a hefty charge to say the least. The fact that news broadcasts do not appear in every episode automatically rules out those episodes, which may be perfectly fit for study for their commentary, but which contain no news broadcasts. It seems safe

to say that the episodes that have been covered can be successfully used as examples to indicate trends within the show, but there is more information available that this project cannot include.

Though it is a relatively small part of the project, the construct of “substantive” and “ambiguous” frames caused some difficulty during the coding process. No matter how it is defined, there remains a certain level of subjectivity inherent in this classification, and as such it is difficult to be as consistent with its coding as one would have liked to be. None of the results for this classification were significant, and one cannot help but wonder if that could be partially a result of the difficulty in recognizing the differences between the two.

XII. Suggestions for Future Research

Until this study, quantitative analyses of purely entertainment-based programs under the heading of framing research were very difficult to find, if not completely non-existent. Most of the existing qualitative studies seem to cherry-pick their favorite examples of a particular phenomenon within a show, then use those examples to “prove” some larger point. Chaney (2004) does this to support his claims of racial bias but misses the forest for the trees, so to speak; he fails to see what is truly being said/IMPLIED by the creators of the show because he focuses on a very small sample of scenes and disregards the context provided by the rest of the episode. For this reason, more quantitative studies on framing in entertainment media would be beneficial, because numbers used properly seem to make more convincing arguments.

Whether that suggestion is followed or not, scholars should not discredit the value of the content within today’s entertainment media. Sitcoms have the ability to comment on social and political matters in a way that is less direct but no less effective (some would say it is even more effective) than more serious or more directly politically-oriented programs. At least in part

because of the capabilities afforded us through new media, our attention spans seem to get shorter and shorter as we read our short news stories and blogs on the internet and then “tweet” about ourselves. In an age when 160 characters is as much as we read in one place at one time, any program that can demand attention for a full 22 minutes has to be considered to have great potential to introduce information to people, and thus it should be seriously studied.

As lines of research like this progress, more attention should be paid to what is being cultivated, perhaps through studies using priming theory, for example. It is time-consuming, yet still relatively easy to write a quantitative study and crunch the numbers of what content is in the show – that is what this project has been devoted to doing. One can also write a qualitative case study on an episode or two, but neither project can effectively get completely into what the creators really mean to communicate. There is no shortage of scholars who can assert what the creators intend to communicate, but they all have different answers based upon their theoretical backgrounds. In order to arrive at a conclusion with some semblance of truth behind it, a good mix of research is necessary, and hopefully this project can make a worthwhile addition to that process. Does *South Park* really warrant this effort? The consistently strong advertising and viewership numbers unequivocally answer “yes!”

XIII. Conclusions

There are three main areas of conclusions reached after this study. The first involves generic and macro-frames. Overall, these frames extend well to the study of entertainment portrayals of new media, at least in this case. Generic frames proved to be very prevalent to the point of being easily-identifiable in 150 of 155 cases. While *Morality* and *Economic Consequences* did not see regular use in the show, this could be due more to the nature of the

show being a comedy rather than a larger political/societal factor. On the other hand, while the macro-frames were less prevalent, two of them did extend well enough into this study. Perhaps the third, *Cynicism*, should be examined further, as the use of cynicism in the macro-frame sense may be based more on the social/political climate of the country under examination, and thus it may not spread as well as the other two macro-frames on a widespread basis.

The second conclusion involves *South Park*'s use of the broadcaster and the notion of broadcast journalism. Three things speak volumes about this. Of all the issue-specific topic areas, the ones with the most frequently negative valences were used more often than the topic areas that were framed more positively. This points to the spreading of the notion that the media feeds on negativity. The second aspect is that *Speculation* emerged significantly more often when the broadcaster was being portrayed seriously, which would lead us to believe that *South Park* is also reinforcing the notion of the media as a speculation machine. Finally, the broadcaster's portrayal as both serious *and* absurd half of the time leads to some confusion over just what the role of the media truly is – are they there to entertain us or inform us?

The final conclusion runs contrary to what may have been expected, but *South Park*, for all its reliance on politically and socially-relevant topics and storylines, does not “stoop” to the level of portraying the media as a liberal entity. The creators of the show, often considered Libertarians (Booker, 2006; Gournelos, 2009), have an opportunity to play upon the notion of the “liberal media,” but they do not. Perhaps that is one facet of *South Park* that keeps viewers – Republican, Democrat and otherwise – watching in such consistently large numbers.

XIV. References

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XV. Tables

Table 1.1

Generic and Macro Frame Frequencies Present in *South Park* News Broadcasts ($N=155$)

Generic Frames		
	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>% of N</u>
<i>Conflict</i>	60	38.7%
Economic Consequences	5	3.2%
<i>Human Interest</i>	94	60.6%
<i>Morality</i>	7	4.5%
<i>Responsibility</i>	59	38.1%
Macro Frames		
<i>Cynicism</i>	16	10.3%
<i>Speculation</i>	55	35.5%
<i>Metacommunication</i>	46	29.7%

Table 1.2, Research Question 1a

Dominant Generic and Macro Frame Frequencies Present in *South Park* News Broadcasts

Generic Frames, N=150		
	<u># Present</u>	<u>% of N</u>
Conflict	43	28.7%
Economic Consequences	0	0.0%
Human Interest	64	42.7%
Morality	1	0.7%
Responsibility	42	28.0%
Macro Frames, N=95		
Cynicism	12	12.6%
Speculation	52	54.7%
Metacommunication	31	32.6%

Table 2.1

Frequencies of Issue-Specific Frames in *South Park* News Broadcasts, $N=154$

	<u># of appearances</u>	<u>% of N</u>
“environment/natural disaster”	14	9.1%
Supernatural/“Science Fiction”	11	7.1%
Religion	5	3.2%
“breaking news/discovery”	14	9.1%
“disease/death”	14	9.1%
“war/foreign affairs/terrorism”	17	11.0%
“chaos/social unrest”	23	14.9%
“law/court/crime”	38	24.7%
“celebrity/pop culture”	18	11.7%

Table 3.1

Conflict Generic Frame Comparison to “Relationship to Reality,” *N*=155

	Relationship to Reality		
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Total</u>
<i>Conflict</i> Appearance	22	38	60
% within <i>Conflict</i>	36.7%	63.3%	100.0%
% within relationship	57.9%	32.5%	38.7%
% of total	14.2%	24.5%	38.7%
No <i>Conflict</i> Appearance	16	79	95
% within <i>Conflict</i>	16.8%	83.2%	100.0%
% within relationship	42.1%	67.5%	61.3%
% of total	10.3%	51.0%	61.3%
Total	38	117	155
% within <i>Conflict</i>	24.5%	75.5%	100.0%
% within relationship	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
% of total	24.5%	75.5%	100.0%

$X^2=7.81 (1), p=.005$

Table 3.2, Research Question 3a

Speculation Macro-Frame Comparison to “Relationship to Reality,” *N*=155

	Relationship to Reality		
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Total</u>
<i>Speculation</i> Appearance	21	34	55
% within <i>Speculation</i>	38.2%	61.8%	100.0%
% within relationship	55.3%	29.1%	35.5%
% of total	13.5%	21.9%	35.5%
No <i>Speculation</i> Appearance	17	83	100
% within <i>Speculation</i>	17.0%	83.0%	100.0%
% within relationship	44.7%	70.9%	64.5%
% of total	11.0%	53.5%	64.5%
Total	38	117	155
% within <i>Speculation</i>	24.5%	75.5%	100.0%
% within relationship	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
% of total	24.5%	75.5%	100.0%

$X^2= 8.603 (1), p=.003$

Table 3.3, Research Question 3b

Relationship to Reality Median Split by Seasons 1-6, 7-12; $N=155$

	Relationship to Reality		<u>Total</u>
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	
Seasons 1-6	15	63	78
% within 1-6	19.2%	80.8%	100.0%
% within relationship	39.5%	53.8%	50.3%
% of total	9.7%	40.6%	50.3%
Seasons 7-12	23	54	77
% within 7-12	29.9%	70.1%	100.0%
% within relationship	60.5%	46.2%	49.7%
% of total	14.8%	34.8%	49.7%
Total	38	117	155
% within all seasons	24.5%	75.5%	100.0%
% within relationship	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
% of total	24.5%	75.5%	100.0%

$$X^2 = 2.37 (1), p = .124$$

Table 3.4, Research Question 3b

Relationship to Reality Median Split by Pre- and Post-9/11; N=155

	Relationship to Reality		<u>Total</u>
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	
Pre-9/11	8	44	52
Expected Count	12.7	39.3	52.0
% within pre-9/11	15.4%	84.6%	100.0%
% within relationship	21.1%	37.6%	33.5%
% of total	5.2%	28.4%	33.5%
Post-9/11	30	73	103
Expected Count	25.3	77.7	103.0
% within post 9/11	29.1%	70.9%	100.0%
% within relationship	78.9%	62.4%	66.5%
% of total	19.4%	47.1%	66.5%
Total	38	117	155
Expected Count	38.0	117.0	155.0
% within all seasons	24.5%	75.5%	100.0%
% within relationship	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
% of total	24.5%	75.5%	100.0%

$\chi^2=3.526$ (1), $p=.044$ (Fisher's exact 1-sided test)

Table 4.1

Dominant Generic Frame Comparison to Valence, $N=150$

	<u>Negative</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Positive</u>
Conflict	23	16	4
% within Conflict	53.5%	37.2%	9.3%
% within valence	30.3%	38.1%	12.5%
% of Total	15.3%	10.7%	2.7%
Human Interest	20	19	25
% within H.I.	31.2%	29.7%	39.1%
% within valence	26.3%	45.2%	78.1%
% of Total	13.3%	12.7%	16.7%
Morality	1	0	0
% within Morality	100%	0%	0%
% within valence	1.3%	0%	0%
% of Total	0.7%	0%	0%
Responsibility	32	7	3
% within Resp.	76.2%	16.7%	7.1%
% within valence	42.1%	16.7%	9.4%
% of Total	21.3%	4.7%	2.0%

$$X^2 = 30.81 (6), p \leq .001$$

Table 6.1

“Treatment of Broadcaster” Comparison to Dominant Generic Frames, $N=150$

	<u>Conflict</u>	<u>H.I.</u>	<u>Morality</u>	<u>Responsibility</u>
Serious	17	13	0	12
% within serious	40.5%	31.0%	0%	28.6%
% within generic	39.5%	20.3%	0%	28.6%
% of Total	11.3%	8.7%	0%	8.0%
Absurd	6	18	1	11
% within absurd	16.7%	50.0%	2.8%	30.6%
% within generic	14.0%	28.1%	100.0%	26.2%
% of Total	4.0%	12.0%	0.7%	7.3%
Both	20	33	0	19
% within both	27.8%	45.8%	0%	26.4%
% within generic	46.5%	51.6%	0%	45.2%
% of Total	13.3%	22.0%	0%	12.7%

$X^2=9.168 (6), p=.164$

Table 6.2

“Treatment of Broadcaster” Comparison to Dominant Macro-Frames, $N=95$

	<u>Cynicism</u>	<u>Speculation</u>	<u>Metacommunication</u>
Serious	1	18	6
% within serious	4.0%	72.0%	24.0%
% within macro	8.3%	34.6%	19.4%
% of Total	1.1%	18.9%	6.3%
Absurd	6	7	7
% within absurd	30.0%	35.0%	35.0%
% within macro	50.0%	13.5%	22.6%
% of Total	6.3%	7.4%	7.4%
Both	5	27	18
% within both	10.0%	54.0%	36.0%
% within macro	41.7%	51.9%	58.1%
% of Total	5.3%	28.4%	18.9%

$X^2= 10.093 (4), p=.039$

XVI. Appendix A
Codesheet

Unit: _____ (Episode #, followed by # of media broadcast within episode. For example, if this is the 3rd news broadcast in episode 702, the Unit # would be 7023.)

Episode Original Air Date: _____

Time In: _____ (Time at which news broadcast begins, in minutes and seconds)

Length: _____ (Length of news broadcast = Time Out – Time In)

Level of News Broadcast:

- 1) Local
- 2) National
- 3) Not sure (please explain: _____)

Broadcaster(s) featured:

- 1) Anchor only
- 2) Reporter only
- 3) Anchor and Reporter
- 4) Voice-over only
- 5) Other (please explain: _____)

Treatment of Broadcasters:

Are broadcasters treated as:

- 1) Serious
- 2) Absurd
- 3) Both
- 4) other (explain: _____)

Topic: Please briefly specify the main topic of this broadcast (e.g. – war, zombies, school, etc.)

Generic/Macro Frames: Please indicate all generic/macro frames that appear.

- 1) Conflict

- 2) Economic Consequences
- 3) Human Interest
- 4) Morality
- 5) Responsibility
- 6) Cynicism
- 7) Speculation
- 8) Metacommunication

Dominant Generic Frame: Please indicate the single most dominant Generic Frame

- 1) Conflict
- 2) Economic Consequences
- 3) Human Interest
- 4) Morality
- 5) Responsibility
- 6) None

Dominant Macro Frame: Please indicate the single most dominant Macro Frame

- 1) Cynicism
- 2) Speculation
- 3) Metacommunication
- 4) None

Other Frame Treatments: Please indicate which of each pair is dominant.

- 1) Substantive / Ambiguous
- 2) Prognostic / Diagnostic
- 3) Episodic / Thematic

Valence of News Broadcast Frames: Please indicate how positive or negative the frames are (i.e. – take main topic and rate how the broadcaster speaks of it).

- 1) Very Negative
- 2) Negative
- 3) Mildly Negative
- 4) Neutral
- 5) Mildly Positive
- 6) Positive
- 7) Very Positive

Visual Framing: Does the visual framing (what you see) match the verbal framing (what the broadcaster is saying)?

- 1) Yes
- 2) No
- 3) Not sure (explain: _____)

Relationship to Reality: Is what the news broadcaster is saying clearly based upon actual events?

- 1) Yes
- 2) No

3) Unsure

Political Slant: Does the news broadcaster(s) language reflect a political ideology?

- 1) Conservative
- 2) Liberal
- 3) Neither
- 4) Both
- 5) Unsure

Explain: _____

XVII. Appendix B

Codebook

Unit: Coders will assign each news broadcast a number, consisting of the official episode number (e.g. 701), followed by which instance of the news within the show is being coded (e.g. 7013 would be the third news broadcast within episode 701).

Air Date: Coders will note episode's original air date. This is important for providing historical/environmental context should an episode need further examination. This can be found when the episode is scrolled over on the "episode player" screen.

Time In: Coders will note what time in the episode the news broadcast begins.

Length: Coders will note the length of the broadcast.

Level of News: 1) Local, 2) National, 3) Not Sure (*most*, but not all instances of "Channel 4 News" are to be coded as local)

Broadcasters Featured: 1) Anchor only, 2) Reporter only, 3) Anchor and Reporter, 4) Voice-over only, 5) other (please explain: _____)

Treatment of Broadcasters: Are broadcasters portrayed as serious, absurd, both, or "other"?

Topic: Coder will briefly summarize the main topic of this broadcast.

Generic/Macro Frames: Coders will determine presence or absence of the five generic frames and three macro frames. Check ALL that apply.

Conflict: Does the broadcast refer to *Conflict* between two or more parties/individuals/groups/entities? Does one group/person dislike another? Does the broadcast refer to winners/losers?

Economic Consequences: Does the broadcast refer to economic gain/loss as a result of the topic? Is cost/expense of anything mentioned? Are *Economic Consequences* of pursuing/not pursuing an action mentioned?

Human Interest: Does the broadcast put a human face on an issue? Is the story described in emotion-laden language? Does the broadcast emphasize how

people/groups are affected by the topic? Is the broadcast an attempt to evoke a personal emotional response?

Morality: Does the broadcast contain a moral message? Does the story refer to moral compasses such as religion/God/other religious tenets? Does the story offer specific prescriptions of how people should behave/act?

Responsibility: Does the broadcast suggest that some individual/group is responsible for a problem? Does it suggest that some individual/group has the ability to solve the problem?

Cynicism: Does the broadcast indicate a “jaded” or negative mentality? Does it indicate a sense of powerlessness to solve the issue at hand? Is there any indication of bitterness or negativity toward individuals or issues?

Speculation: Does the broadcast speculate about what has happened or will happen? Does the broadcast mention any hypothetical assumptions about the topic? Does the broadcast make any implications or inferences about the cause of the topic?

Metacommunication: Does the story include the broadcaster’s own opinions? Does the broadcaster cite other journalists/media outlets? Does the broadcast mention how the news media has handled the situation?

Dominant Generic Frame: Coders will indicate the single most dominant generic frame (*Conflict, Economic Consequences, Human Interest, Responsibility*).

Dominant Macro Frame: Coders will indicate the single most dominant macro frame (*Cynicism, Speculation, Metacommunication*).

Other Frame Treatments: Denote which of each pair is dominant.

Substantive/Ambiguous: Is the news broadcast clear and filled with detail (substantive), or vague and indistinct (ambiguous)?

Prognostic/Diagnostic: Does the broadcast involve the outcome or solutions (or possible solutions) to a problem (prognostic), or does it involve problem identification and attribution of blame (diagnostic)?

Episodic/Thematic: Does the broadcast focus on this one situation, without linking it to a larger context (episodic), or does it place the issue/event in a broader context (thematic)?

Valence: Overall valence of each news broadcast – Likert Scale from “Very Positive” to “Very Negative.”

Visual Framing: Does the visual framing “match” the verbal framing?

Relationship to Reality: Is this news broadcast’s topic *clearly* meant to reflect a *specific* event that has occurred in actual reality? To the best of your knowledge, given the date of the original broadcast, does the broadcast imitate/satirize/poke fun at a specific situation from reality that may have occurred around the same time as the episode’s original air date?

Political Slant: Does the news broadcaster(s) language reflect a political ideology? To the best of your knowledge, could the broadcaster’s speech be viewed as an intentional effort to skew the news in one political direction or another?

XVIII. Appendix C

South Park Codesheet Instructions

Thank you for assisting me with the coding process of this project. Your help is greatly appreciated, and instrumental to the success of this project. Hopefully you will enjoy the experience, but please do try to be as accurate as possible, according to the material on the codesheet and these instructions. Please watch each episode in its entirety, and make sure you include ALL instances of news broadcasts within each episode. I will only assign you episodes known to contain at least one news broadcast, but many episodes contain 2, 3, or more.

To access South Park episodes, you will need to use a computer with high-speed internet access for best results. On your web browser, go to <http://www.southparkstudios.com>. Then note the section called “Episode Finder” (lower left of screen, may require scrolling down). Click on the season containing the episode you wish to view. Now, you should see a black background with several thumbnail-sized pictures which indicate the different episodes. Click on the episode you want, and it will show up and start playing. There is usually an initial commercial, as well as a few more commercials during each episode. Unfortunately, these cannot be avoided – they are a byproduct of being able to access these episodes for free.

As you watch the episode, at some point you will see a news broadcast character show up, or in some cases, you will notice that the episode appears as it would on a news broadcast, with “live” in a corner of the screen, and “4 NEWS” or something similar in another corner. From the time the broadcaster shows up, begins speaking, or the screen turns to the news broadcast screen until the time the broadcast is over, comprises a single news broadcast. **Your task is to concentrate on what the broadcaster is saying**, not what any interviewees or other citizens are saying within the broadcast.

It can be confusing to define “news broadcast,” so I’ll help you out. Jerry Springer, Larry King Live, Oprah, and other similar shows, sometimes featured in South Park, are NOT considered news broadcasts. Just the actual news programs, local or national, are considered broadcasts. If Larry King (or a similar substitute) is sitting behind a desk, it is not news. If someone is sitting behind the desk, reading news directly into the “camera,” whether it’s on local Channel 4 or on CNN (or a similar substitute), then it is considered a news broadcast. Local-access TV programs also are NOT considered news for this project. If you are unsure about whether a clip constitutes a news broadcast: when in doubt, go ahead and code it.

Please use these directions to help you navigate the codesheet:

Unit: Please assign a unit number to each broadcast, according to this formula: Use the official episode number, followed by the number of the news broadcast within the episode. For example: The second broadcast in episode #701 would be coded as unit # 7012. When you are provided episodes to watch, you will be provided with the episode number.

Air Date: Note the original air date. This can be found when you scroll over the thumbnails on the episode player screen.

Time In: Under the episode, you will see a bar indicating the episode's progress. At the right end of the bar, just underneath it, you will see both the ticking time code as well as the total episode length. Indicate what time the broadcast begins, as indicated by the ticking time code.

Length: Length of episode. Subtract the "Time In" from the time code at the end of the individual news broadcast. For a 10 second broadcast, you can indicate it as ":10," or as "10 seconds," it's up to you. Strict accuracy is not paramount here, just get it within 1 or 2 seconds of the actual broadcast time.

Level of News Broadcast: Please indicate whether the broadcast is local or national. In almost all cases, a broadcast using the "Channel 4" designation and/or a broadcaster named "Tom" is the local South Park news. However in some cases this may not be true, so if you are unsure, do pay attention to the language of the broadcaster to garner any hints that may occur in the text – often local broadcasts will refer to the city as "South Park," while national broadcasts are more likely to say "South Park, Colorado."

Broadcaster(s) Featured: If the broadcaster is sitting behind a desk reading the news, then he/she is an anchor. If the broadcaster is "on the scene" of the story, he/she is a reporter. If you hear a voice but do not see any news broadcaster for the length of the broadcast, it is a voice-over.

Treatment of Broadcaster(s): Are the broadcasters being portrayed as serious journalists, or are they saying absurd things that a "real" broadcaster would never say on the air? The differences can be subtle. Sometimes, both things are happening simultaneously. Sometimes the subject matter is absurd but the broadcaster is being "serious" about it (e.g. – a "serious" news story about everyone in the world pooping their pants). I've been coding situations like that as "both."

Topic: Please give a brief but descriptive summary of what the news broadcast is specifically about. If the broadcast is short (5-7 seconds or less), you may wish to just type in exactly what the broadcaster says – it may help you code the broadcast without having to go over it several times.

Generic/Macro Frames: These are frame classifications that are thought to subsume most frames presented in news broadcasts. Included in **Generic Frames are:**

Conflict frame is when the broadcaster talks about some sort of *Conflict*.

Economic Consequences is when the broadcaster frames his speech in terms of the financial impact the subject of the broadcast will have.

Human Interest includes emotional language and appeals.

Morality is when the broadcaster is talking about religious issues, moral declarations, or prescriptions of how to act.

Responsibility is when blame is placed upon someone or something for a problem or issue.

Macro Frames include:

Cynicism, when the broadcaster indicates powerlessness or uses sarcasm/irony;

Speculation, when the broadcaster predicts a course of action or provides a hypothetical explanation for what happened; and

Metacommunication, when the communication is about other communication (e.g. – another news outlet’s report, etc.).

Substantive/Ambiguous Frames: Ambiguous is vague or indistinct, while substantive is detailed and informative.

Prognostic/Diagnostic Frames: Diagnostic involves problem identification and attribution (blame), while prognostic involves the outcome or solutions to problems.

Episodic/Thematic: Episodic focuses on this individual situation and does not require further context, while thematic places issues and events in some general context.

Valence: This refers to how positively or negatively the broadcaster(s) speak about the topic of the broadcast.

Visual Framing: If the visual framing matches what the broadcaster says, or if it is a basic shot of the broadcaster without showing much detail of the surrounding events or scene, then answer yes. If there’s a clear discrepancy between what’s being said and what’s being shown, then answer no. For example: If the broadcaster is talking about something calmly and nonchalantly while chaos ensues around him/her, then answer no.

Relationship to Reality: Is this broadcast based directly on a specific event that has occurred in reality? “No” example: If a broadcast involves a volcanic eruption, but doesn’t make specific reference or bear striking similarity to one particular volcanic eruption (e.g. – Mount Saint Helens in 1980), then answer no here. “Yes” example: If a broadcast is about the right to die, and the situation bears striking resemblance to the Terry Schiavo situation, then answer yes here.

Political Slant: If the news broadcaster’s speech indicates a political affiliation, indicate which one. If he/she speaks favorably about strong military force or low taxes, for example, the broadcaster’s speech likely indicates a Republican slant. If he/she speaks favorably about saving the environment or sharing the wealth, it likely indicates a Democratic slant.

In most instances, if you are unsure of an answer, you will be provided with the option to answer “unsure.” If you are unsure about the answer, please briefly explain why in the blank provided. This will let me know that I need to look more closely at the broadcast and surrounding context.

Thank you once again for your help. This thesis literally would not be possible without outside help, so I really do appreciate it!

XVIV: Appendix D

South Park News Broadcast Guide
(In order of episode number – not chronological)

<u>Episode Number</u>	<u>Original Broadcast Date</u>	<u>Number of Broadcasts in Episode</u>
103	8/13/1997	6
105	9/10/97	1
106	9/17/97	3
107	10/29/97	1
112	2/18/98	2
201	4/01/98	1
203	5/20/98	1
207	6/17/98	1
208	6/24/98	4
209	8/19/98	2
211	9/02/98	1
214	10/07/98	3
216	12/09/98	5
218	1/20/99	1
302	4/14/99	1
306	7/07/99	1
308	7/21/99	4
314	11/24/99	1
317	1/12/2000	1
401	4/12/00	2
402	4/05/00	1
403	4/26/00	2
408	7/05/00	3
412	11/08/00	2
502	6/20/01	1
503	6/27/01	1
509	11/07/01	2
511	11/21/01	2
512	11/28/01	1
514	12/12/01	1
602	3/13/02	2
605	4/03/02	3
607	6/26/02	3
611	7/24/02	6
612	11/06/02	5
616	12/04/02	1
701	4/16/03	1
702	3/26/03	3
707	4/30/03	3

708	10/22/03	1
709	10/29/03	3
710	11/05/03	2
711	11/12/03	1
806	4/28/04	4
813	12/08/04	3
902	3/16/05	3
904	3/30/05	2
905	4/06/05	1
906	4/13/05	3
908	10/19/05	4
910	11/02/05	1
911	11/09/05	1
912	11/16/05	5
913	11/30/05	1
914	12/07/05	3
1002	3/29/06	2
1003	4/05/06	2
1004	4/12/06	2
1005	4/19/06	2
1006	4/26/06	1
1010	10/18/06	1
1105	4/04/07	1
1107	4/18/07	1
1109	10/10/07	1
1112	10/31/07	2
1201	3/12/08	1
1202	3/19/08	4
1203	3/26/08	2
1204	4/02/08	2
1205	4/09/08	1
1206	4/16/08	2
1210	10/22/08	2
1211	10/29/08	2