

Salve Regina University

Digital Commons @ Salve Regina

Pell Scholars and Senior Theses

Salve's Dissertations and Theses

5-2010

Questioning Objectivity in Mainstream Broadcast Journalism: The Value of Subjectivity on "The View"

Monika K. Raczkowski

Salve Regina University, monika.raczkowski@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.salve.edu/pell_theses



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), and the [Film and Media Studies Commons](#)

Raczkowski, Monika K., "Questioning Objectivity in Mainstream Broadcast Journalism: The Value of Subjectivity on "The View"" (2010). *Pell Scholars and Senior Theses*. 56.

https://digitalcommons.salve.edu/pell_theses/56

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Salve's Dissertations and Theses at Digital Commons @ Salve Regina. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pell Scholars and Senior Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Salve Regina. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@salve.edu.

Questioning Objectivity in Mainstream Broadcast Journalism:
The Value of Subjectivity on *The View*

By
Monika Raczkowski

Prepared For
Dr. Ramsey
English Department
Salve Regina University

May 3, 2010

Gender participation in the media is not equal in the United States. According to the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, only 3% of powerful positions in mainstream broadcast media are held by women. The Annenberg study shows the staggering underrepresentation of women in the media, and exhibits the need for positive images of women. Because images of influential women are limited, the images of women in power that do reach viewers need to be authentic and positive. Images influence the motivations and feelings of self-worth, and can encourage or discourage women's participation in political discussions. Moreover, because women constitute half of the population but are rarely in positions of power in the media, it is important that those given a voice express their views when given the opportunity. The program *The View* is a critically acclaimed talk show in which an all-female cast of varying socio-economic, experiential, and cultural differences discuss topics within the news. Because of the cast members' experiences, they often provide varying interpretations of the news, as well as, opposing opinions. These opposing opinions—because of the co-hosts' differences—provide a discussion of the news that becomes more personal and seemingly less objective than newspapers and strict-news program. Their presentation of the news does not follow the same objective news model as newspapers and local news, but should not be discredited as unimportant because they offer valuable insights into current events. Despite being critically acclaimed, many disregard the show for its valuable discussion and instead are distracted by the differences in opinion. Even though objectivity has become the standard—evidenced through history and through standards such the Society of Professional Journalists Code of

Ethics—subjectivity is often inferior to more objective practices. *The View* stands as a testament that there is value in subjectivity—particularly, the co-hosts’ opinions are valuable to marginal audiences whose opinions are often uncomplicated by objective news.

There have been many attempts to chronicle and establish a universal code of journalistic ethics or at least to describe the one that is already established. Historically, objectivity was not the first form of news making and because of this it is hard to distinguish the origins of ethics and objectivity. Even though it seems history and development of objectivity should precede the history of ethics, it is difficult to mention ethics without objectivism. Without an accepted form of ethics—a standard viewers can expect from the news—the intentions of news organizations are unclear and it becomes difficult for readers to distinguish news as truth or news as fiction.

Objectivity in journalism exists on two levels: objectivity as a historically-produced standard, and objectivity as the established rules that have and are still practiced. In other words, the development of objectivity as a standard can be traced throughout history, but also the definition and characteristics that constitute objectivity are debatable. For example, Stephen J.A. Ward attributes the origins of objectivity to a global movement in which people sought the truth about their government. More contemporary writers such as John P. Ferre directly oppose this argument and criticize objectivity as the reason for people’s disconnection and apathy for government and politics. Other writers, such as David T.Z. Mindich, focus on the definition of objectivity and the factors that constitute objective news rather than objectivity’s historical origins. Thus, the criteria and development of objectivity differ from writer to writer. Despite the contradictions, both the history and the definition are critical to an understanding of objectivity, and both are in some form culturally derived. In

order to understand the significance of subjectivity on *The View*, one must first understand objectivity and its history.

Objectivity is an idea in journalism that is heavily debated but also vaguely defined. Most journalism textbooks offer guidelines similar to those of Mindich, a scholar on objectivity in journalism. Mindich attributes the start of objectivity as an ethics in the 1830s until 1890s because of the success of the New York papers during that time (10-11).ⁱ However, his definition is particularly useful because of his thorough and multifaceted criteria that seem to focus on journalistic integrity rather than reader critique. His criteria are historically derived; he explains how the Penny Presses led to a need for detachment in journalism (39). In other words, he is concerned with the factors that journalists and news organizations take into consideration when developing stories rather than a journalist's ability to be realistic. He lists five important factors of objectivity: detachment, nonpartisanship, the inverted pyramid, dependence on facts, and balance (8). Mindich's first criterion, detachment, takes into consideration author bias, which is a primary concern of journalists (38-39). Although he explains that since 1996 objectivity has been removed from the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics, he admits that it is still a great influence on journalistic writing and tradition (5). Journalists according to the objective news model are expected to remove their biases, present only the facts, and take care to develop all the sides of the story. This objective model dominates news and has done so for the majority of news history.

Unlike Mindich, Ward concerns himself with the development of objectivity rather than the definition of it.¹ The early press was a reflection of a society striving for objective truth,ⁱⁱ and journalism ethics has developed as a result of this reporting. The contradictions in

the origins of objectivity among scholars are important to an understanding of journalism ethics. While Ward describes an intrinsic need for ethics that originates from culture, others see the need for objectivity due to legal issues and a demand for institutional standards. He argues that ethics are a system needed by both journalists and the public in order to create a reciprocal relationship. He writes that the scattered ideas of journalism in the sixteen and seventeen-hundreds were soon replaced by different demands during the American and French revolution. The English Bill of Rights became fundamental to people's participation in politics, and he connects these changes to the press deeming themselves "public watchdogs" and "instruments of public opinion" (129).ⁱⁱⁱ

Ward's assertion that journalistic ethics derive from a public need that includes both journalists and readers describes the evolution of the press and journalism's success in criticizing society. Because the newspapers function as a watchdog has become fundamental to modern journalistic obligations, he emphasizes people's historical and political demands as the reason for the existence of objectivity.^{iv} He considers historical events critical to the movement towards objectivity, but his ideals also explain the current need for objectivity. People turn towards the news in order to become informed about the current state of affairs, but rarely do they turn to the newspaper in order to consider an opinion. Ward's hypothesis about objectivity as a means to inform the public during the seventeenth and eighteenth century is still applicable today. People still seek information about the affairs that concern them just as the English were concerned about the political and religious problems of their time. Therefore, he asserts that objectivity evolved from public demand.

While Ward derives the need for objectivity from history, Theodore Glasser defines objectivity in light of similar socially-derived public needs, but he is more critical of the way

in which the media functions. He provides an ideology of news that is based on three inherent biases: the media's role as watchdog, the treatment of individuals as passive observers who disintegrate original thinking, and a lack of responsibility for creating news by being accountable for presenting facts but nothing more (176-177). His definition of objectivity accounts for inherent biases despite attempts at impartiality. He suggests that the intentions of objective news are evident within biases because the media is motivated to provide views that follow the status quo, that provide definitive answers to problems within the world, and give information motivated by opinion, but are concealed by the façade of objectivity (180-181). Objectivity as a model is substandard because of the ways in which news sources aim to fulfill their own motivations by providing definitive statements about rather than discussions; through the use of individual experts, organizations neglect opposing views or contradictory information. Therefore, his criticisms of objectivity expose the faults of a strictly objective news model. Because people are biased and strive to prove the assertions they make, objective news is an unattainable ideal. News, according to Glasser's ideas, is presented through a partial perspective of a journalist. By understanding the motivations of journalists, one can see how a discussion of news rather than a statement of facts is fundamentally favorable.

Journalism Ethics Today

The most current reflection on journalistic ethical standards is the Society of Professional Journalist's code of ethics. Listed on their website, the preamble states that journalists should seek the news, serve the public, and adopt the code of ethics in practice (SPJ). The code claims that journalism ethics are not a set of rules but instead a number of guidelines that should promote ethical thinking. This type of ethics reflect Daniel's idea that

journalists are conflicted by various responsibilities. Both suggest that journalists should make the best decisions possible, independent of precedent. The SJP Code of Ethics is divided into four categories: seek truth and report it, minimize harm, act independently, and be accountable. These categories are similar to Mindich's interpretation of objectivity in which detachment, nonpartisanship, the inverted pyramid, dependence on facts, and balance are mentioned. The common themes between these principles are the unbiased and factual approach to reporting. The code of ethics continues to describe situations and ways in which journalists should act. For example, journalists should "test the accuracy of information." The code also mentions that journalists should "recognize a social obligation to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open and that government records are open to inspection" (Society of Professional Journalists). Through an obligation to expose the truth about government, the code of ethics reflects the same historically-derived ambition for the media to present unbiased but critical views of the government. Although objectivity today has developed a more definitive and prescribed set of ethics, the watchdog persona that Ward describes during the French and American Revolution as well as into the 20th and 21st century has held true for journalism ethics today.

The foundations of objective journalism are important to *The View* because of the shows tendencies to criticize society and to voice their opinions. Even though it is not objective, *The View* still has these same watchdog tendencies. More importantly the Society of Professional Journalists have exclusively adopted an objective news model; objectivity has become normative and all other news models have been discredited.

Even though, *The View* reflects the opinions of the co-hosts, it still offers a certain level of objective news; in order for the co-hosts to offer their differing opinions, they need

the initial objective reporting first.^v

Even though there are benefits to a more precise code of journalistic ethics as objectivity has become the overriding principle, there has also been criticism of this current ethical system. Journalistic ethics have been criticized in articles for causing conflict and a separation between the individual and his or her society, such as John P. Ferre's "Grounding an Ethics of Journalism." The article was published in the *Journal of Media Ethics* and won honorable mention in the Carol Burnett/University of Hawaii/ AEJMC Prize for Student Papers on Journalism Ethics.^{vi} Not only is Ferre critical of the motivations of news organizations but he also criticizes the The Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists because they do not explain the reasons for the rules nor why they should be followed. In other words, even though objectivity has its merits in providing fact, strict guidelines are myopic and do not facilitate ethical discussion but instead become a form of legislature and set of rules to follow. A danger in providing a code of ethics is that news becomes subject to rules rather than being a set of moral guidelines.

Whereas many writers expose the shortcomings of objectivity and while others imply that the public needs objectivity, Stephen H. Daniel focuses on the journalists and the ways in which they must bypass their own prejudices in order to provide some greater good. A conflict that arises in the discussion of journalistic ethics is not just author biases but also authors' responsibilities outside of journalism that influence their work. Daniel explains the conflicts journalists encounter as professionals and their responsibilities as humans. He explains this in his article "Some Conflicting Assumptions of Journalistic Ethics": "Unfortunately, most journalists do not live and work in an environment of ordinary interaction and communication. They purposefully attempt to minimize personal prejudices,

to prove and challenge in ways which most people would otherwise find offensive, and even to continue coverage of material when their freedom or lives at stake” (51). He suggests that ethics are as important for journalists as they are audiences (51). The motivations and responsibilities of journalists that he uncovers are fundamental to understanding ethics as a standard but not always a practice. He differs from the other writers in this suggestion because he implies that codes of ethics ignore the human conflict between doing the right thing. Daniel explains that journalism as a profession requires objectivity, and that this objectivity comes in conflict with human nature. He gives an example of the problems that arise when journalists must choose between appeasing editors or meeting deadlines (53). The immediacy or consequences of a certain decision become motivation for journalists that may come in conflict with a more ethical choice. Where journalistic integrity should be primary, other responsibilities taint the capacity for journalists to make ethical decisions.

Daniel’s insight into journalism ethics are important because he brings ethics out of a theoretical level of ideals and places them in the context of actual decision making. Daniel’s analysis reflects a similar criticism as Jerre in that he does not believe that journalistic ethics should be demarcated into rules and regulations. He treats journalists as individuals rather than rule followers, and motivations are feasible explanations rather than excuses. Because of his treatment of journalists, the question of subjectivity and objectivity become second to ethics as a whole. He views ethics as a need to do good rather than please particular people or groups, and he implies that ethical choices cannot be prioritized a priori. Furthermore, he does not mitigate the human difficulty to make good decisions—in this case the choices journalists make—and he also does not emphasize following rules as a way to be ethical. Journalistic integrity becomes a method of analyzing situations singularly rather than

fulfilling exclusive guidelines that are not applicable to every situation. Thus, Daniels describes the highest good of a journalist as the same as the highest good of all individuals—developing authentically (56). For Daniels, journalism ethics derives from ethical personal decisions rather than agreed-upon rules. When applied to *The View* and subjective news, the importance of opinion is explained by Daniel's view that journalists are human and have opinions; *The View* merely functions as a medium for five individuals to provide their biases that would otherwise be inhibited by objective news.

The history of objectivity coupled with the current SJP guidelines describe the current climate of newsgathering. Objectivity has become a standard through the code of ethics, but also objectivity has become an expectation among audiences when watching television or reading the news. Audiences have come to expect unbiased, well-researched reporting; a type of reporting that has been historically derived through people's needs to remain informed. There are benefits to objective reporting because of its clarity and attempt at transparency. However, objectivity is insufficient in discussions of representation, interpretation, and the gathering of meaning. The discourse on *The View*—although often undermined—is more useful than objectivity in such cases particularly because the discussions aid in viewer's development of meaning.

Stuart Hall is important in any discussion of meaning, and in order to understand how *The View* promotes interpretation and executes successful subjectivity, an understanding of his ideas is necessary. He emphasizes the ideological influences of representation rather than their relativity to reality, and helps explain the influence of representation on the public. Julie D'Acci complicates Hall by describing the nuances of gender representation, and she suggests that gender representation should reflect reality to the extent that representations

should produce positive images. She also explains that gender is socially constructed—this idea alone is critical to understanding the differences in experience among the co-hosts that account for their differing views on politics. This also suggests that representation is not only important to providing audiences with images, but that images can also challenge audiences by providing views that go against the status quo, and that these images of representation can be positive. Thus, an application of Hall's theories to various clips from *The View* assert the limitations of objectivity.

The View, The Daily Show, and The Colbert Report

There is little research about *The View* in regards to journalism ethics. However, *The View's* subjective news format is most similar to late-night comedy talk shows because of the way the hosts are able to give their opinions about the news. Sandra L. Borden and Chad Tew explore the positive and negative aspects of broadcasting news through news-related comedy, specifically in regards to *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart (TDS)* and *the Colbert Report (TCR)* with Stephen Colbert. The article is applicable to more than just *TDS* and *TCR*; this type of reporting also applies to daily talk shows such as *The View*. Because hosts of *The View* also recycle already broadcast news stories rather than reporting the stories themselves, the show functions in a similar realm as a critique of media. The hosts provide subjective rather than objective perspectives, and thus fall into a similar category as the comic new journalists Colbert and Stewart. The agenda of these subjective shows is to be critical of news, events, and pop-culture. In an analysis of *The View* in regards to this article, there needs to be a regard for journalistic integrity, and a value in subjective opinions and the way they function to criticize the media.

The article argues that both Stewart and Colbert unethically discuss news in contexts in which they are not accountable for the same integrity as broadcast journalists. However, the article looks beyond the model to explore and provide insights about their internal and external criticism of the news, while also describing the limitations of re-used information. The article successfully functions to examine the various positive and negative attributes of what Borden and Tew call “fake news,” and the benefits and limitations of indirect news sources.

An alternative—or as an addition—to broadcast news is the emergence of indirect news sources in the form of talk shows and comedy skits. *TCR* and *TDS* are examples of this type of television show that uses recycled news clips as a basis for discussions about politics, world issues, news, and criticisms of the media. The shows usually take a comedic stance on news subjects, and these shows often take place in front of a live audience. In order to understand Borden and Tew’s argument, one must first understand the virtue theory model to which they are referring. They explain that this model is useful because it explains that Stewart and Colbert are not journalists because they are not bound to the same moral commitments (301). They write, “intentions matter for moral evaluation,” and thus the article argues that Stewart and Colbert are not journalists because they do not enact the practice of journalistic moral activity but are imitators (303). Likewise, the co-hosts of *The View* are not bound to the same boundaries as journalists. Borden and Tew argue that if journalism only required the act of taking videos and telling good stories, that anyone could be a journalist. However, they assert that it is because of moralistic intentions that journalists differ from the general public. This criticism of *TCR* and *TDS* directly relate the definitions of objective news. Borden and Tew’s condition of journalistic integrity is an objective

principle that applies to *The View* as well. *The View* does not implement its own reporting and their concern is not telling the news but telling how they feel about the news. Because of this, Borden and Tew would assert that the hosts are not subject to journalistic integrity and can be a form of corruption.^{vii}

This assertion that Colbert, Stewart, and the hosts of *The View* do not embody the same motivations as traditional journalists is indisputable. However, perhaps viewers' attraction to such journalism is what makes it successful in contrast to traditional journalism. Borden and Tew neglect to acknowledge Colbert's and Stewart's disconnect from journalistic responsibilities as a positive aspect while both comedians view this as critical to their "watch dog" stance. Colbert and Stewart are not tied to journalistic integrity, which means that they do not have the same moral obligations and standards created by the industry, as Borden and Tew assert. These scholars also do not consider that journalistic constraints can be negative, even in regards to ethics. *TDS* and *TCR* are not required to provide breaking news, to create different spins on repetitive stories, nor are tied to an objective news model. This allows for a criticism of the news when other sources produce stories prematurely—at times without accuracy—or when agenda-setting occurs. These two shows instead function as critiques of the media. One could argue that there is a checks and balances system in place: just as the media is described as the fourth estate so do these two shows function to find fault with the media. Likewise, *The View* is not hindered by the restraints of mainstream media. They debate the news and are not held responsible for their factuality; this allows for discussions and criticisms of the world that aid in viewer's development in meaning, which is not contingent on timeliness or factuality.

The question of objectivity and ethics are not important because of how they functions in media but because of how people view the media because of their rules and regulations. Objectivity has become a marker of good news, and is no longer a descriptive term but a qualitative one. It is important to note also that objectivity as a system of ethics developed intrinsically and as a result of the demands of both the public and journalists. Objectivity has left little room for subjectivity, and opinions have become insignificant to news organizations and audiences. This disintegration of opinion has led to a bad reputation for individual thinking and well-educated biases. To have an opinion in the “real news” is to impose an opinion on others, which is the antithesis to good news. There are many arguments for and against objective news in opposition to subjective news. The sources that provide these arguments vary from independent news organizations, journalists, scholars, and audiences. However, the preference for objective news as a dominant and superior form of news describes a model that is too easily accepted and too easily discredits subjective news.^{viii}

Borden and Tew prove the integrity of journalism in their example of factuality. They assert that these shows provide re-used information with no original reporting (304). The writers explain that this means that *TDS* and *TCR* “implicitly buy into factuality—and its associated rules of evidence” (305). In other words, this means that because there is no original reporting, the hosts are subject to already established biases and the decisions of those who have broadcast the news. The article successfully uncovers the issue by also considering that by re-using news, *TDS* and *TCR* can focus on the interpretation of the news instead. However, to assert that there is no original reporting is over simplified. Both *TDS* and *TCR* do incorporate original reporting even though much of their programs critique other

media outlets and recycled news. Rather than remaining concerned about objectivity, the shows can focus on how the news is internalized. In terms of factuality, the writers of the article are successful at exposing both sides of the problem. Because it is clear that *TDS* and *TCR* are not responsible for producing facts but instead criticizing news that already exists, Borden and Tew make sufficient claims for the benefits and limitations of recycled reporting. Likewise, *The View* is subject to the same biases that are inherent in their recycled news sources.^{ix}

The article also makes important observations about the effective aspects of *TDS* and *TCR* and explains that the shows are responsible for the same accountability as journalism. Borden and Tew quote Colbert from *NPR's Fresh Air*, in which he explains that he makes his audiences work hard by compelling them to engage in issues outside the show. The article also explains that the shows are interesting because they “occupy a place on the line between internal and external criticism” (308). Because *TDS* and *TCR* criticize a realm which they are a part of, they provide an interesting perspective on the media that is impossible in traditional journalism. *The View's* hosts act similarly to Colbert and Stewart because they criticize a world of which they are a part. The article also mentions that Stewart and Colbert, by virtue of their medium, are able to “get away with more.” These arguments further the assumption that there are compelling reasons to give credit to untraditional and recycled news. The value of such news, the writers propose, is the audience's participation.

The article ends by suggesting mediation between “fake news” and real news so that both parties must learn from each other. Borden and Tew suggest journalists need to exercise their right to provide subjective opinions on important issues and that “fake news” must consider their responsibility in providing news accurately. The article's conclusion provides a

climate in which a more productive discourse is possible in both types of news. This conclusion rectifies the favorable in both traditional and recycled journalism and therefore also explains the writers' previous inability to prove only negativities in Stewart and Colbert's shows. The article concludes with the suggestion that neither objective nor subjective news is better, that both are necessary to informing the public, and that each have particular responsibilities. In the conclusion, Borden and Tew provide a multi-faceted explanation that is less myopic, more interesting, and more informative than the previous, assertions that merely discredited the shows for recycling news. This conclusion is particularly important to any discussion of subjective news.

To discredit any news medium—whether explicitly news related or not—is to ignore the possibly useful criticisms they may offer. According to this conclusion the producers of *The View* must be aware of responsibility when providing the news and therefore must be careful to maintain journalistic integrity such as avoiding biases, providing balanced information, and publishing reputable stories. However, the show cannot be discredited as invaluable simply by virtue of its categorization as subjective. Contrarily, the ability for *The View* to function as a watchdog provides a strong benefit for subjectivity that is often overlooked by viewers who prefer objective news. By looking into the differences in the coverage of Rihanna on *20/20* and *The View*, the merits of subjectivity become more compelling, and Borden and Tew's argument becomes more clear.

20/20 and *The View*

20/20 is ABC's in-depth interviewing program; interviewees vary from celebrities to politicians, and the questions can be personal, controversial, or simply informational. It utilizes objective news style reporting, and is worth mentioning because it features important

subjects who are presented in an impartial way through its reporting style. Some notable episodes include Barbara Walters asking Vladimir Putin about whether he ordered killings on his people, questioning Hillary Clinton about the pressure of being the first lady, exposing the John Edwards sex scandal, and interviewing George Bush Jr. about his experiences throughout his two presidential terms. *20/20* has become a medium in which controversial topics are investigated and difficult questions are asked. Because it is a reliable and timely program, it is relevant to the discussion of the benefits and limitations of objective news. The interviewer's biases are subdued, extensive research is conducted, and questions are balanced. Because of this, *20/20* follows Mindich's definition of objective news. The format—interviewing—requires thorough, unbiased research, careful planning, fact-checking, balanced questioning and that make it an example of objective news sources. An interviewer can ask certain questions above others, which can present a certain level of bias; however, this is still considered journalistically objective so long as the questions are balanced. Besides the interviewer's choice of questions, the interviewee develops much of the conversation and influences what is and is not disclosed; the interviewer surrenders control of the discussion to the interviewee after the questions are posed. The interviews often air continuously with few editing or cuts. Newsgathering is conducted on camera, and the interviewee often presents his answers in entirety. Moreover, this also means that the interviewee has relative control over the responses.

The balance within the show is derived from the format; the interviewer asks questions based on research and the interviewee is able to rebut, confirm, and expand upon the issue. Because of this format, there is a balance between the content the interviewer wants to elicit and between what the interviewee wants to divulge. Although *20/20* does not

follow the inverted pyramid, it does follow normal interviewing conventions such as beginning with less intrusive questions and working towards the more difficult, personal questions. Another reason why *20/20* is particularly objective is that the news story is less edited—the interviewee has a greater opportunity to give his or her opinion and the interviewer is less able to disclose information from viewers. Therefore, *20/20* is a useful news show on *ABC* because it follows the patterns of an objective news source.

The View, on the other hand, follows a generally subjective news format. The topics are pre-determined and the cast members have access to facts on cue cards, which makes their reporting seem objective. The method of conversation on *The View*, however, suggests the show is subjective because the hosts' present information based on their own experiences rather than reporting about others. The hosts are able to give opinions about the news, which offers the audience blatant biases. Each host has different views about each subject, and the show functions as a place for them to offer their ideas, refute other views, or change their positions about issues. The hosts are able to speak freely about topics so long as they do not violate FCC rules and follow the network's general guidelines. However, despite the subjective nature, *The View* strives to base the discussion on factual reporting, even though the focus of the show is on personal opinion rather than journalistic storytelling. By observing various incidences in the media and the contrast in the way objective news formats differ from subjective ones, a reader can begin to appreciate the value of subjectivity.

Rihanna on *20/20* and *The View*

The media's portrayal of Rihanna is just one way in which the benefits of objective and subjective news can be compared. *ABC's* coverage of Rihanna, particularly in the differences between the *20/20* segment and episodes of *The View*, differ in reporting style.

20/20 is considered to be a program of in-depth, intrusive interviews in which interviewers elicit controversial and unexpected information about a subject. It follows an objective news model and works to support the fourth estate ambitions of traditional journalism. *The View*, on the other hand, is a show in which five women offer their opinions about what has appeared in the news. *The View* maintains journalistic integrity but is more subjective; it offers subtleties about news topics that are not evident in hard news. It is important not to mitigate the importance of morning talk shows in a discussion of news. *ABC's* coverage of Rihanna's relationship with Chris Brown and her appearance in *GQ* provide two specific examples in which the benefits of subjective news are evident.

Diane Sawyer interviewed Rihanna on November 6, 2009 on *20/20*, 9 months after Rihanna was physically abused by Chris Brown. *ABC* claimed it was the first in-depth interview since the incident. *20/20* interviews generally feature two unique and important types of information: information attained outside of the interview and the interviewees claims that are made during the broadcast. In the November 6th episode, Sawyer exposed information about Rihanna that contradicted Rihanna's original claims. Sawyer found that Rihanna had filed earlier police reports featuring Chris Brown. When asked, Rihanna said that she had only filed one report—the one that leaked to the press. Because of *20/20's* in-depth and extensive reporting, Sawyer exposed Rihanna's fallacious story. More importantly the incidence shows that objective reporting strives to attain some objective truth. In many ways it followed the objective models of Mindich.^x The show elicited private, controversial information about Rihanna while also maintaining and defending her reputation, and following the values of journalistic ethics.^{xi} The types of questions Sawyer asked Rihanna

portrayed in her in a positive light despite Sawyer's ruthlessness at uncovering the truth. The format of the questions are just one way in which *20/20* functions objectively.

Sawyer's interview with Rihanna concluded by informing the public of three important pieces of information: Rihanna remained in inconsistent contact with Brown after the incident despite the police report and abuse, she ended her relationship because of the guilt she felt towards young women who may continue contact with abusive partners, and that Rihanna lied about her relationship with Brown in order to mitigate his bad reputation. Sawyer exposed Rihanna's lies in order to inform the public of the truth. Sawyer acted under the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics; she worked to attain the truth about her subject by finding unsettling but necessary information. However, an objective reading of Rihanna's battle with domestic violence reflects an inherent problem in news that is more complicated than the attainment of truth or fact. *ABC's* coverage of Rihanna diluted the problem of domestic violence into a distinction between truth and fact rather than exposing the implications and subtleties of such information. Sawyer, by virtue of the objective news model, was only able to uncover fallacies in Rihanna's claims but was unable to assert whether Rihanna's actions were moral or appropriate. Objectivity, thus, functions merely to inform the public but does little to complicate moral issues or to raise ethical issues such as those surrounding Rihanna's lies. Sawyer was only able to point out the hypocrisy in Rihanna's claims, but was not able to assert that they were unethical. Through subjectivity on *The View*, readers were offered a nuanced interpretation of the situation. The co-hosts were able to speculate as to why Rihanna was unable to break her ties with Brown, and also to consider the emotional consequences of abuse. Although the co-hosts did not discuss the ethics of her lies, they did discuss serious issues surrounding her abuse.

The View has complicated Rihanna's experience with Chris Brown and has offered audiences a complex reading of Rihanna, unlike the *20/20* interview. Whoopi introduced the clip of Diane Sawyer's interview on *20/20*. The clip showed the beginning of the *20/20* interview when Rihanna stated that it was embarrassing that Chris Brown "is a person [she] fell in love with." Joy began the discussion by stating that sometimes people call it love when "it's really co-dependency." Sherri responded by saying that so many women re-enter abusive relationships and that because Rihanna said the situation was embarrassing, she was really insulting Brown. Sherri continued by saying that she hopes that Rihanna learned from the situation. Sherri's comment reflected her concern for women; she recognized that Rihanna is a microcosm of domestic abuse and she hoped that other women recognize the severity of her experience. Joy noted that Rihanna has an album debuting that week, that Chris Brown was doing great and selling tickets, and that she "loves show business." She did not say this with antagonism or bitterness; she acknowledged the way that public relations functions. Joy's comment reflected a different understanding of Rihanna's situation. She pointed out that Rihanna's press junket and unexpected openness about Brown is the result of the debut for her new CD, which implies that Rihanna was not disclosing information on her own accord but rather for promotional purposes. Joy did not express anger towards Rihanna's motives; she enlightened the audience to a nuance of the situation that was otherwise not mentioned by the media. In other words, the flexibility of subjectivity allowed Joy to be critical of the media—a field she is also a part of—by highlighting its superficiality.

In the beginning portion of their discussion, the women's voices were calm and they carefully listened to each other. It seemed as though Elisabeth was less interested in this topic because she had little to say except to mention a relationship to psychology. Sherri's point

was a personal hope connected to a greater cause; she wanted Rihanna to learn from the situation in order to prevent domestic abuse. The calmness of the discussion did not last long. Whoopi disagreed with Joy's statement that Brown was doing fine. The women were rattled by the sudden disagreement. Whoopi, who is the moderator, said that Brown is not doing great because "people do not like people who hit other people."^{xii} After this comment, calm was restored and Whoopi mentioned that Sherri wants to take her niece to see Brown because he deserves another chance. She explained that Brown has "said he was sorry," "paid the price for what he's done" and "is getting help." She cited Michael Phelps as an example of someone who was given a second chance. Sherri's observations reflected forgiveness for Brown she feels he deserves, and she wanted her niece to also understand the need for forgiveness because of his young age. Elisabeth asked Sherri if she was going to talk to her niece about Brown before the concert; Sherri explained that she talked about it when it happened, and that if it is really a second chance then she does not want to berate the point. Sherri's explanation shows compassion for Brown but also the virtue of forgiveness that she wants to instill in her niece. The medium, a morning talk show, allowed Sherri to show compassion for Brown but to also mention her view on celebrity domestic abuse. Unlike *20/20*, which presented the facts about what happened to Rihanna, the women on *The View* spoke about the ways in which people can respond to the event. She took the situation out of its context and into the daily lives of average people. By giving Brown a second chance, she offered people different ways to respond to abusive individuals: to either give them a second chance or hold them entirely accountable. By presenting the situation in this way—by offering opinion rather than fact—Sherri responded to the situation in a way in which people can come to more informed opinions about domestic abuse because of the diverse opinions of

the cast members. Whoopi added to this complexity by also mentioning that she does not believe that Phelp's crime was nearly the same as Brown's. Whoopi acknowledges a fallacy in Sherri's reasoning that allows for a deeper reading of the situation.

All four women's views are valid to a critical discussion of Rihanna's abuse. Whoopi is humored by the ways in which the media treat Brown's misdemeanors too seriously and she disagrees with the scrutiny he receives. She expressed her disagreement through her mocking tone in order to suggest that at times the media overdramatizes the news. Joy's opinions parallel Whoopi's because she also mentioned the superficiality of the media in reporting on Rihanna at the same time as her CD launch. Elisabeth and Sherri, on the other hand, are more concerned with the ways in which the media informs the public. Sherri felt that women needed to learn from Rihanna in order to prevent domestic abuse. However, she also mentioned that Brown is young and must also be given the opportunity to learn. Elisabeth also showed her concern for the issue of domestic abuse by questioning Sherri about the ways in which Sherri will discuss Brown with her niece. Elisabeth, in this way, is concerned about the ways in which children will understand domestic abuse.

The nuances within the discussions between the cast members of *the View* are important to an understanding of Rihanna's domestic abuse. Although *20/20* informed the public of the earlier police reports that Rihanna had filed, it did little to acknowledge the greater issues involved, and the ways in which the public could be affected. *20/20* functioned solely to inform the audience of events: how Rihanna was beaten, where and why it happened, and what she has been doing since then. However, *20/20* failed to mention the superficiality of the media but also the other side of the situation, the way in which Brown was dealing with the consequences. *The View*, on the other hand, acknowledged all of these

issues. Whoopi voiced her concern for Brown and his poor reputation by the media. So often, the media portrays the views of the afflicted but not of the afflictor. In other words, Brown's story is rarely mentioned in hard news, but Whoopi was critical of the ways in which the media treated Brown as "doing just fine." Ironically, despite the fact that Rihanna attempted to mend his reputation through the *20/20* segment, the main message remained that her abuse was frightening, and that she would never want other women to experience similar abuses. Rihanna's dramatic story portrayed Brown as a terrible person who is unable to change, a person she struggles to avoid. Whoopi's understanding of the situation, on the other hand, better functioned to bolster Brown's reputation because she suggested that he was dealing with the consequences of his actions. Whoopi's short but succinct comments allowed for a different perspective that problematized what at first seemed to be an obvious story of nefarious abuse. Furthermore, Sherri's willingness to give Brown another chance also delineated a part of the story that was not evident through the *20/20* interview. Brown's young age, Sherri felt, warranted him another chance by the media. This attitude contradicted that of *20/20* but it was also a reasonable way for audiences to approach the situation. Whereas the *20/20* segment left the issue resolved—that Brown is an abusive man and that all abusive men must not be forgiven—*The View* was more critical and more vocal about the subtleties in his actions.

The View is distinctly different from *20/20* in terms of its purpose and style. To criticize *20/20* as neglecting certain aspects of Rihanna's story would be an oversimplified analysis. The discussions on *The View* could not exist if objective reporting did not precede the producers' research. Without the initial objective reporting, *The View* could not exist. What is problematic about *20/20* and an explicitly objective news reading of Rihanna's abuse

is that it neglects the subtleties and implications of its reporting. More specifically, objective news avoids presenting interpretations and understandings. Even though the objective news model *20/20* followed allowed for a critical and reliable report of the case, it still portrayed Brown negatively—not because of the content or because of writer bias but because objective news reporting did not cover the context of the situation. *20/20* was thorough in its investigation and was critical of Rihanna’s assertions, but it explained the situation in an elevated atmosphere detached from real life. Because of its obligations to journalistic objectivity, Sawyer could not express opinion or bias, and portrayed Rihanna factually but at a distance. However, Rihanna’s abuse is not remote but relevant to the experiences of women; those who have and may be abused. Her story is more than just fact—the way in which the public understands the story will influence the ways in which they understand the issue as a whole. Thus, there is a great responsibility in the way the news is portrayed, and it has become even more crucial since Rihanna has become a spectacle for domestic abuse.

The merits of *20/20* lie in its function to inform the public of facts, although it does little to inform the public of what to do with the information with which they are presented. *The View*, on the other hand, offers the audiences ways in to internalize and form judgments about the story, as well as, develop a perceptive and critical stance on the issue. *The View* cannot exist without initial, objective reporting that precedes it, but it is valuable to audiences. Thus, subjectivity should have greater merit in the news, as it is influential in the development of opinions, views, and meanings.

Rihanna’s *GQ* Photoshoot

In a clip of the view from January 7, 2010, the women discussed Rihanna’s *GQ* photo shoot. Whoopi explained that many claim the photos are extremely provocative, and she

asked the other women if the photo shoot was a step in the right direction for Rihanna. The producers showed clips of the photos. In the first, Rihanna posed cat-like on her hands and knees wearing a grey bra and underwear. Barbara responded first and asked where Rihanna wanted to move on to, implying disapproval of the photos. Joy responded by claiming she does not want to be a victim of abuse, but instead that wanted to be a “fashion victim.” The members then worked to try to complicate the photos. Barbara stated that Rihanna wants to be a sex symbol, and Sheri replied by saying Rihanna has always been a sex symbol.



Sheri continued by saying that maybe now Rihanna felt like a bad girl and was taking control. The producers showed another photo that is more racy, shown here. Elisabeth interpreted the photo differently. She explained that it is a control photo, in which Rihanna was showing her power over her image. Sheri complied with this assertion and said that maybe what Rihanna was saying is that you can have “these” (referring to her breasts) and not “those” (referring to her blocking herself). Barbara mentioned that regardless of how provocative the photo was, that it was no excuse for abuse. Everyone agreed and Whoopi

Fig. 1. Rihanna poses in a cropped top covering her genitals with her hands. Michael Thompson. GQ: 2010.

speculated that perhaps Rihanna was hiding a giant boxing glove that “comes up when someone comes near her and goes ‘Pow.’”

Although this final interpretation was comical, the discussion implied far more than just a few women’s opinions about two magazine photos. The photos themselves were scandalous, especially for morning talk show television. The second photo had Rihanna’s breasts censored with a black box, indicating that the network was wary of showing the original copy. More importantly, however, the nuances between the women’s differing interpretations exhibit the value of opinion as news.

My argument that *The View*’s incorporation of opinion in news is founded upon the assumption that Rihanna’s scandalous photo shoot is news. For the purposes of this thesis, news is anything that interests the public and tells a story regarding a conflict. Some traditional factors of newsworthiness include proximity, future impact, prominence, conflict, human interest, and timeliness. These factors are not exclusive requirements but are used to indicate the extent of a story’s newsworthiness; the more factors a story utilizes, the more newsworthy it is often considered. However, according to these factors nearly any story that contains a conflict can be newsworthy. Thus, my definition of news will be equally general because of the context of *The View*. Because the show is a morning talk show and not an early morning or evening news broadcast and because the show regards opinions, I will consider news to be any story that respond to people’s concerns.

Interpreting a photo shoot or images on broadcast television is an activity that rarely happens on television. Although news outlets have mentioned magazines in their segments, the news does not interpret its subjects but only displays and describes them. The fact that *The View* featured Rihanna’s photoshoot was rare in itself; *ABC* was the only network to

mention the spread, let alone criticize it. What is more important about Joy, Sherri, Elisabeth, and Whoopi's interpretations is that the women were able to voice their opinions; the four were able to contradict, consider, and reconsider their views as reasonable citizens of American society. There are further implications to this, though. The discussion about Rihanna's photo spread depicts three important things about subjective news: that *The View* can encompass biases, that opinions matter, and that the audience benefits from such a discussion.

The women's varying life experiences and personality influence the ways in which they interpreted the photo. Barbara and Joy were distracted by the risqué poses and nudity. On the other hand, Elisabeth and Sherri read the photo in terms of women's power and the ways in which Rihanna was manipulating her audiences. It is possible that age and experience influenced these differing readings. Barbara and Joy are older than both Sherri and Elisabeth, and their views about how women should act and portray themselves differ significantly. Furthermore, Barbara and Joy have both been married for a significantly longer time than Elisabeth, and Sherri is divorced. These experiences factor into how the women understand photos and interpret people's actions.

Along with their age, the dynamics and relationships between the women—the ways in which they listen to each other and modify their beliefs—signify the importance of opinion in news. The views that the women present and their openness about the topics they discuss indicate the flexibility of their opinions. Sherri began by reacting to Barbara's statement that Rihanna is a sex symbol by speculating that Rihanna may be exposing herself as a bad girl. However, she quickly agreed with Elisabeth's view that the photo is about control. The two ideas at first glance are completely contradictory; a bad girl persona implies subjection where

as control implies power. Thus, Sherri succeeded to a more complex understanding of the photo through a reevaluation, which she might not have had Elisabeth not made that claim. This type of thinking is important for audiences as well. Just as Sheri was able to refine her views on the photo shoot and sexuality in general, viewers exposed to multiple views rather than one objective truth would come to more complex and educated beliefs. More specifically, women whose inherent biases prevent them from initially considering photos such as Rihanna's as evidence of control rather than sex would be able to approach the subject with more openness.

Further research into Rihanna and her image exude similar allusions to strength and control rather than promiscuity that support Elisabeth's reading. In "Hard," she sings: "Tougher than a lion/ Ain't no need in tryin' /I live where the sky ends /Yup, you know this." Through these lyrics, she suggests her strength is compared to that of a lion. These lyrics are more aligned with Hasselback's interpretation of the *GQ* photo shoot where she exerts that Rihanna has overcome her relationship with Brown, and instead is in control of her identity. In Rihanna's song "Rude Boy," which is arguably as promiscuous as her *GQ* photo shoot, she sings: Come here, rude boy, boy, can you get it up? / Come here, rude boy, boy, is you big enough? /Take it, take it, baby, baby, take it, take it, love me, love me." Although these lyrics are sexually explicit, her attitude portrays control rather than submissiveness. The parallel between Rihanna's photo shoot and lyrics are strong; in both she exhibits herself licentiously but does so in challenging the traditional notions and readings of women's sexuality.

In this instance it is particularly important for women to question photos such as Rihanna's because they epitomize the ways in which media studies have questioned women

and their objectification. Stuart Hall, a cultural theorist, writes “It is participants in a culture who give meaning to people, objects and events” (3). Hall explains that people give meaning to the things they interact with. In terms of *The View*, the images that viewers see also become a part of their culture. However, it is the meaning, which people themselves give to the subject that are important. The ways people internalize their experiences influence the creation of their meaning. In the *GQ* clip, the women created and recreated the meaning of Rihanna’s photos for themselves. This discussion allowed for differing opinions and new meanings. However, the clip also applies to the ways in which audiences create meaning for themselves. Rather than just seeing the photo, viewers also received commentary from *The View* that explicated the different ways that Rihanna could be seen. Because people create meaning, it is important that these meanings not be myopic or premature, and *The View* facilitates this by offering five different viewpoints.

Not only is it important to consider the ways in which meaning is derived, but this also has implications about news itself. Using Hall’s idea that people create meaning, it is important for news organizations to present the news in an extensive, complete way. Because biases are unavoidable but also crucial to a person’s understanding, there are instances in which opinion is important, especially to viewers. *The View* is a medium that allows viewers to see different approaches to issues and in the case of the *GQ* photo shoot. They were offered a rare opinion that was plausible, but it also showed women in a powerful ways rather than the subjected, inferior positions that people often expect from the media. Viewers were offered the possibility that a suggestive photo was not just exploratory—Rihanna trying to find her sexuality—but that it could also be suggesting strength in women’s sexuality. *The View* complicated the image by offering this reading. Within a strictly hard news, objective

environment, viewers would be offered facts and not opinions. Because people create meanings for themselves, opinions are also important to the development of these meanings. By only including facts, objective news neglects to acknowledge the value of opinion in developing people's understandings of stories.

To be honest, when I looked at Rihanna's photos, I initially found them racy and excessive. I sympathized with Sherri's idea that Rihanna is going through a "bad girl phase." Considering my education in media studies, however, I should have not looked at the photo so narrow-mindedly. After learning about the poor ways women are portrayed by the media historically, and the misconstrued perceptions involved, the first thought I should have had was that the image was one of power. Furthermore, as a woman who has attended school after gender liberation, I should have considered that Rihanna was depicting an image reversal in which women were so comfortable that they elicited respect for men through their sexuality. This was hardly the case though; my first impression was misogynistic—I was subscribing to the ways in which women have always been read by the media and I was only furthering this negative perception.

Interpretations such as Elisabeth's and Sheri's are positive and work to reverse the negative portrayals of women in the media. An essay by D'Acci, a television studies scholar, she describes the nuances of gender representation. She suggests that gender representation should reflect reality to the extent that representations should produce positive images. Although this contradicts Hall because he does not believe gender representation need be realistic, they both share the idea that representations are constructed. Specifically, D'Acci explains that gender is socially constructed—this idea alone is critical to understanding the differences in experience among the co-hosts that account for their differing views on

politics. This also suggests that representation is not only important to providing audiences with images, but that images can also challenge audiences by providing views against the status quo, and that these images of representation can be positive.

By integrating Hall and D'Acci's ideas, the benefits of opinion on *The View* are extended to not only offer audiences with challenging ideas, but they also work to develop women's reputations in the media as a whole. Because the women offer five viewpoints, they represent various ideas, social problems, experiences and cultures that work to inform the public of ways to look at various issues, such as Rihanna's photo shoot.

The View in Politics: The State of the Union Address

Another topic that *The View* featured was the State of the Union address. *ABC's* first coverage began two days before when Sawyer interviewed the President on *ABC World News*. She began by introducing him as a "new," "victorious" "history-making" president. She mentioned that his critics were concerned his plans would not create more jobs. She asked whether the boost would come from stimulus money, and Obama responded that he would focus on job growth. Sawyer rebutted by asking him whether jobs were primary on his agenda during his campaign. The producers then streamed footage from a speech on February 24, 2009 in which Obama said that his plan will save or create 3.5 million jobs, 90% of which are to be in the private sector. Sawyer stated that his claims made it seem like there would be golden opportunities from coast to coast. Obama quickly remarked that that is not what he said, and Sawyer responded with a gasp and clarified that "there was a hope for jobs, at least." Obama then explained that at the time he promised stopping the economic tractions and putting people back to work. He then explained they have saved and created a

few million jobs. He admitted they have still lost seven million jobs. He said he understands the American people, but that he wants to improve things.

Sawyer then asked the question: “to all the people terrified about the deficit, 1.5 trillion federal deficit can you still guarantee there will be no taxes for anyone who makes less than \$250,000 a year? Obama conceded that the best solution was still not to raise taxes. Sawyer then asked about health care. Obama confessed to what he called a “genuine mistake.” He explained that he was too concerned about policy and not process even though he “campaigns on process.” He concluded that he would rather be “a really good one term president than mediocre two term president.”

ABC's primary coverage about Obama's State of the Union address, through its objectivity, provided useful information for audiences. Sawyer's relentless questions about jobs attacked Obama in a way that suggested he was too passive and was late in meeting his campaign promises. Furthermore, her assertion that more jobs have been lost than gained exposed a deficiency in Obama's plans that questioned the success of his presidency. She furthered this by questioning whether despite the deficit, Obama could still promise that those in the middle class will not pay taxes. Sawyer's questions functioned as a watchdog, just as Borden and Tew argued that *TDS* and *TCR* monitored and criticized the media's accuracy and reporting. She asked difficult questions that challenged Obama's plans, and she acted as a voice for people to uncover the President's intentions.

The *ABC World News* interview though, did not portray a complete coverage of the situation. It only presented the views and answers provided by Obama himself. *The View*, on the other hand, explained the State of the Union as an event that affects people and not the

President himself. This type of coverage offered the second part of the story—the ways in which the news informs the public and the ways in which the news is internalized.

After the State of the Union address, Tim Hasselback guest co-hosted *The View* and took the place of his wife Elisabeth. Whoopi began the discussion by saying many people said Obama needed to redeem himself and gain more confidence from the people, and she asked the hosts about how he did. Sheri mentioned how she voted for him and will support him throughout the four years. Joy responded by saying that his tone seemed almost to be begging, as if he “can’t do this alone” and was asking for everyone to “meet halfway.” The women seemed to agree that Obama’s speech was sincere and an attempt at mediating the two parties.

Barbara then mentioned how backstage everyone had mentioned parts that they liked about the address. Tim explained that he admired Obama’s confidence but then found it comedic that it looked as though he was having a thumb war with Pelosi; he said it made him nervous. Joy reacted by describing a time where Obama pulled out the seat for Hillary Clinton and how people claimed he was chauvinistic. She said that we were not used to having gentlemen as Presidents, especially not with George Bush in the White House. Even though Tim’s remark did not add to the conversation and seemed to poke fun at the President, it sparked Joy’s reference to the incident with Clinton, which did extend the conversation. Furthermore, the conversation described the difference in the way Joy interpreted the address as opposed to Tim. Whereas Tim watched the address with criticism of the President, down to the way he shook hands with Pelosi, the women were more interested in the ways in which the President appeared genuine and caring about the issues. This example within *The View* exhibits an important message about which Hall writes. There

are problems inherent with any reading of text. Although meaning is humanly and culturally derived, Hall also makes another important assertion. He states:

It is worth emphasizing that there is no single or “correct” answer to the question, “what does this image mean?” or “What is this ad saying” Since there is no law which can guarantee that things will have “one, true meaning”, [sic] or that meanings won’t change over time, work in this area is bound to be interpretative—a debate between, not who is “right” and who is “wrong”, [sic] but between equally plausible, though sometimes competing and contested, meanings and interpretations. The best way to “settle” such contested readings is to look again at the concrete example and to try to justify one “reading” in detail in relation to the actual practices and forms of signification used, and what meanings they seem to you to be producing. (9)

Hall explains that there is no singular, correct meaning but that meaning must be derived through careful deliberation and through a complete understanding of the text. Furthermore, the “practices and forms of signification” applied to *The View* would refer to the hosts, their opinions, the ways in which their opinions are presented, and what the hosts seem to imply, in this case about the State of the Union Address. Because of the complexity of issues, not only can a co-host’s opinion be misunderstood or misinterpreted, but a co-host may also be wrongly informed. With regard to Hall, the co-hosts would not be solely responsible to the production of another person’s meaning or understanding because meaning is not contingent on one reading. According to Hall, meaning results from the act of interpretation. He also suggests that readings focus on just one instance, and to produce a full meaning, people use a variety of experiences and readings in order to develop an understanding. Thus, meaning is

not dependent on one encounter with a subject, and the viewer is then more responsible for coming to an educated understanding based on a multitude of experiences. This type of multifaceted reading lies in opposition to the journalistic model of objectivity, which seems to assume that readers depend upon reliable news organizations to offer the truth through unbiased yet balanced reporting. Hall's model challenges this view by acknowledging people's experiences in the development of understanding, but also by suggesting that meaning is individual. Although objective news may give readers the opportunity to develop this individual meaning, its self-prescribed responsibility to provide the ultimate truth becomes a limitation for readers in considering other possibilities or experiences on the subject.

Not only does subjectivity allow for viewers to develop opinion, it also is beneficial because it is not bound to the same journalistic principles. As quoted earlier, Borden and Tew describe the ways in which Colbert and Stewart are exempt from journalistic principles such as fact checking and reliability. I would also argue that subjectivity allows for more open criticism as well as personal reporting, which also leads to beneficial information. In the November 19, 2009 episode of *The View*, Elisabeth named the U.S. Preventative Task Force's new mammography guidelines a "gendercide." She was outraged because her mother would have died of breast cancer according to these new regulations. She conducted her own research and found that Utah, a state where insurance does not fund mammographies and which emulated the new task force regulations, had the lowest number of breast cancer diagnosis and also the highest death rate. The clip showed the ways in which any person can conduct his or her own research in order to support a marginal idea unsupported by objective news. *Good Morning America*, which did a segment earlier in the morning on the same topic,

was skeptical of the guidelines, but was unable to prove that the guidelines were preemptively made. Elisabeth, on the other hand, was able to show how the guidelines were hastily established. Another benefit to original and yet subjective reporting is it shows the ways in which people are affected by the news. Regardless of whether the guidelines are in the best interests of the public, they reflect a sensitive subject for many Americans, and few people's initial responses would be to limit breast cancer testing. However, *The View* here functioned as a sounding board for viewers to see people such as Elisabeth who are deeply affected by the topic. Subjectivity, in this way, can work to help overcome the current apathy in the country about important issues.

Hall's suggestion that meaning is culturally derived and individuals create meaning can only apply to limited situations; it suggests that any interpretation is plausible. D'Acci, for this reason, is more useful because she suggests that images and representations in the media need to be positive. Because women have had limited participation in the ownership of the media and few women have had positions of authority, it is important that images of women be positive. Because *The View* provides multiple women with differing viewpoints, the representations are multifaceted and also positive. Women on *The View* are not as one-dimensional as those on objective news, who deliver information but never represent themselves. On the other hand, the co-hosts on *The View* are able to not only portray themselves favorably, but they are also able to be critical of images and the ways in which they are affected. Subjectivity through discussions such as on *The View* demonstrates Hall's ideas. The co-hosts are critical of the news, images, and politics in an attempt to develop meaning for themselves. In doing so, they exhibit Hall's ideas of interpretation. Subjectivity,

therefore, is a superior form for viewer interpretation because it provides a more open, critical, and extensive context for viewers to develop their opinions.

Subjectivity exists on *The View* with the help of the objective news that precedes it. However, objectivity has received significantly greater merit in the news because of its factuality and consistency. However, the objective news model lacks the capacity to criticize or report on issues of representation, and is unable to provide the development of meaning. Due to journalists' obligations to ethics and integrity, they are unable to portray bias and are therefore unable to be critics of the news or to discuss meaning as a whole. Subjectivity, however, aids in viewers' interpretations of the news and their development of meaning by providing opinion and nuances to news. Because the news functions more than to inform viewers but also to help them consider viewpoints about political agendas, social problems, and ideas such as gender and race, it is crucial that discussions of news topics not be limited to objective, factual reporting. Through its nuanced discussions, lively debate, and careful considerations, *The View* and its cast successfully utilize subjectivity and provide a medium that promotes viewers' development of meaning.

Notes

- ⁱ He defines the word “objective” with hesitation because he is unsure about whether objective journalism can exist since biases will always exist among writers.
- ⁱⁱ Ward described the early press as “scattered,” and often political and religious (99). He claims to differ from other scholars because he accredits early journalistic ethics to the 1600s where as most consider the institution of journalistic schools and associations the beginning of ethics during the 1920s (100).
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ward describes the changes between the seventeenth and eighteenth century:
In the seventeenth century, publishers valued impartial reports that contained matters of fact because they maintained a readership, while keeping the censor at bay. In the eighteenth, factuality and impartiality promoted the public sphere, informing public opinion and effective criticism of the government. These values became part of a more ambitious public ethic of journalism. (136)
- ^{iv} He explains that with the onset of the American and French revolutions, the demand for accurate reporting became more and more important as people turned to the press to provide news (137).
- ^v Ward’s commentary on newspapers during the nineteenth and twentieth century are equally valuable as his analysis of news during the French and American Revolutions. He describes objectivity in the twentieth century as evident in two forms: the liberal, elitest newspaper and the popular, egalitarian press. Ward notes the distinction between England and the United States, however these two factors, news as educating the public and news as unbiased information for the masses, are evident in global news during this century. Ward furthers his explanation that after the 1880s, the technology, business, and organization necessary to print newspapers cheaply and to distribute them farther was available (182). Thus, news evolved throughout history because of the need among people to be informed as well as their desire for news to be impartial. Both of these characteristics are included in Mindich’s definition of objectivity; the history of news describes how objectivity became the standard in news today.

^{vi} The article addresses the dangers of news reporting and argues that journalism perpetuates the same individual autonomy as capitalism. In other words, he explains that networks exploit for “the profit of mass appeal” (20).

^{vii} Borden and Tew’s arguments stem from an objective approach—they are concerned with news as truth while *The View* encroaches upon the interpretation of meaning. They later discuss the merits of avoiding journalistic integrity, which is more aligned with *The View*’s agenda.

^{viii} Specifically, Borden and Tew define journalistic obligation as a concern with three factors: gatekeeping, factuality, and objectivity. Gatekeeping refers to “exercising reliability, selecting the important over the trivial while avoiding sensationalism” (304). However, the article fails to provide evidence that *TDS* or *TCR* lack gatekeeping. In fact, the article provides evidence of journalistic shortcomings and it provides an example in which “fake news” is advantageous. Borden and Tew describe an example in which Stewart exposed news stations for sensationalizing Mel Gibson’s drunk driving in 2006. Stewart criticized the major news organizations’ use of film clips in which Gibson blows up cars and drinks alcohol. News stations were providing fragmented and irrelevant clips to perpetrate a violent image of Gibson. Rather than functioning as an example in which journalism enacts journalistic integrity, the article describes a situation in which gatekeeping was lacking in journalism. Despite the authors’ legitimate and arguable observation, the article fails to show how *TDS* and *TCR* lack gatekeeping and instead proposes that journalism lacks the moral integrity to gatekeep and requires a “watch dog” such as *TDS*. This example with Mel Gibson does not prove the advantage of objective news but instead supports Stewart as providing useful, morally intentioned news. Furthermore, in regards to *The View*, Elizabeth Hasselback successfully linked stricter mammography guidelines with higher deaths during the thirteenth season on the 53 episode despite a research group, the U.S. Preventative Task Force, changes in the guidelines. Even though comedians and talk-show hosts are not held to the same journalistic integrity does not mean that they cannot provide productive criticisms and evidence for their claims.

^{ix} Although the article describes the issue of factuality in its entirety, Borden and Tew’s mention of objectivity mimics the same insufficient explanation as their description of gatekeeping. The authors are unable to explain why *TDS* and *TDR*’s lack of objectivity is inferior, just as they were unable to prove why gatekeeping was lacking in these comedic shows. The article explains that the difficulty with establishing a compromise between objectivity and bias is a factor in journalistic integrity. The authors explain that journalists have become slaves to their sources and withhold truth claims from the public regardless of authenticity—in other words, journalists avoid biases in their writing even when they have sufficient knowledge and evidence to propose their opinion as a truth (305). The article proposes that *TDS* escapes this journalistic criticism because it uses comedy as an excuse to avoid a need for objective arguments. Thus, comedy can avoid objectivity as well as present

opinions without backlash. However, the article fails to portray this escape as a negative factor—the article does not explain why subjective as opposed to objective news is a problem. The argument is insufficient—is there an advantage to this objective news? Should *TDS* and *TCR* be bound to the same constraints as journalism? If anything, the article proposes that journalism inhibits journalists from making their well-supported and researched claims to the public. *The View*, therefore, has allowed its hosts and viewers to receive uninhibited journalism at the dispense of authenticity.

^x Mindich's assertions about the importance of balanced questioning and the dependence of facts are exhibited in Sawyer's reporting. By exposing the truth about the police reports, Sawyer carries out an ideal, objective news model.

^{xi} According to the Society of Journalism Professional.

^{xii} Whoopi is often a voice for men, as she was the only one to defend men's affairs on the show (such as when Tiger Woods affairs became public). She often asserts that affairs are only the symptom of a greater and inevitable problem.

Works Cited

- Borden, Sandra L., and Chad Tew. "The Role of Journalist and the Performance of Journalism: Ethical Lessons From 'Fake' News (Seriously)." *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 22.4 (2007): 300-14.
- Code of Ethics*. Indianapolis: Society of Professional Journalists, 1996. *Society of Professional Journalists*. Eugene S. Pulliam National Journalism Center, 1996. Web. 7 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>>.
- D'Acci, Julie. "Television Representation and Gender." *The Television Studies Reader*. Ed. Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill. New York: Routledge, 2004. 373-83.
- Daniel, Stephen H. "Some Conflicting Assumptions of Journalistic Ethics." *Philosophical Issues in Journalism*. Ed. Elliot D. Cohen. New York: Oxford UP, 1992. 51-56.
- Geddie, Bill, prod. "Rihanna's GQ Photoshoot." *The View*. ABC. New York, NY, 7 Jan. 2010. <<http://go.abc.com>>. 14 Jan. 2010. Web. 20 Jan. 2010.
- Geddie, Bill, prod. "Gendercide." *The View*. ABC. New York, NY, 19 Nov. 2010. <http://go.abc.com>. 1 Dec. 2009. Web.
- Geddie, Bill, prod. "State of the Union Address." *The View*. ABC. New York, NY, 27 Jan. 2010. <<http://go.abc.com>>. 1 Feb. 2010. Web. 20

Glasser, Theodore L. "Objectivity and the News Bias." *Philosophical Issues in Journalism*.

Ed. Elliot D. Cohen. New York: Oxford UP, 1992. 176-83.

Hall, Stuart. *Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage

Publications, 1997.

Mindich, David T.Z. *Just the Facts: How "Objectivity" Came to Define American*

Journalism. New York: New York UP, 1998.

Ward, Stephen J.A., *The Invention of Journalism Ethics*. Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University,

2006.

