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# Funny in a Man's World: Women Comedians' Use of Political Satire at the White House Correspondents' Dinner

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FUNNY IN A MAN'S WORLD: WOMEN COMEDIANS' USE OF POLITICAL  
SATIRE AT THE WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENTS' DINNER

BY

JESSICA M. PETERSON

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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2017

FUNNY IN A MAN'S WORLD: WOMEN COMEDIANS' USE OF POLITICAL  
SATIRE AT THE WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENTS' DINNER

This thesis is approved as a credible and independent investigation by a candidate for a Master of Science in Communication Studies and Journalism and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of the thesis does not imply that the conclusions reached by this candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

'Rebecca A. Kuehl, Ph. D.'  
Thesis Advisor

Date

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Date

~~Dean~~ Graduate School

Date

Dedicated in memory to the women who taught me education was the most valuable asset  
you could have.

My mother, Dr. Denise Marie Peterson, for teaching me the best education comes from  
learning about the world around me.

My grandmother, Rita Ann Rens, for teaching me the smartest people in the room aren't  
always the loudest.

I love and miss you both immensely.

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## ABSTRACT

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JESSICA M. PETERSON

2017

Satire and politics are typically considered masculine fields within the societal constructs of the United States. Wanda Sykes and Cecily Strong both navigate these male-dominated worlds with their addresses at the White House Correspondents' Dinner. This analysis views these addresses through three rhetorical lenses: feminist standpoint theory, rhetorical citizenship, and rhetorical and political agency. This study explores the way women's issues in society exposed to various audiences through Sykes' and Strong's satirical addresses. Communication scholars have not previously considered both of these addresses; this analysis furthers our understanding of feminist viewpoints being shared to audiences and encouraging audiences to take civic action on issues facing today's American society.



## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL SATIRE AND THE WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENTS' DINNER**

In 2016, the Democratic Party nominated Hillary Clinton for President of the United States (Democratic National Convention, 2016). In 2016, Amy Schumer headlined Madison Square Garden (Runcie, 2016). In 2016, government officials argued about women's health issues (Gass, 2016b); the United States had a gender pay gap (Peck, 2016); and sexual offenders received three months of punishment (Bever & Wang, 2016). While glass ceilings are being shattered every day in American society, there are areas of concern for women in today's society. The intersection of politics, comedy, and women's issues is an important aspect of U.S. society and needs to be studied. For centuries, men have been able to take part in politics and comedy while women have been the homemakers (Campbell, 1973). While women have advanced into joining men in politics and comedy, this advancement has not happened without criticism. Instead of making fluff jokes about characters, women comedians have branched out into commenting about political issues. Funny women like Amy Schumer, Cecily Strong, Wanda Sykes, Tina Fey, and Amy Poehler have used their positions in society to address issues like women's portrayal in the media, sexual harassment and assault, and gun violence (Gass, 2016a).

In this thesis, I introduce the topic of women and political satire, specifically within the White House Correspondents' Dinner (WHCD), and the ways these women have used persuasive rhetorical strategies to influence their audiences. This first chapter introduces the White House Correspondents' Dinner (WHCD) and the White House Correspondents' Association (WHCA). Then, I address the statement of the problem,

which leads into the background of the problem. I define key terms before, finally, justifying this study's rationale and its importance to communication research and, specifically, rhetorical studies.

### **Introduction to the White House Correspondents' Dinner (WHCD)**

In May 1921, the first White House Correspondents' Dinner (WHCD) was held at the Arlington Hotel in Washington, D.C. Fifty men attended the event, which honors the media who work within the White House (White House Correspondents' Association, 2015). Until Helen Thomas participated in 1962, women were not permitted to attend the WHCD even though they were members of the WHCA and paid membership dues (Thomas, 1999). The WHCD has grown throughout the years; attendance is up to 2,600 guests annually (WHCA, 2015).

Events that are attended by the President attract mass amounts of media coverage. Events like the National Prayer Breakfast and the WHCD allow the President to interact on a more personal level (Fabry, 2016; Waisanen, 2015). Rhetorical studies of the National Prayer Breakfast are also largely underdeveloped (Johnson, 2012), like the WHCD. Similarly, the National Prayer Breakfast is closely related to the WHCD in the attendance and occasion, as Congress invites individuals to the event (Johnson, 2012); whereas, the media invites celebrities and politicians to the WHCD. C-SPAN televises the National Prayer Breakfast, and it garners similar media attention as the WHCD (Johnson, 2012). The focus of studies on the National Prayer Breakfast (Johnson, 2012; Ofulue, 2002) is the persuasion tactics used by Presidents to push their agendas. The National Prayer Breakfast is a place in which the President has the designated rhetorical space to share about his faith and how his policies relate to his faith (Johnson, 2012). The

National Prayer Breakfast mirrors the study of women comedians at the WHCD because space for them to share their messages is already in place through the keynote address at this ceremonial occasion.

Since 1993, CSPAN has covered the WHCD, where the President of the United States delivers a funny monolog, and another keynote speaker follows to close. Few women have hosted the audience of the WHCD solo. Famous women who have spoken at the event are Paula Poundstone (1992), Elaine Boosler (1993), Aretha Franklin (1999), Wanda Sykes (2009), and Cecily Strong (2015) (WHCA, 2015). While comedians have followed Presidential speeches at the WHCD, the focus of the current study is on Wanda Sykes and Cecily Strong, the two women who performed during the Obama Administration (2008-2016). Throughout the years of the Obama administration, comedians have followed President Obama's remarks (WHCA, 2015). Famous comedians such as Seth Meyers, Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, Joel McHale, Wanda Sykes, and Cecily Strong have delivered speeches poking fun at the media, the United States President, and policies (Colletta, 2009; Waisanen, 2009; Becker & Waisanen, 2013). The men who have spoken at the WHCD during the Obama Administration each had their television shows where they critiqued political decisions (Colletta, 2009; Waisanen, 2009; Becker & Waisanen, 2013; Boukes, Boomgaarden, Moorman, & de Vreese, 2015). The women who have spoken during the Obama Administration became famous on sketch comedy shows. Sykes became famous on *The Chris Rock Show* (Sykes, 2014) and Strong became famous on *Saturday Night Live* (NBC Universal, 2015).

While rhetorical scholars have analyzed the rhetorical strategies in speeches given by male comics at the WHCD (Waisanen, 2009; Becker & Waisanen, 2013; Hart, 2013), the women comedians who have spoken at the event have not been analyzed or studied for their unique rhetorical contributions to political rhetoric and shaping public discourse related to political issues. It is important to recognize marginalized voices (Kotthoff, 2006), especially within the realm of politics and comedy. Taking the podium at the WHCD gives the orator the ability to persuade not just their immediate audience, but also target audiences viewing remotely via television or online. The WHCD is uncharted territory for funny women to speak because of the stigma presuming that comedy and politics are activities only men can partake in (Campbell, 1973; Voet, 1998; Campbell & Jamieson, 1978; Patterson, 2012). For centuries, women who have participated in politics and comedy have been outside of the standard set forth by society (Campbell, 1973; Patterson, 2012; Campbell & Jamieson, 1978). Women have been a minority in the comedic world; women who were present and keynote speakers at the WHCD had to fight against the masculine, comedic norms of society.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Many rhetorical critics (Waisanen, 2009; Boukes, et al., 2015; Becker & Waisanen, 2013; Wagg, 2002; Colletta, 2009; Hart, 2013) have analyzed the speeches given by presidents and male comics at this event, but have neglected to incorporate the satirical persuasion used by the women comics at this event. Waisanen (2009) comments on how Colbert and Stewart are important comic rhetors to study because of the amount of civic duty they can teach to their audiences in the public sphere. Colletta (2009) noted that, after Colbert's remarks at the WHCD, the mainstream media that was satirically

attacked by Colbert refrained from commenting on his remarks in the press the next day; however, the Internet clip of his address did garner attention (Colletta, 2009). The audiences who tune into political satire shows, such as the ones formerly hosted by Colbert and Stewart, are typically younger and more female (Becker & Waisanen, 2013). The more female finding is fascinating, as the world of female comedians grows in society.

The muted group of women comedians is important to acknowledge for their contributions to the event. A muted group is when one party has more power over another (Wood, 2005). In the case of the WHCD, male comedians have outnumbered women comedians, leading scholars to focus primarily on the male comedians. This focus follows the typical patriarchal tone of some rhetorical theories (Foss & Griffin, 1995). Sticking to the traditional gender norms of U.S. American society, politics and comedy are also patriarchal areas that have typically muted women's voices (Campbell, 1973; Wood, 2005; Hill Collins, 1989).

Before Jeanette Rankin's historic election in 1917, no woman had served in the United States Congress (House of Representatives, 2016). Before women had the right to vote, they had the right to petition the government, although men tried to keep that right away from them (Zaeske, 2003). In 1915, it was more socially acceptable for women to make public addresses than it had been in the past, although it was still frowned upon for women to try to persuade men (Innocenti & Miller, 2016). Men made most of the decisions in politics until the 15th Amendment gave women the right to vote in 1920 (Wood, 2013). In 1961, United States Supreme Court upheld the statute of the 14th

Amendment, which denied women the opportunity for equal rights with men (Campbell, 1973).

History shows women are valued more for their appearance than their words (Southard, 2011; Patterson, 2012; Zaeske, 2003). The objectification of women has them stereotyped as sexual objects, mothers, and pets/children (Wood, 2013). These gender stereotypes and the roles associated oppose the values which American culture prides itself on - independence, self-reliance, and success (Campbell, 1973). Sex objects are viewed mainly regarding how women are described and observed by men (Wood, 2013). The mothers' stereotype personifies women as caretakers of the family, which makes women seem unfit for participation in the professional world (Wood, 2013). The pet/child stereotype defines women as having to be protected by men because the stereotype says women are as less able to perform in the professional world than men (Wood, 2013). Many women grew up with traditional gender roles that require girls' being submissive to authority (Campbell, 1973). Those gender roles are still seen today, although the roles have shifted from the private to public sphere.

Historically, women have been silenced in physical ways as well. If a woman spoke out against something, there were tools such as ducking stools, gagging, and gossip's bridles used to silence them (Jamieson, 1988; Zaeske, 2003). These restraining tools translate into political discourse because they discourage women from voicing their opinions and views (Kathoff, 2005). From 1917 to 2006, only 313 women have served in the United States Congress (House of Representatives, 2016); today, in the 114th Congress, four out of five members are men (Bump, 2015). Slowly, women have become a bigger force in the world of politics.

In July 2016, the Democratic Party nominated Hillary Clinton for President of the United States, shattering one of the largest glass ceilings in the feminist world. Many other first world countries have had women leaders, such as Angela Merkel and Margaret Thatcher (van Zoonen, 2006). There are currently 11 women serving as Head of State and ten serving as Head of Government throughout the world (UN Women, 2016). Rwanda beats the United States, and every other country, for having the most women serving in parliament; women hold 63.8% of seats in the lower house (UN Women, 2016). The world is slowly advancing the role of women in politics. The advancement of women seen in other areas, including comedy.

Like politics, comedy has largely been a man's world. Many rhetorical studies (Waisanen, 2009; Boukes, et al., 2015; Becker & Waisanen, 2013; Wagg, 2002; Colletta, 2009; Hart, 2013) focus on the satirical comedy of the men who host comedy news shows. Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert are favorites of scholars to study due to the vast amount of content they have produced. Hart (2013) uses *The Daily Show* hosted by Jon Stewart for his object for analysis; his results show a shift away from the traditional ideology of politics and focus on the dialectical choices of Stewart (Hart, 2013). Waisanen (2009) used both Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert in his study when exploring their discourse through the comedic frame and theories of perspective by incongruity by Kenneth Burke. Becker and Waisanen (2013) divided political comedy into two areas of features and effects. The features of political comedy include the rhetorical devices and conventions used and the impact on pop culture. The effects of political comedy include four areas: "knowledge and learning, attitudes and opinion, cynicism and engagement, and processing, understanding, and affinity" (Becker & Waisanen, 2013, p. 161). These

studies (Hart, 2013; Waisanen, 2009; Becker & Waisanen, 2013) all focus on the men of political satire and note the growth of political comedy in American society. These men, in particular, have questioned politicians on their shows and critiqued the news media for their political leanings. They employed the same tactics within the WHCD during their presentations, while also taking jabs at individuals at the event (Waisanen, 2009; Becker & Waisanen, 2013). Sykes and Strong also followed the basic outline provided by the men within their satirical setup but stayed away from making any direct insults about individuals.

### **Background of the Problem**

Few scholars have studied female comedians' political rhetoric at the WHCD, which is situated as a unique standpoint and can offer insight into women's strategies connected to political satire. As noted above, the focus has been mainly on the men, coupled with their late night talk shows. The area of women comedians' use of satire in politics is largely unexplored. Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert are both men highlighted by scholars for their political satire (Becker & Waisanen 2013, Day & Thompson 2012, Waisanen 2009). Waisanen (2009) commented on the ways in which both men critique the news in society through the persona they portray on their news parody shows. For example, Stephen Colbert now hosts *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, but network executives asked him not to use the persona he created for his role on *The Colbert Report* (The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, 2016). This example shows the comedians may be going by their original names, but they are still their personae created by television. This persona becomes personal when taken into a role like hosting the WHCD because the comedians are using their celebrity to deliver the address. This section briefly introduces



celebrity politics, political satire, and women comedians, which I explore in depth in Chapter 2.

**Celebrity politics.** In America in particular, there is a strong emphasis placed upon celebrities acting in politics (Street, 2012). From politicians acting as celebrities, to celebrities advocating for policies, and celebrities becoming politicians, there is an increased focus on the study of celebrities in politics (Street, 2012; Marsh, t' Hart, & Tindall, 2010; Farrell, 2012). The frame of celebrity politics used for this study is celebrities acting as advocates for policies. This type of celebrity politics has increased with celebrities acting on the national stage of politics and advocating through social media, and specifically for women's rights (Rowlands, 2016).

There has been an overwhelming presence of women speaking out for women's rights in political arenas; however, studies of celebrity politics primarily focus on men partaking in this area (Farrell, 2012; Marsh et al., 2010; Street, 2012). Emma Watson, famous for her role of Hermione from the Harry Potter movie and book series, has been an advocate at the United Nations for women's rights throughout the world (Rowlands, 2016). Many of the events of celebrities using their voices for change are in the United Nations' focus on women throughout the world (Rowlands, 2016; Boboltz, 2016). While this is important to note, these women are speaking seriously, not satirically at these events in front of world leaders. Many other female celebrities are sharing messages of female empowerment in a more indirect route through comedy.

Social media has become a platform for celebrities to become involved in public policy. Famous musician, Demi Lovato, is known for calling out other celebrities for focusing on petty issues instead of advocating for issues that matter to society (Delbyck,

2016). The Facebook Live feature has become another area for celebrities to show their advocacy. *Divergent* movie star, Shailene Woodley, utilized the live feature of Facebook to advocate against the Keystone XL Pipeline that has created controversy through the United States, especially with Native Americans in the Dakotas (Johnson, 2016). She joined a group at Standing Rock Reservation as they traveled to Washington, D.C., protesting the construction of the pipeline through sacred tribal lands (Johnson, 2016). These examples show how celebrities are using multiple platforms to advocate for issues pertinent to them, helping to shift American society from "politics policy to policy politics (Marsh et al., 2010 p. )". Although this study focused on the humorous advocacy of Sykes and Strong, it is important to be aware that celebrities have many platforms to influence their audiences on public policy.

**Political satire.** The most well-known names in political satire are Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, and Seth Myers. Studies on the use of political satire tend to focus on the men who comment on the happenings of politics (Becker & Waisanen, 2013; Waisanen, 2009; Boukes et al., 2015; Hart, 2013). In the 2016 election cycle, Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert came out of retirement to comment on both political parties' national conventions. Colbert even likened the 2016 Presidential election to the popular movie and book series, *The Hunger Games*, by dressing up as the fictional host, Caesar Flickerman at the RNC and DNC (Chan, 2016). This connection between popular culture and politics is a generational shift toward a commentary on politics.

Where previous generations would get their political news from the nightly news, today's generations overwhelmingly turn to popular culture to learn about politics. Scholars (Boukes et al., 2015; Colletta, 2009; van Elteren, 2013) contend that a majority

of today's populace gets their political updates from satirical news shows like *The Daily Show* or *The Colbert Report*. Satirical television hosts such as Colbert and Stewart may have become, in the populace's eyes, news anchors.

Shows like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* are exactly that, television shows. These satirical shows tend to create a distrust of news sources among viewers (Hart, 2013). The distrust of the established news media could be a possible result of the slippery slope presented by comedic news shows, especially when audiences misinterpret a joke (Innocenti & Miller, 2016). While the distrust may be one possible result, there are also findings that political satire encourages audiences to search for more information about an issue (Hart, 2013). When Sykes and Strong presented at the WHCD, they highlighted issues about their standpoint as women comedians and could have indirectly encouraged audiences to go in search of more information about the political issues that they covered.

**Women comedians.** A recent important moment for women in political comedy happened in 2008 when Tina Fey parodied then Republican Vice-Presidential candidate, Sarah Palin, and Amy Poehler parodied then-Democratic Presidential nominee Hillary Clinton. However, those studies of this event (Esralew & Young, 2012; Day & Thompson, 2012) focused on the characters of Palin/Clinton and not about Fey/Poehler commenting on political issues within society. Even when Fey and Poehler co-hosted the "Weekend Update" sketch on *SNL*, they were not making satirical statements about issues (Day & Thompson, 2012). The character persona portrayed on "Weekend Update" did not have the power of choosing sides on political issues (Day & Thompson, 2012). This

prior research relates to the study of Strong, as she was another female anchor on *SNL* (NBC Universal, 2015).

More recently, women comedians have become even more outspoken about political issues. In 2015, Amy Schumer became an outspoken advocate for gun control after a shooter opened fire at a theater showing her movie *Trainwreck* (Gass, 2016a). She has also addressed sexual assault and other women's political issues on her Comedy Central show, *Inside Amy Schumer* (Goldstein, 2015). Women went even further in speaking out on women's issues this year as the Democratic National Convention (2016) presented the following comedic speakers: Elizabeth Banks, Lena Dunham, and America Ferrera.

Banks, Dunham, and Ferrera, who are well-known in American culture for being "funny ladies," all took to the DNC stage in 2016 to endorse the Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton (Democratic National Convention, 2016). They also took the time to use their comedic chops to refer to her opponent, Donald Trump. Dunham and Ferreira took the stage together to address the rhetoric used by Trump on women and immigrants (Murthi, 2016). Banks impersonated Donald Trump's entrance at the Republican National Convention, then reminded the crowd that he stole her act from the popular movie and book series, *The Hunger Games*, where she played Effie Trinket, a character who Banks described as being "a cruel out of touch reality-TV star, who wears insane wigs while delivering long-winded speeches to a violent dystopia" (Murthi, 2016). This funny lady's comments about a public figure, and especially a national political party's Presidential nominee, justifies the significance of women comedians' political rhetoric and use of

political satire, especially since many U.S. voters tuned into the Democratic National Convention (Murthi, 2016).

Given the extensive scholarship about celebrity politics and politicians, political satire, and the increasing presence of women comedians and their political rhetoric about public issues, this study combines important areas of literature in communication studies and rhetorical studies. This study used rhetorical analysis to investigate the communication problem of how women comedians at the WHCD can persuade their audiences about public issues, and especially issues that are important to women in the United States.

### **Definitions**

This section defines key terms for this study. Many of the defined words have multiple meanings across disciplines. I offer definitions within the discipline of communication studies and rhetorical studies. Important terms that I define in this section include the following: satire, parody, celebrity politics, marginalization, feminism, standpoint, citizenship, and agency.

Humor can take multiple forms; this study, in particular, focused on the use of satire. Burke's (1984) definition of satire contends that strategic ambiguity is used to cover up insecurities and follies of an individual to out others for the same vices. Current communication scholars revised the original definition of satire given by Burke (Colletta, 2009; Becker & Waisanen, 2013). Colletta (2009) defines satire as, "a form [of humor] that holds up human vices and follies to ridicule and scorn" (p. 859). Satire is unique in humor as it critiques someone or something. Satire contrasts with parody, which gives exaggerating humorous qualities of a public figure (Esralew & Young, 2012). A popular

parody in society today was Tina Fey's *SNL* parody of Governor Sarah Palin; her character was so close to the actual Governor Palin, many people mistook her renditions of Palin to be the vice-presidential nominee (Esralew & Young, 2012). Sykes and Strong at the WHCD are using satire, which is different from parody, because they are speaking while portraying themselves, and not fictional characters, to the audience.

Celebrities can use humor to comment on politics satirically; this opens the door to engaging in celebrity politics. While there are many forms of celebrity politics, the definition for this study is celebrities who use their fame to advocate for political, societal, or economic issues (Wheeler, 2013). Celebrity politics is an important aspect of the study as both hosts of the WHCD are celebrities who enter the world of politics through their rhetoric on women's political issues. They are both celebrity political advocates because they represent marginalized voices. Marginalization is groups who have less power in society than the dominant group (Collins, 1997; Wood, 2005; Campbell, 1973). This study looked at the marginalization of women in the male-dominated areas of politics, comedy, and the media.

Feminist standpoint theory is one of the major lenses to view this study. Feminism is advocating for women's equality in treatment (Voet, 1998). Feminism is important as Sykes and Strong address women's issues. Standpoint defined in a knowledge/power framework is where a group's position in society gives them a different view of the power structures built by a dominant group (Hill Collins, 1997). Sykes and Strong both bring in different backgrounds than are typically heard at the WHCD because they are a few of the only women to address this specific audience. Crenshaw (1989) asserted that intersectionality "is greater than the sum of racism and sexism" (p. 140). Intersectionality

is when elements such as “race, gender, social class, ethnicity, age, and sexuality...of social structure emerge as fundamental devices that foster inequality resulting in groups” (Hill Collins, 1997, p. 376). Additionally, Sykes identifies as African American, and so her intersectional identity offers a different viewpoint on these issues.

This study is not only about the viewpoints of these women but also analyzed the calls to action brought about by these rhetors. Citizenship is an action or calls to action taken by an individual to make positive advancements for society (Voet, 1998). Asen (2004) defined citizenship “as a mode of public engagement” (p. 191). This definition is important because the rhetors are enacting citizenship by participating in the event, and calling upon their audience to take action in a satirical form. Asen (2004) also contended, “citizenship engagement cannot always be known” (p. 195), which means the full extent to which Sykes and Strong reached their audiences is unknown. Agency is defined as “the complex process by which a communicative act materializes out of a combination of individual will and social circumstances” (Geisler, 2004, p. 14). Simply put, agency is the capacity to speak up (rhetorical agency) or take action (political agency), and agency is something that the rhetor attempts to instill in an audience when developing a call to action throughout a speech. This ties into citizenship, but is specifically calling upon the audience by use of auditory persuasion. Agency can be rhetorical and political; both are important as this study focused on women comedians' use of political satire at the WHCD.

### **Justification of Rhetorical Acts and Research Questions**

The issues facing women are similarly important in politics and comedy. The WHCD is a unique rhetorical occasion where comedians enact political satire to

audiences who have the power to share the message delivered by Strong and Sykes to multiple audiences beyond the immediate audience. However, even though there is some literature on celebrity politics (Marsh et al., 2010; Street, 2012; Farrell, 2012; van Zoonen, 2006), female comedians (Patterson, 2012), women's issues in political discourse (Campbell & Jamieson, 1978; Campbell, 1973; Hill Collins, 1997), and political satire (Waisanen, 2009; Becker & Waisanen, 2013; Hart, 2013), scholars have not studied the use of political satire by female comedians speaking about women's political issues in the specific context of the WHCD, which is the purpose of this study.

The transcripts from Wanda Sykes and Cecily Strong's WHCD addresses are used as texts to conduct a close textual, rhetorical analysis. Scholars have not studied the speeches delivered by female comedians at the WHCD in a rhetorical frame, justifying the purpose of this study. Even obtaining transcripts of their speeches proved difficult. Historians archive the President's manuscript from the address from the WHCD for study (Waisanen, 2015), but there was no published transcription of the remarks of Sykes and Strong. I examined the full texts of the rhetors; however, this study focused on the word choices used by both women to address women's political issues. This sample is unique because as noted above, women comedians' use of political satire, especially at the WHCD, is largely understudied. I have excluded the men who have addressed the WHCD in the past in this study's choice of texts for rhetorical analysis due to a focus on how women comedians address women's issues in this specific context.

I chose to study women comedians' speeches that have been recorded and aired on C-SPAN, due to accessibility. Specifically, I selected the two speeches delivered by women since the cable airing of the WHCD as the artifacts for rhetorical analysis. This



sample was selected purposively because it needed to have a focus for a feminist frame. I could have used a broader sample and included the men who have addressed the WHCD to see if they addressed any women's political issues. The selection of the male comedians who addressed the WHCD was decided against because it would have lost the focus on how women communicate about women's issues using political satire. Many communication scholars have studied men's use of political satire.(Waisanen, 2009; Becker & Waisanen, 2013; Colletta, 2009; Hart, 2013). The gap in scholarship creates a need for the study of women's political satire in the communication studies discipline.

The limitation of this sample is the fact that Paula Poundstone, another woman comedian who has hosted the WHCD, is excluded from this sample because her address was before C-SPAN started airing and recording the WHCD. Elaine Boosler, another woman comedian, also hosted the WHCD, and is excluded from the chosen sample due to the fact her address was before C-SPAN started airing the WHCD.

The texts received from CSPAN from an e-mail inquiry were in closed-caption, so the texts were adjusted for glaring errors. The transcriptions noted audience reactions, i.e. booing, cheering, or laughter after a joke. The texts were analyzed while listening alongside the speech recordings. I expected to see Sykes and Strong address women's political issues about women's health, women's pay, women's portrayal in the media, and welfare.

I used close textual, rhetorical analysis to analyze the women comedians' rhetoric at the WHCD. The central research question for this study was: how do women comedians, such as Wanda Sykes and Cecily Strong, use political satire as a rhetorical strategy to address women's political issues at the WHCD? More specifically, through

using the theoretical perspectives of feminist standpoint theory, rhetorical citizenship, and rhetorical and political agency, I sought to answer the following research questions about how and why these women comedians used political satire to address women's issues at the WHCD:

RQ1: How, if at all, do Sykes and Strong attempt to use their feminist standpoints and experiences to engage multiple audiences about women's political issues at the WHCD?

RQ2: How, if at all, do Sykes and Strong attempt to rhetorically create engaged citizens at the WHCD?

RQ3: How, if at all, do Sykes and Strong attempt to cultivate rhetorical and political agency in their audiences, to take action on women's political issues?

**CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT  
SURROUNDING RHETOR, AUDIENCE, AND SUBJECT/PURPOSE OF THE  
WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENTS' DINNER**

The lack of focus on women rhetors in political satire creates a need for a study in this area of communication studies, and specifically, rhetorical studies. This chapter introduces the two rhetors who have produced the rhetorical acts in this study, Wanda Sykes and Cecily Strong. I then address the different audiences exposed to the speeches. The audiences are those apparent to the speaker and those created by their message. Lastly, I address the subject of celebrity politics and the overarching purpose of political satire studied from the speeches given by women comedians.

**Rhetors: Wanda Sykes and Cecily Strong**

Popular communication research studies (Patterson, 2012; Day & Thompson, 2012) have used the women of Saturday Night Live (SNL) to comment about how women comedians portray themselves. In particular, the parody of Tina Fey and Amy Poehler around the 2008 Presidential campaign was of significant study for communication scholars (Patterson, 2012; Day & Thompson, 2012). Women in comedy are not typically considered satirical commentators about politics, but they have been put in roles commenting on the election by the characters they played during the year of the election. Fey and Poehler were also viewed as the "co- anchors" of "Weekend Update" on SNL (Day & Thompson, 2012). While Fey and Poehler played themselves, they had character personae that they presented to the camera (Day & Thompson, 2012). The use of parody is in stark contrast to the political satire used by Sykes and Strong at the WHCD. While presenting at the WHCD, Sykes and Strong were not representing

characters they have played on television but hosted the dinner as celebrities of society. Scripted television allows actors and actresses the ability to hide behind the script, and deliver others' words to a mass audience. When they are writing their script for an event such as the WHCD, for which they were invited to speak, they are speaking as themselves and must rely on their credibility.

The speaker's credibility in this instance creates a unique environment for the rhetor to act. Sykes and Strong are not the first women comedians to address the WHCD, but they joined an "elite sorority" (Kahn, 2015), shared with Paula Poundstone and Elaine Boosler. Poundstone hosted in 1992, and Boosler followed in 1993 (WHCD, 2015). This study excluded the use of Poundstone and Boosler, but it is important to note what they believed about women comedians. During Poundstone's and Boosler's interviews, they commented on how they do not like to distinguish themselves from their male counterparts (Kahn, 2015). Their comments contrast with the gendered comments historically made by male comedians about women in comedy, many of whom do not think women have the capacity to be funny (Patterson, 2012). Poundstone hosted the last year of President George H.W. Bush's presidency, and Boosler hosted the first year of the Clinton administration (Kahn, 2015). The only time gender was noticeable to Poundstone was the day after her speech, when the media reported on the white pantsuit she wore instead of the satire she provided during the dinner (Kahn, 2015). Sykes and Strong were not available for comments for the article published by Kahn (2015) in *Elle* magazine, but their remarks at the WHCD highlight gender discrepancy in comedy, politics, and the media. Exploring the background of the rhetors gave insight into their unique standpoints in society, primarily when addressing women's political issues.

**Wanda Sykes.** Sykes grew up in Virginia near the Pentagon, as her father was an Army Colonel (Lee, 2012). Sykes once appeared on a television program to trace her family's history; she discovered she was a direct descendant of a slave who was partially free due to the fact her mother was a white woman (Lee, 2012). Sykes was the first African-American, lesbian, woman comic to host the WHCD in 2009. She was also the first female to present at the WHCD since the Clinton administration (WHCA, 2015). Sykes is known for covering political issues within her stand-up comedy routines (Sykes, 2014; Maynard, 2006). The author of the book, *Yeah, I Said It*, she confronts controversial issues (Sykes, 2014). At the end of the forward in her book, *Yeah, I Said It*, Sykes reminds the reader she has the freedom of expression and speech given to her in the United States Constitution and to not be offended by her thoughts (Sykes, 2004). In 2008, at a rally in Las Vegas, Sykes announced she was gay and married to a crowd of about 1,000 (Warn, 2008). In 2010, she received the GLAAD Award for her promotion of equal rights of the LGBTQ community in society (Sykes, 2014). She criticized the Bush administration's stance on same-sex marriage (Maynard, 2006). She also criticized his appointment for attorney general, John Ashcroft, by writing, "I went out and got me four abortions" (Sykes, 2004, p. 32). Sykes also understands the importance of females in comedy; she had a special on the *Oprah Winfrey Network* about female comedians called "Herlarious" in July 2014 (Sykes, 2014). Society has framed Sykes as a controversial and funny woman.

Sykes may push for women to become involved in politics and comedy, but that did not stop the media from comparing her to her male counterparts. For example, Parker (2009) compared Sykes to Stephen Colbert for her use of satire when addressing Rush

Limbaugh and Governor Sarah Palin. In the days following Wanda Sykes' address at the WHCD, conservative media outlets across the country questioned if she went too far when speaking about Rush Limbaugh (Fox News, 2009). In the joke about Limbaugh, she likened him to a hijacker on 9/11 (Zeleny, 2009). This is one of the many controversial comments Sykes has made throughout her career that makes her a profound rhetor for this study. On the other side is Cecily Strong, who is considered a newcomer in comparison to Sykes.

**Cecily Strong.** Cecily Strong has recently begun her career as a famous comedian. Strong grew up near Chicago, Illinois, and graduated from the California Institute of Arts with her bachelor's of Fine Arts (NBC Universal, 2015). After working at improvisation clubs and performing at different sketch comedy festivals, Strong got her break in 2011 on *SNL* (NBC Universal, 2015). Strong became famous on *Saturday Night Live* hosting "Weekend Update" and performing in other skits. After the terror attack in Paris in November 2015, *SNL* creator, Loren Michaels, asked Strong to do a cold open for the show following the attack to show solidarity in the face of heartbreak (Sims, 2015). Other comedians who performed after the terror attacks in Paris were able to use satire during their remarks; in contrast, Strong gave a somber introduction to *SNL* (Sims, 2015). In May 2015, Strong hosted the WHCD, becoming the fourth woman to roast the media and President (Greenberg, 2015). She was the first straight woman comic to host the WHCD in over 20 years, and the first woman since Sykes to host.

Strong has spoken out about women's political issues outside of her address to the WHCD. In an interview in Cannes on June 21, 2016, Strong revealed she had once worked with an abusive man at a theater (Atkinson, 2016). In an interview about gender

equality, conducted with fellow *SNL* cast members Vanessa Bayer and Aidy Bryant, Strong stated, "Women are afraid to speak out because you get fired, you leave" (Atkinson, 2016, para. 4). The act of Strong speaking out against her abuser gives her credibility for relating to women and women's issues in society today.

Both Sykes and Strong's Twitter accounts are another location where they spread their messages, combining their celebrity with political activism to their followers. Sykes (@iamwandasykes) rants about politics, football, and everything in between. On September 8, 2016, Sykes tweeted about how disgusted she is with politics and how she's been avoiding network news. Strong (@cecilystronger) uses her account similarly to Sykes; however, Strong utilizes the retweet feature more often when dealing with issues. In her most recent retweets, she has tweeted about issues such as racism towards Leslie Jones and has retweeted the UN Women's tweet of the article of Strong sharing her story of abuse.

### **Audience: Politicians, Celebrities, and the Media**

Sykes and Strong address an immediate audience of the media, celebrities, and politicians in attendance at the WHCD. Their reach expanded farther than the audience that surrounded them, including the target audience, created audience, and the agents of change (Campbell, Huxman, & Burkholder, 2015). The audiences reached by Sykes and Strong expand due to the advancement in technology with their speeches available online. This advancement expanded the scope of the audience to be impacted by these female rhetors over time.

**Immediate audience.** The WHCD is composed of a diverse immediate audience of politicians, actors, and media figures. To attend the WHCD, media outlets such as

CNN, Fox, Time, The Huffington Post and NBC purchase tables to seat their guests (Andrews- Dyer, 2015). Who receives an invitation is up to the executive officials of the particular media outlet, which is parallel to the National Prayer Breakfast, where members of Congress send invitations (Johnson, 2012; Fabry, 2016). The guests invited to the WHCD are in contrast to other Washington, D.C. events such as the National Prayer Breakfast. The National Prayer Breakfast is normally made up of Washington politicians, religious leaders, and media members who focus on religion (Koran, 2016). Most events in Washington, D.C. are attended by politicians and include media coverage; however, with the prominence of speakers at the WHCD, it has become highly attended by media moguls, celebrities, and politicians alike (Andrews-Dyer, 2015, Goodin, 2009; Parker, 2009). This event creates a unique setting in which Sykes and Strong can address members of the audience who could make changes regarding social, political, and economic issues.

Sykes' immediate audience was difficult to find. In 2009, a majority of media outlets denied releasing their list of celebrity attendees (Goodin, 2009). This restriction is because it was taking longer than usual to confirm celebrity guests (Goodin, 2009). After the event had taken place in Washington, D.C., reports from the event included some of the prominent names of celebrities who attended. These guests included: actors and actresses Ben Affleck, Jennifer Garner, Natalie Portman, Demi Moore, Ashton Kutcher, Kerry Washington, Anne Hathaway, Eva Longoria, Kevin Bacon, and Jon Hamm; famous Supermodel, talk show host, and creator of America's Next Top Model, Tyra Banks; and famous musician Jon Bon Jovi (Goodin, 2009). The lack of coverage of guests from 2009 was in contrast to the lists given of Strong's audience in 2015.



Strong's audience also included famous politicians, media moguls, celebrities, and journalists, some of whom were present at Sykes' 2009 WHCD address. In 2015, American Sniper star, Bradley Cooper, and director Christopher Nolan were guests of Time (Andrews- Dyer, 2015). NBC Universal invited an array of celebrities, politicians, and White House aides to sit at their table for the dinner (Andrews-Dyer, 2015). AOL hosted professional athletes Russell Wilson (quarterback for the Seattle Seahawks), Frank Kaminsky (Wisconsin Badgers basketball player), and New England Patriots coach, Bill Belichick (Andrews-Dyer, 2015). It is not only journalists and media moguls who attend this dinner, but a mix of various audience members for the "nerd prom," as the Twittersphere named the WHCD (Bump, 2015).

**Target audience.** The power of the Internet allows for videos, such as the artifacts I analyze for this study, to go viral and impact millions of people. Sykes' video has over one million views (1,325,403 as of April 13, 2017) (YouTube, 2017). Comments on Sykes' videos dubbed her as one of the best WHCD hosts (YouTube, 2009). Strong's YouTube (2015) video of her speech at the 2015 WHCD had 1,899,210 views as of April 13, 2017. Comments on her video show that a majority of viewers thought her comments were strong and that she "took no prisoners" (YouTube, 2015). This comment shows their speeches can have a tangible impact on Internet viewers.

Sykes and Strong both targeted politicians and media during their addresses as well. Sykes addressed the conservatives' criticisms of the President; she defended him against Rush Limbaugh, who said he hoped Obama failed (Saltonstall, 2009). Strong made cutting remarks about racial issues in America, police brutality, and women's issues (Johnson, 2015). While Johnson (2015) covered her content, the headline given to his

story countered Strong's (2015) appeal to the media when she asked the media to not comment on women's wardrobe because "that is not news". The title of his article published in the Chicago Tribune was, "Strong looks sharp at the White House Correspondents' dinner" (Johnson, 2015).

**Created audience.** Through the messages they sent, Sykes and Strong rhetorically created audiences as well. Both comedians created engaged citizens because of their satire used to address issues, and specifically women's issues, in society. Sykes used constitutive rhetoric when addressing the notion of President Obama failing, which was put forth by conservative talk show host Rush Limbaugh. While some saw her comments as attacks and horrifying (Saltonstall, 2009), others may have agreed with her comments, allowing them to think of Obama in a positive light. She also asked for change from the media when she mentioned how President Obama is always caught without a shirt on, which leads to the sexualization of the President. Since she highlighted Obama in such a positive light in 2009, she exposed the audience to a more favorable view of him as well.

Additionally, Strong's (2015) remarks about Hillary Clinton being the next President of the United States did not persuade everyone, even though she carried that theme throughout her speech. Charland (1987) proposed that we have to take Burke's notion of "identification" as part of the tactics of "persuasion" used by rhetors to create a collective identity. Strong's comments about Clinton during her speech are an example of constitutive rhetoric, as she can persuade people of Clinton's presidential qualities (Charland, 1987). Since she stated Clinton's name throughout her speech at the 2015 WHCD, she was exposing audiences to the idea of having Clinton as President (Strong,

2015). While this statement may not have changed the outcome, Hillary Clinton did accept the Democratic nomination for President in July 2016.

**Agents of change.** The media influences popular opinion through disseminating their messages via television, radio, and the Internet (Engel, 2014). The media can construe messages based on the ideological leanings of their networks (Engel, 2014). Sykes (2009) advocated for the success of the Obama administration by making jokes about conservative outlets. This created backlash from news sources with right leaning views (Fox News, 2009; Staltonstall, 2009). Sykes' satire poking fun at Rush Limbaugh was seen as an attack upon a person, whereas Strong generalized with the audience as a whole for most of her performance.

While Strong did poke fun at the President, she did not call many others out by name. Strong encouraged the media to report news, and not report about what women are wearing (Strong, 2015). Since the media shares their message with the mass populous of the United States, it was important for Strong to have them take an unofficial oath. She criticized the members of the media who were in attendance, poking fun at BuzzFeed for their lists to share the news (Yahr, 2015). She also touched on the issue of race and policing, which since Ferguson, MO has permeated society, telling Obama his hair is white enough to talk back to the police (Yahr, 2015). As an agent of change, media outlets can push issues to the forefront of the U.S. public's lives and leaders of the nation.

Those who can make the changes in society that underline the comedy used by Sykes and Strong are the media and members of Congress present at the WHCD. Legislators can encourage legislation to be proposed to create change. Sykes praised the Obama administration for their dedication to raising teacher pay; the audience around her

heard these praises. Strong (2015) poked fun at members of Congress about women's health issues by saying she wouldn't "tell them how to do their job, that would be like them telling her what to do with her body". This concept resounded with the American people, as the media and the government constantly discuss women's health issues.

The American people are also agents of change. Since the masses can view these speeches, they can encourage everyday people to realize the underlying messages delivered by Sykes and Strong. The more jokes made about an issue; the more likely citizens are going to actively seek out information about the issue (Hart, 2013). Sykes and Strong encouraged citizens to engage in social change to make a difference regarding the discrepancies they see in society with those who are similar to them. Citizens can take the ideas distributed by Sykes and Strong and put them into action in their lives. By sharing the remarks of Sykes and Strong with others or actively lobbying the government for action on issues, Sykes and Strong addressed how citizens can make a change in American society.

### **Subject and Purpose: Celebrity Politics, Political Satire, and Women Comedians**

The focus of this study is to understand how women comedians use political satire to influence their audiences. It is vital to understand how the world of celebrity intersects with politics, how to enact political satire, and how women comedians differ from their male counterparts. This section gives background on the areas of celebrity politics, political satire, and women comedians. This information leads to the understanding of why the study is of importance for communication and rhetorical scholars.

**Celebrity politics.** Today's world of fame blends celebrities and politicians; from advocacy to use of the popular app, Snapchat, politicians, and celebrities are main

fixtures in U.S. society (Street, 2012). The roles of celebrity and politician have been blending over time, from celebrities becoming prominent politicians to politicians becoming high profile celebrities (Wheeler, 2013). Many studies have centered on the rise of celebrity politicians such as Ronald Regan, the Obama family, the Clintons, Angela Merkel, and other heads of state (Wheeler, 2013; van Zoonen, 2006). There has also been research on the impact of female celebrities endorsing candidates; specifically, Oprah endorsing Obama during the 2008 presidential election (Kuehl, 2010). Van Zoonen (2006) recognized the importance of specifically studying women who hold power and how they become celebrities. She claimed female heads of state become celebrities not based on the merits of their work, but because of being the first of their gender to hold the position of power (van Zoonen, 2006). Women's upward mobility as politicians is important to understand, but it is equally as important to look at women celebrities who advocate for issues in society.

While this area is of importance to study, this study focuses on celebrities using their prominence for advocacy. Van Elteren (2013) noted how politicians have historically used Hollywood stars to entice voters. Celebrities have gone beyond attending events to increase attention; they have become political participants in "electioneering, fundraising, lobbying and so on" (van Elteren, 2013, p. 265). Celebrities who participate in political advocacy impact the media coverage given to an event (Marsh et al., 2010). This means even though the event may be a night to celebrate the WHCA, which itself is a media event, the celebrity status of the host also influences the amount of coverage given to the event. The more celebrities participate within the realm of politics, the more they hold sway within a party, and it bolsters their brand of celebrity

(van Elteren, 2013). Oddly enough, van Elteren (2013) also claimed Americans tend to trust celebrities who participate in politics more than politicians. For this study, this means the rhetoric used by Sykes and Strong may have had a more profound impact because citizens may view them as more trustworthy than conventional politicians, such as President Obama or Presidential candidate Hillary Clinton.

Celebrities have become more active in endorsing candidates for political office. In 2008, Oprah Winfrey endorsed President Barack Obama for the nomination; the first time she has endorsed a candidate during her public career (Kuehl, 2010). The 2016 Democratic National Convention overflowed with celebrities from actors in "Shondaland" (i.e., Shonda Rimes, creator of *Grey's Anatomy*, *Scandal*, and *How to Get Away with Murder*) to business leader, Michael Bloomberg (Garofalo, 2016). This blending shows the shift in the political practice of reaching voters. This emergence of entertainment celebrities on the national election scene has turned the world of politics into a spectacle (Street, 2012). These examples translate into the WHCD because to get their points across, Sykes and Strong must entertain their audiences while simultaneously attempting to persuade them on political issues.

**Political comedy.** Scholarship has examined many forms of humor; parody and juxtaposition are common areas of study for women comedians (Landay, 1999; Patterson, 2012), while the area of women using satire is largely unexplored. A parody is a hyperbolic portrayal of quirky traits of a prominent figure or an actor (Patterson, 2012). As noted above, Tina Fey is well-known for her parody of former vice-presidential candidate, Sarah Palin. Juxtaposition dramatizes cultural phenomena in the real world (Landay, 1999). Audiences see juxtaposition on popular television shows such as *I Love*

Lucy (Landay, 1999), and more recently, Tina Fey's *30 Rock* (Patterson, 2012).

Juxtaposition is different from satire because instead of using their voices to comment upon society, both Lucille Ball and Tina Fey created shows and characters to make comments on society.

Political satire is not simply a parody of current politicians as seen on shows like SNL, but a critique of what politicians are doing and how they are doing it (Hart, 2013). Parody relies on character flaws and quirks to make them humorous; in contrast, satire focuses on the issues or the decisions politicians have made and comments on the status quo (Colletta, 2009). "Satire is defined as a form that holds up human vices and follies to ridicule and scorn" (Colletta, 2009, p. 859). Political satire encourages the audience to pay more attention by using humor (Boukes et al., 2015). For these reasons, it is important to study political satire as a form of rhetoric, especially with the upward mobilization of women and women comedians in today's society.

Humor may encourage the audience to pay more attention, but it can also have a negative effect if not employed correctly. When using humor, the rhetor must be aware of the message they want to send, especially if they want their audience to act upon their message instead of brushing it off (Innocenti & Miller, 2016). Innocenti & Miller (2016) analyzed political humor used during the women's suffrage movement by Anna Howard Shaw. This study was similar to studies done by Southard (2011) and Zaeske (2003) but differed as they looked at the humor used. Shaw was also unique as she was a woman who used agency to further her agenda to create change in society (Innocenti & Miller, 2016; Southard, 2011; Zaeske, 2003). In their study, they used articles and biographies from Shaw to draw upon her use of humor and the way her humor was received

(Innocenti & Miller, 2016). Shaw encouraged men to pass the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which would give women the right to vote. She had to employ humor to persuade her audience to support the Amendment without having them dismiss her claims (Innocenti & Miller, 2016). Innocenti and Miller (2016) stated, "Failing to appreciate her [Shaw] humor would be a fallible sign of an inability to follow her political reasoning" (p. 378). This claim resonates with this study because it shows why people laugh at jokes, even if they do not always understand them. It also connects to the advocacy used by Sykes and Strong, because even though their audience may not understand the joke, the joke itself is creating recognition of the issue.

As noted above, a majority of the studies previously done on political satire have focused mainly on the "witty men" on television (Becker & Waisanen, 2013; Waisanen, 2009). Using *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show* as artifacts to study, a majority of political satire studies have emphasized only the men of satire (Colletta, 2009; Becker & Waisanen, 2013; Waisanen, 2009; Hart, 2013). One way to expand this area of study would be to look at the ways in which the women who host "Weekend Update" on SNL use political satire. Former SNL cast member, Tina Fey, was one who utilized political satire within her reports on "Weekend Update." One memorable moment was when she criticized the media for focusing on "fluffy news" instead of real issues like the AIDS epidemic (Day & Thompson, 2012). Fey has utilized components of satire, but always while acting within a television show as her setting.

While the opportunities for women to engage in political satire in U.S. society may be slim, there is still need to recover their voices. There is a need to focus on how women utilize political satire to mobilize their audiences to take action on women's



political issues. It has been historically rare for women to be able to enact political agency (Southard, 2011; Zaeske, 2003; Campbell & Jamieson, 1978). Understanding how women speakers use political satire to critique the power structures and status quo in the United States aids understanding of how other movements can be further encouraged by giving voice to those typically marginalized within a culture.

**Women comedians.** Men have dominated the field of comedy, but there are funny ladies who are traditionally brushed aside. From Lucille Ball's hit television show *I Love Lucy* to Amy Schumer's addressing date rape culture on her sketch comedy show, women have been gaining momentum. Historically, women who have partaken in comedy have been viewed as unfeminine and ugly (Patterson, 2012). Famous comedian John Belushi threatened to quit *SNL* if all the female writers were kept on the show because he argued that women are not funny (Hill & Weingrad, 1986). Lucille Ball had to play the character of a dumb housewife in her iconic television show, but this helped her highlight the gender discrepancies in society (Landay, 1999). Tina Fey used similar juxtaposition to Lucille Ball on her popular show *30 Rock* (Patterson, 2012), but instead of the domestic context, the show's setting was on the set of a television show, in a workplace. Slowly, the women of comedy are transforming the world of comedy to be more inclusive.

Using Strong and Sykes' WHCD speeches, I analyze how they made statements on the current political status quo by using the rhetorical strategy of political satire. Neither of these speeches have been studied as artifacts of rhetorical political satire. Both Sykes and Strong faced scrutiny for their performances at the WHCD of breaking the traditional gender roles assigned to women (Kahn, 2015; Staltonstall, 2009). The woman

rhetor herself is violating traditional norms associated with women in American society by speaking out (Campbell, 1973). The media scrutinized Sykes for her choice of outfit; she wore a white pantsuit to give her speech (Kahn, 2015). The audience also criticized Sykes for her comments about conservative talk show host Rush Limbaugh (Staltonstall, 2009). The audience audibly booed during parts of Strong's address during some of her criticism of the media and politicians (Kahn, 2015). The way in which Sykes and Strong address issues is considered to be masculine in American society because of their use of political satire, which makes them face negative comments by those who view society in the traditional sense as they violate gender norms (Campbell, 1973; Patterson, 2012).

Women rhetors have a need to be recovered in the study of rhetoric and communication as a discipline. As I have previously shown, many of the studies of rhetoric focused on celebrity politics and political humor have focused on the men within these fields of study (Becker & Waisanen, 2013; Waisanen, 2009; Hart, 2013; Colletta; 2009). The world of women rhetors is increasing as women are breaking glass ceilings by participating in activities historically dominated by men. In 2016, Hillary Clinton shattered the ultimate glass ceiling for women in being the first woman in a major political party to be nominated for the President of the United States. By using their speeches to influence others, Sykes and Strong used their voices to mobilize others for their cause, to promote women's experiences and women's issues to the broader public. Calls to action are examples of civic duty (Asen, 2004; Kock & Villadsen, 2012; Voet, 1998). Sykes and Strong both call on agents of change to take action, which is an enactment of rhetorical citizenship. In the next chapter, I turn to an in-depth explanation of feminist standpoint theory, rhetorical citizenship, and rhetorical and political agency,

which taken together, provide the theoretical lens for an analysis of Sykes' and Strong's political rhetoric and use of satire to communicate about women's issues.

## **CHAPTER THREE: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES OF FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY, RHETORICAL CITIZENSHIP, AND RHETORICAL AND POLITICAL AGENCY**

Using their voices for action, Sykes and Strong present the perspectives of underrepresented groups in society. In this chapter, I explain the theories I used to study Sykes' and Strong's WHCD addresses. Also, justifications have been added in each section to explain the fit of each lens with the two rhetorical artifacts. The first, feminist standpoint theory, shows why it is important to hear from Sykes and Strong. The second, rhetorical citizenship, explains how it is part of their civic duty to speak on behalf of the groups to which they belong. The third, rhetorical and political agency, explores how and why people are motivated through rhetoric and public discourse to take action on political issues.

### **Feminist Standpoint Theory**

Feminism has gone through many stages during history, from the 1st wave of the women's suffrage movement that granted women the right to vote, to today's society where women are still breaking the glass ceiling in historically male-dominated fields (Cottle, 2016). The first period of feminism at the end of the 18th century fought for women's equal rights, which would make their gender equal to men (Voet, 1998; Southard, 2011). The second period from 1918-1940 is when women's suffrage achieved upward mobility for women in American society, but when the Second World War started, and women's rights movements diminished (Voet, 1998). The second wave of feminism from the 1970's onward was a rebellious age of women; there was still gender inequality in the workplace, in the home, and in society in general (Voet, 1998). Nancy

Hartsock developed feminist standpoint theory during the second wave of feminism because the second wave placed a large focus on social and political voice for women (Changfoot, 2004). Today, women are still fighting for equal pay, women's health issues, and other issues that oppress women in society (Peck, 2016).

Sykes and Strong both provided a different worldview than their male counterparts when they took the stage at the WHCD. Wood (2013) explained: "Standpoint theory complements symbolic interactionism by noting that societies are made up of different groups that are organized in social hierarchies" (p. 59). By using standpoint theory, I communicate the significance of Sykes' and Strong's performances at the WHCD based on their position in society as women in the United States. Standpoint theory also says that those who stand outside of the standardized "normal" can bring unique insights (Wood, 2013; Campbell, 1973; Changfoot, 2004). This standpoint is important especially on the occasion of the WHCD, which traditionally favors men in politics, comedy, and even in the attendance at the event. Both Strong and Sykes utilize political satire at the WHCD because they have a dual insight of being women in comedy, which grants them an insight into another "man's world" of politics.

These outsider's viewpoints allow them to critique groups on behalf of women. A major component of feminist standpoint theory is that different groups in society have different social interactions and views of society (Wood, 2013). This theory helps to answer my research questions because standpoint theory says that marginalized groups produce new insights into society (Wood, 2013; Hill Collins, 1997; Changfoot, 2004; Voet, 1998). Sykes and Strong speak on behalf of women's issues because this standpoint will not dissolve the group of women they represent (Hill Collins, 1997). Hill Collins

(1997) talked about how the civil rights movement of the 1960's had fairly disbanded after the end of segregation, but the advocacy of women's rights has never disbanded, it's only shifted in the paradigm over time. The subgroup of women will not go away over time; throughout history, women have been working towards advancing women in society.

Standpoint theory derived from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), a German philosopher, who noted in 1807 that one's socioeconomic location in society influences their views of the society they live (Wood, 2013). Hegel's theory developed based on the study of a master and his slaves. This focuses on the power dynamic built between two different groups of people (Wood, 2013). Scholars have extended this power framework into looking at various power struggles faced by groups of minorities, specifically women (Changfoot, 2004). When Hartsock developed feminist standpoint theory in 1983, she acknowledged lesbians and women of color but neglected to include them in her standpoint (Changfoot, 2004). This beginning scholarship helped Hill Collins (1997) develop the feminist standpoint theory to identify power struggles faced by groups who face discrimination based on sex, race, age, and sexuality.

This theory is also a Marxist theory because it deals with the struggles of power within a patriarchy (Wood, 2005; Hill Collins, 1997). When Hill Collins (1997) developed standpoint theory regarding race and feminism, she theorized it as a knowledge/power framework. According to Wood (2005), a central claim to this argument is that "women's lives are systematically and structurally different from men's lives and, that these differences produce different (and differently complete) knowledges"

(p. 61). Sykes and Strong, therefore, bring new knowledges to the traditionally masculine areas of media, politics, and comedy.

A standpoint is achieved through critical reflection of power relations and dealing with struggle (Wood, 2005). The women in these texts have a unique insight into women's political issues that the media and government do not, as traditionally patriarchal institutions in the United States. Sykes and Strong do not hold as much power as the politicians and media members in the audience at the WHCD. This allows them to tell the people of power what they, representing typically marginalized voices of women, and specifically, women of color, think of women's political issues in government and the media. This answers the question of how Sykes and Strong use their unique standpoints as members of marginalized groups to persuade their audience about women's political issues.

Another aspect of the feminist standpoint explored in this study is the idea of intersectionality. Intersectionality means the convergence of two different standpoints to create a new "intersection" of a viewpoint (Crenshaw, 1989; Campbell & Jamieson, 1978). Crenshaw (1989) drew upon historical court cases of Black women whose cases fit either the race standpoint or the women's standpoint, but not both. Southard (2011) noted that while there was activism for women's rights, there was also still exclusion of people lower on the socioeconomic scale and racism in some women's movements. This scale places a bind upon Black women because they are in between the two sides of the women's rights movement and the civil rights movement. Skyes specifically has this unique viewpoint because she is African-American, a woman, and also a lesbian. She combines all of these viewpoints to create a new voice on the national stage. While

Strong is a heterosexual, "ethnically ambiguous" female, she also speaks about issues of race during her WHCD performance (CSPAN, 2015). African American men have found emancipation through the civil rights movement; Caucasian women have begun to find a voice through the different waves of feminism; African American women are still working on figuring out what group they belong to, or if they should be their own (Crenshaw, 1989; Southard, 2011). Sykes and Strong are recovering women's lost voices in this area of rhetoric. Sykes and Strong are in the group of women's lost voices as the news coverage surrounding their speeches is quite limited.

Feminist standpoint theory is the best way to analyze these texts because Sykes and Strong are both speaking on behalf of traditionally marginalized groups of women, and specifically, women of color. This lens is the best lens for analysis of this communication issue because it addresses the power struggles women have traditionally faced in society, and how women overcome making the personal political (Campbell, 1973). It is the best theory for studying this topic because it is important to know how women's standpoints (including their experiences, worldview, and identity) in society give them a unique rhetorical position to discuss and advocate for women's political issues.

### **Rhetorical Citizenship**

The oratory of political issues can create enactments of citizenship. The rhetorical citizenship being used in this study is defined by Keith and Cossart (2012) as a "set of commutative and deliberative practices that in a particular culture and political system allow citizens to enact and embody their citizenship, in contrast to practices that are merely 'talking about' politics" (p. 46). This is the best definition of citizenship because it



allows citizens to connect emotion with reason (Keith & Cossart, 2012). Citizenship is important for the study of Sykes and Strong because the audience must connect the emotion in humor to the reasoning in their rhetoric.

Rhetoric has historically been used to facilitate discussion about political issues. William Keith and Paula Cossart discuss the use of public deliberation by citizens enacting citizenship (Keith & Cossart, 2012). "A discourse theory conceives of citizenship as a mode of public engagement" (Asen, 2004, p. 191). A discourse theory says citizenship is not static. It is a fluid, ever-changing dynamic to be explored by all. Sykes and Strong both engage in citizenship within their addresses at the WHCD. Asen (2004) claimed the simple act of speaking out about issues creates agency for the audience. By publicly speaking about the state of society, one can enact citizenship by representing marginalized voices. Rai (2010) contended that when private issues become public, it creates a more inclusive society. Sykes and Strong used their addresses as a mode of civic engagement to encourage marginalized voices in their audiences to engage in social change.

Historically, women have engaged in public forums to represent women's issues. Women could not organize public forums in the 1800's without a male assisting them (Keith & Cossart, 2012). Keith and Cossart (2012) asserted in their study that while women were in the audience, women were rarely presenters at these public forums. For Sykes and Strong to be two of a handful of women to host the WHCD continues with the historical themes of the 19th century, where women were a rarity as public speakers about political issues. That tradition has been obsolete since women's suffrage, but women are still working to obtain equal rights within U.S. society (Voet, 1998).

Asen (2004) hinted at using artifacts, such as Sykes and Strong's addresses, to study citizenship when he stated: "Democracy's heart does not beat in the halls of Congress or in the voting booth, but in everyday enactments of citizenship" (p. 197). The public sphere is an ever changing site for rhetorical invention (Rai, 2010). Most people believe that participating in a government is a democracy, but democracy in itself is about being a servant leader (Greenleaf & Spears, 2002). Servant leaders use their voices to encourage participation and discussion about issues in society (Greenleaf & Spears, 2002). Both Sykes and Strong are good examples of enacting rhetorical citizenship because they are giving voice to marginalized groups of people using the public forum of the WHCD.

Asen (2004) also noted communication delivery needs to be "creatively and aesthetically engaging" (p. 197). Historically, U.S. Presidents have used creative language when encouraging citizens to do their part during times of economic crisis (Asen, 2010). The political satire and humor within Sykes and Strong's addresses allow for a captive audience and memorable messages. As Asen (2004) explained about using rhetorical citizenship, "a creative, aesthetic uses of communication promise to reconnect people to public affairs and each other" (p.197). Beasley (2006) studied the use of imagination needed by citizens of the European Union (EU) because the typical state system used in a Western democracy is not as loyal to their home nation due to the community built by the EU. By utilizing humor in their addresses, Sykes and Strong create a lighter atmosphere in which to discuss serious issues and encourage the audience to stretch their imagination.

By addressing the WHCD, Sykes and Strong not only utilize their standpoints, but they also enact citizenship by encouraging others to speak up. Celebrities have the ability to reach apolitical audiences when they address policy and give voice to marginalized groups in society (Marsh et al., 2010). Asen (2004) wrote: "More voices bolster public agendas because they raise distinct perspectives and encourage different ways to participating" (p. 199). The more voices heard within a society; the more education comes from hearing one another. There is a risk of having other, marginalized positions and beliefs represented within conversations about citizenship and enacting citizenship with diverse others (Asen, 2004; Asen, 2010); this will either challenge or strengthen one's beliefs.

Rhetorical Citizenship theory allows for exploration into the call to actions created by both Sykes and Strong. Throughout most of contemporary history, feminism and citizenship have been conceptualized separately (Voet, 1998). Advocating for equal treatment of women within politics, the media, and comedy is an act of rhetorical citizenship. This framework allowed for an in-depth analysis of both Sykes and Strong's WHCD addresses. Using this lens provided insight as to how Sykes and Strong both advocate not only for change within the parties in the audience but call for action on women's political issues.

### **Rhetorical and Political Agency**

Beyond feminist standpoint theory and rhetorical citizenship, I also used the theoretical perspectives of rhetorical and political agency. This theoretical lens allowed for an analysis of the rhetors' rhetorical agency and political agency, as well as the role of the audience in advocating for action on women's issues. Rhetorical agency is using one's

voice or persona to influence audiences (Geisler, 2004; Campbell, 2005). Political agency is using one's voice or persona to enable audiences to act and influence political issues (Southard, 2011).

Campbell (2005) proposes five different elements of agency. First, Campbell (2005) contends agency is symbolically communal (Butler, 1997). There is also a feminist component because external forces (i.e. gender norms, laws, and institutions) that avoid essentialism influence women (Campbell, 2005; Sartre, 1976). Second, the invention of the spoken artifact is also a part of rhetorical agency (Campbell, 2005). Aristotle's idea of invention focuses on the development of speech; Campbell (2005) notes that there is a connection between rhetorical acts because of the limitedness of linguistics; however, the artistry in the spoken word is how those words come together to shape ideas. This idea leads into the third concept of artistry; the artistry of the rhetor focuses on the stylistic tools they employ (Campbell, 2005). Artistry can be seen in the ironic language used or by repetition used in speeches such as Sykes' 2009 address and Strong's 2015 address. The fourth area of development is the effect through form (Campbell, 2005). Form is found in all communication but is specific to agency depending on how it is used (Campbell, 2005). Sykes and Strong both use satire as their form of agency, which allows for the moment to be of importance (Campbell, 2005). Lastly, Campbell (2005) warns that agency can be used in defamatory ways as well. This form of agency calls upon the rhetor to be ethical and thoughtful when using agency because it can also be used to create hateful messages. An example of a rhetor that created fear among the audiences was Hitler in his manifesto, *Mein Kampf* (Campbell, 2005).

Citizenship and agency are closely aligned as rhetoric incite action from audiences, through the rhetor's words (Zaeske, 2003). The connection between rhetorical and political agency focuses on the link between "rhetorical action and social change" (Geisler, 2004, p. 12). First, I focus on the development of Sykes and Strong as female comedians using political satire; then I move into how the audience grows due to the interplay of media and the role digital media serve in rhetorical agency. This lens helps to explain how rhetoric attempts to move audiences to social and political action, through the realization of rhetorical and political agency among audience members.

This study is about women comedians' use of political satire at the WHCD. This description of the study is important to scholarship about political agency because the rhetors are from marginalized groups in society but have the ability to use agency to enact political change in their audiences (Geisler, 2004; Campbell, 2005). Campbell and Jamison (1978) studied how Representative Barbara Jordan of Texas was able to enact rhetorical agency by simply being the first African-American woman to perform on stage at the DNC because the opportunity to perform had historically been given only to white males. Similarly, Sykes and Strong had the opportunity to share their rhetorical agency on a stage typically reserved for white male comedians. Sykes is an African-American woman, and Strong is an "ethnically ambiguous" (CSPAN, 2015) woman. While they may follow the same framework as the men who have spoken at the WHCD, they are especially memorable because they are part of an "elite sorority of women" (Kahn, 2015) who hosted the WHCD.

During their WHCD address, Sykes and Strong used repetition to articulate their points clearly. Campbell and Jamieson (1978) acknowledge repetition is a form used to

emphasize a key idea and persuade their audiences. The rhetorical and political agency of Sykes and Strong is present in considering their use of repetition to speak about specific women's issues. The form of repetition can cause an audience to act if the rhetor stresses that there may be consequences in the real world (Geisler, 2004; Campbell & Jamieson, 1978). Many famous rhetors have used repetition to influence audiences; these have primarily been male figures such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., President John F. Kennedy, and more recently, President Barack Obama (Eldenmuller, 2016).

While Sykes and Strong may be memorable for being women, they may have drawn more influence from the audience. Advancements in technology have allowed for mediated messages to be shared over time, which seems to alter agency (Geisler, 2004). Due to scope and their focus on the first wave of feminism, scholars (Zaeske, 2003; Southard, 2011) who have talked about women's political agency have not taken into account the shift to the digital age. Sykes and Strong physically addressed the WHCD in 2009 and 2015, but their oratory is still available for viewing on sites such as YouTube.com. Geisler (2004) noted how there needs to be more research on the effect of digital media on rhetorical agency. Not only did Sykes and Strong address the media in person, the media then reported on their remarks in the news (Fox News, 2009; Greenberg, 2015; Johnson, 2015; Parker, 2009; Staltonstall, 2009; Yahr, 2015; Zeleny, 2009). I contend this interplay is accessible through news media and video dynamics.

While the digital age may change the way humans encounter speech, the rhetor's agency and their attempts to imbue agency within their audiences remain constant. The rhetor consciously makes a decision about what he or she will say to influence their audience (Geisler, 2004). Anna Howard Shaw, a women's suffrage activist from the early

1900's, carefully framed her political reasoning when speaking at a rally or submitting an article to a journal to persuade men to support a women's right to vote (Innocenti & Miller, 2016). Contemporarily, Sykes and Strong were both deliberate in their language choices used to frame their addresses to persuade their audiences.

The language changes throughout time. Depending on the cultural or societal definition of a word, the meaning can be different (Campbell & Jamieson, 1978). Language helps to show the change between the women enacting political and rhetorical agency in the early waves of feminism (Southard, 2011; Zaeske, 2003) to the agency enacted by women comedians on the national stage of the WHCD. Campbell and Jamieson (1978) state, "because rhetoric is of the public life because rhetorical acts are concerned with ideas and processes rooted in the here, and now of social and political life, rhetoric develops in time and through time" (p. 22). Looking at rhetorical and political agency in these WHCD speeches is an important study in looking at how rhetorical citizenship and agency among women speakers on women's issues have changed over time.

Scholars who research rhetorical and political agency argue that the rhetor uses their oratory to enable their audiences to act, for audiences to realize that they have the capacity for action (Geisler, 2004; Campbell, 2005). By speaking at the WHCD, both Sykes and Strong are using their voices for action. They, themselves, are enacting their call to action because of the historical lack of women comedians following the President at the dinner (Kahn, 2015). Agency is also applicable from the audience standpoint because the rhetors are calling upon action from the audience, even on the level of engaging with their jokes to consider women's issues. When the rhetors call out the

audience for having negative reactions to their jokes they are using this form of agency. It is important to include agency to analyze how the rhetors use rhetoric to imbue their audiences with agency, to move forward their positions on women's issues.

### **Limitations**

This study is limited in that it only looks at the addresses from Wanda Sykes in 2009 and Cecily Strong in 2015 at the WHCD. The WHCD is an annual event, meaning many speeches could have been chosen. Further studies could focus on the audience reactions to these speeches or the differences between women's and men's oratory at the event. Another way this study is limited is in the scope of the study since more addresses could be analyzed for similarities of issues addressed by both men and women at the WHCD.

Other limitations are the lenses used to analyze the oratory by Sykes and Strong. Using feminist standpoint theory looks at these speeches from that theoretical perspective. Obviously, many other lenses could be used besides the three I chose to use here. Another way in which this study could be conducted would be through a qualitative content analysis. Neither approach is incorrect; however, I chose the rhetorical approach because my research questions focus on how, in their speeches, Sykes and Strong attempted to persuade their audiences about women's issues through their unique rhetorical standpoints as female comedians. Rhetorical scholarship cannot make conclusions about the impact of the rhetor's influence over an audience; this limitation means we do not know the impact the speeches from Sykes and Strong on their audiences.



An overarching limitation to this study is the theme of "Americanization" (Street, 2012). This communication issue may only be an issue in a society like the United States as there is a large focus on politics, celebrities, and the media. As shown in the literature review, celebrity politics is common practice in the United States, and almost uniquely so. The spread of celebrity politics around the world is increasing as celebrities start speaking about issues, such as Emma Watson at the United Nations (UN Women, 2016). Mediated news sources continually surround Americans, which could be different for many other areas in the world. In the next chapter, I turn to a rhetorical analysis of Sykes and Strong's addresses at the WHCD, to see how their feminist standpoint influences their ability to imbue their audiences with agency and to enact rhetorical citizenship on women's issues.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF WANDA SYKES' AND CECILY STRONG'S WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENTS' DINNER ADDRESSES**

In the previous chapters, I have laid the foundation to applying feminist standpoint theory, citizenship theory, and agency to connect the rhetorical acts of Wanda Sykes and Cecily Strong at the WHCD. In this chapter, I analyze both Sykes and Strong's speeches through first, feminist standpoint theory, second, citizenship theory, and finally, rhetorical agency. This entire analysis is grounded in political satire, as that was the method of persuasion used by Sykes and Strong in their addresses; and previous male hosts of the WHCD have used political satire as their method of persuasion (Colletta, 2009; Waisanen, 2009; Becker & Waisanen, 2013).

Sykes and Strong have similar satirically persuasive organizational formats for their performances when addressing issues at the WHCD. Sykes (2009) began her address by addressing her ethos as a speaker by identifying her alignment with the Obama administration; then she moved on to the president. After addressing the president, she talked about national security, the previous administration, and Republicans. Then Sykes (2009) moved on to addressing First Lady Michelle Obama; she reiterated the Republican dissent of the election of Obama in her closing. In contrast, Strong (2015) started by addressing her own ethos by assessing her stance as a straight woman; she then moved on to addressing the media. Next Strong (2015) moved on to the 2016 election, and finished by addressing the president; however, she concluded with Obama leaving the White House. Sykes and Strong concluded differently because Sykes performed at the beginning of the Obama administration and Strong presented at the end.

Importantly, both Sykes and Strong used a topical structure of macro organization. They both addressed their own positionality through their ethos in their introductions, and talked about relevant national issues at the time and spoke directly to the President in the body of their speeches. Through the application of the critical perspectives of feminist standpoint theory, rhetorical citizenship, and rhetorical agency, I show how Sykes and Strong use their positionality and advocacy of women's issues in American society to persuade their audiences.

### **Rhetorical Analysis of Feminist Standpoint Theory at the WHCD**

Feminist standpoint theory offers the critique of a unique worldview (Wood, 2013; Hill Collins, 1997; Campbell, 1973) and other groups in society. This framework dealing with power and knowledge in society allows the examination of unique worldviews (Wood, 2013; Hill Collins, 1997; Campbell, 1973), critique of other groups (Wood, 2013; Hill Collins, 1997; Changfoot, 2004; Voet, 1998), women's rights issues (Hill Collins, 1997; Changfoot, 2004), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Campbell & Jamieson, 1978), new knowledges (Crenshaw, 1989; Southard, 2011), and recovering women's lost voices (Crenshaw, 1989; Southard, 2011). Sykes' and Strong's addresses both fit within the framework of feminist standpoint theory. Some viewpoints are culturally relevant and touched upon through the word choice of the women comedians, though not stated explicitly.

**Unique worldviews.** Sykes and Strong both use their unique worldviews to comment on issues in society. The worlds of politics and comedy typically marginalize women in society (Campbell, 1973; Wood, 2005; Hill Collins, 1989). By using their voices, Sykes and Strong represent marginalized groups in society when speaking out

about issues (Collins, 1997; Wood, 2005). Sykes' address in 2009 is at the beginning of Barack Obama's presidency, whereas, Strong's address was in 2015 at the end of President Obama's administration. While years apart, Sykes and Strong both give unique insights because of their backgrounds.

Sykes is an African-American, homosexual female. This unique worldview gives her a diverse platform to share with the audience. Sykes (2009) said at the beginning of her address, "I keep getting asked the same question. Are you nervous? Are you nervous? I'm like with this administration? What is there to be nervous about?" This statement applies to Sykes' unique worldview because, under the new administration of Obama, she has an intersection of interest in the White House. President Barack Obama and Sykes are both members of the African-American community. The Obama administration pushed forward a progressive agenda with women's health care and equal marriage for the LGBTQ community (Garunay, 2016; Office of the Press Secretary, 2016). She confirms her support of the new presidency, while at the same time exposing her willingness to share her viewpoints with her audience. Sykes' comment about the new Obama administration was a satirical comment about the outgoing Bush administration. She is positively commenting that the Obama administration carries more hope than the previous administration. Sykes (2009) also hints that no matter how she performed she would be a success; she would either make more money or get great press. This is different than Strong's opening remarks about her worldview.

Strong is a white, heterosexual female. This is a unique worldview to the White House Correspondents' Dinner because a white, heterosexual woman had not yet hosted the WHCD under President Obama's administration. Strong (2015) said, "I'm also the

first straight woman to host this in 20 years, so we finally made it, straight people. Where my heterosexuals at, huh?" This applies to Strong's worldview of having the attention of the WHCD because she reminds the audience this is a stage rarely held by women. She stresses the fact that she is a straight woman, which encourages the audience to adapt to her viewpoints on issues. The in-person audience and the online audience viewing this speech can comprehend that a woman speaking at this event is unique whether it was the day of the address or years later online. Strong is also commenting on the aspect of heteronormativity in society. She's satirically mixing the uniqueness of her being a female with the societal norm of being straight.

**Critique of other groups.** When accessing speeches previously given at the WHCD, one can draw parallels between feelings of different groups at that point in time. The critique of various groups in society who are normally "untouchable" allows for women's voices to be heard (Wood, 2013; Hill Collins, 1997; Changfoot, 2004; Voet, 1998). Both Sykes and Strong critique similar groups, however, there are slight differences due to happenings in the world during their addresses. Many different events in society allow for the critiques of certain groups who are under fire by Sykes and Strong.

Sykes' first group under scrutiny was the Secret Service. In the previous administration of President George W. Bush, President Bush had a shoe thrown at him on stage at an event (Myers & Rubin, 2008). Sykes (2009) commented on this situation when she said:

So if you guys are running out like that, the Secret Service, you guys have to stay on point. You have to step up your game. You made me a little

nervous when those shoes got past you. Throwing shoes at Bush. I did speak to the head of the Secret Service, and he said we just don't know how much footwear they stopped. [LAUGHTER]

Sykes made the argument to critique the Secret Service in this way because they are supposed to be the top security force in the country, yet they couldn't spot an incoming flying shoe. The larger point she is making is that the Secret Service needs to be more aware of incoming dangers to the leader of our country. She critiqued the group by tying it back to President Obama's basketball-playing skills. The President was known to be very casual and play pickup games with members of the Secret Service. She satirically claimed that the Secret Service had to block more shoes than the public was aware. While she used satire to address the Secret Service's lack of ability to defend against flying footwear, she was also remarking that a lot of individuals wanted to throw things at President George W. Bush. The Secret Service has to prioritize their concerns, and journalists' shoes were not the main concern post 9/11.

After critiquing the Secret Service, Sykes moved on to critiquing the group who supported President Bush, Republicans. After eight years under a Republican administration, Sykes (2009) had a lot to say about the economic recovery after the 2008 recession and conservative pushback:

I gotta say, he broke a lot of stuff, sir. He broke a lot of stuff. You thought you were going to find a new home. You got a fixer-upper. There are a lot of things that need to be fixed. You are trying to help, and I'm amazed at some people not allowing you to help. What is up with the governors who turn down money? Who turns down money? Maybe you should get Oprah

to give it away. Oprah would say, 'Okay, governors, look under your seats.' [LAUGHTER]

The economy was in a severe recession when President Obama first took office (Gimein, 2016). It's an interesting tie between the bailout and Oprah. Oprah campaigned for Obama in the 2008 Presidential election (Zeleny, 2007). Sykes critiqued typically conservative governors who wouldn't take federal help by suggesting they accept assistance from a powerful, African-American woman who did giveaways on her popular talk show. Sykes comments on the fact that if you give it away like Oprah, then governors would be more willing to accept the assistance, simply because of the celebrity and popularity surrounding Oprah Winfrey.

After critiquing Republican politicians, Sykes moved on to critiquing conservative news pundits and their stances on issues. Sykes (2009) commented on the issue of torture:

Sean Hannity said he was going to get water boarded for charity for armed forces. He hasn't done it yet, I see, like can he take one. Please. You might be able to take a waterboarding by someone you know or trust. But let someone from Pakistan water board him or Keith Olbermann. He could take a waterboarding. I can break Sean Hannity just by giving him a middle seat in coach.

Sykes critiqued this particular news pundit because of his stance on torture. Hannity made claims he would be waterboarded for charity (Linkins, 2009). Sykes commented on how this was outlandish because he would have picked a friend who wouldn't torture him. She also critiqued his inability to relate to the average citizen, because sitting in the

economy area of a plane would be torture enough for Hannity. Hannity is a white, upper class, conservative male who, Sykes satirically states, is privileged enough he would break down if he had to engage in a lower- class activity in American society.

Similarly to Sykes, Strong critiqued the media, the United States Congress, and the Secret Service. Strong ran through the list of media in attendance and cracked jokes about many of them; afterward, she moved on to commenting about Hillary Clinton's bid for the presidential nomination. Strong (2015) had the media take an oath when she said:

This next part is a repeat after me. I want all the media to put their hands up and swear something this election season, okay? I solemnly swear not to talk about Hillary's appearance because that is not journalism.

[LAUGHTER] [APPLAUSE] Also, Cecily Strong looks great tonight.

[LAUGHTER].

This attack stems from the amount of press focusing on women because of their stylistic choices. In 2008, the media criticized Hillary Clinton for the way she dressed on the campaign trail (Givhan, 2007). At the WHCD in 2015, Strong reminded the journalists in attendance that real political news is about policies and platforms, not how a candidate decides to dress. She turns the oath into a satirical critique of the media when she makes the members of the media in attendance also comment positively on her appearance instead of on her performance at the WHCD.

Strong knows a lot of media and politics tend to overlook the importance of women's ideas and focus on their style. She poked fun at the U.S. Congress, which is made up of mostly men. Strong (2015) slyly commented, "Since I'm only a comedian, I'm not going to try to tell you politicians how to do politics or whatever. That's not my job.



That would be like you guys telling me what to do with my body. I mean, can you imagine?" Only one-fifth of the 114th Congress was made up of women (Bump, 2016). Strong's joke about politicians making decisions about women's issues stems from drawn out debates about women's reproductive health care and changes that occurred with the adoption of the Affordable Care Act. While not singling out the male gender, Strong touches on the fact that the people making choices about women's bodies in politics don't even have the body of a woman. She critiques this group for making decisions for others without fully comprehending their views by asking a rhetorical question. No one in the audience is supposed to respond to the question, but they all know the answer. The majority of Congress is made up of men, who create policies about women's reproductive health that are restrictive regarding women's access.

The Secret Service also came under attack by Strong. The detail surrounding their criticism is different from the reasons Sykes criticized them in 2009. Strong (2015) joked:

I bet that, when the President walked in and saw all these bellhops, he thought, finally, some decent security. [Laughter] I'm just kidding, let's give it up for the Secret Service. Yeah. [Applause] They are the only law enforcement agency in the country that will get in trouble if a black man gets shot.

During the years of drones, the Secret Service has been under scrutiny for drones accessing the White House lawn (Shear & Schmidt, 2015). This is why Strong joked about their ability to protect the president. She also addressed issues of police brutality in the United States with the last comment about the President being shot. This controversial

statement spanned farther than just the Presidential security and commented about issues facing everyday Americans. In 2014, the Black Lives Matter movement sparked controversy after the slayings of unarmed black men by police officers; it was of great prominence in Ferguson, MO after officers shot and killed Michael Brown (Lowery, 2017). This rise of tension between unarmed black men being shot and killed and national police forces drew attention to the number of instances of this nature in American society.

**Women's rights issues.** In American society, women's issues are either thrust to the forefront as problems or cast aside and seen as unimportant compared to so-called masculine issues, such as the economy or defense (Lakoff, 2008). Women's rights issues are of importance primarily to women, including women's access to education and healthcare, preventing violence against women, and fostering women's equality. Both Sykes and Strong take unique approaches to addressing women's issues in society through satire. Sykes used examples of other women in society, whereas, Strong spoke in the first person about issues facing women in society.

Sykes' first comment was about women's reproductive health; however, she used an example about Alaskan Governor Sarah Palin. Sykes (2009) said, "I know Governor Sarah Palin; she's not here tonight. She pulled out at the last minute. Somebody should tell her that is not really how you practice abstinence." During Governor Palin's vice-presidential run with John McCain in 2008, it was revealed that her teenage daughter was pregnant. Palin had been known to be a firm believer in abstinence-until-marriage until she revealed her daughter was pregnant (Stevenson, 2008). Later, it was unclear what Palin's stance on sex education was, but McCain's stance was clearly abstinence

(Stevenson, 2008). Sykes critiques the "pull out" method of sexual relations is not abstinence and implicitly argues that there should be a change in sex education.

Shifting away from the Republican challengers, Sykes commented about First Lady Michelle Obama's appearance. Sykes did so while also addressing women's portrayal in the media and the 2nd Amendment. Sykes (2009) said:

First Lady, beautiful as always, looks very nice. [APPLAUSE] And how dare you people give her grief about baring her arms. The country is broke, and sleeves cost money. [LAUGHTER] And you have lovely arms, so I am glad you are showing off your arms. That's right. You let some of these little floozies out here know. You can try some funny business if you want to, but you are going to get one of these babies around your neck.

[LAUGHTER]

Sykes ingeniously tied together multiple issues when talking about Michelle Obama's arms. She comments about the national debt, gun rights, and the strength of Michelle Obama. First, Sykes commented about how the media was appalled for a first lady to have bare shoulders and arms (Sykes, 2009). Then she moved on to commenting on the inability to afford sleeves because of the national debt and the current economic recession. She then subtly hinted at the 2nd Amendment, which is to own arms, such as guns, but then make sure everyone is aware Michelle Obama could take people down with her "bare arms." Gun control has been a controversial debate in American society; Sykes' statement of "could take people down with her bare arms" shows her liberal stance on the issue of guns in society. This is also evident from a tweet from Sykes on June 12,

2016, from her account @iamwandasykes, "If you're serious about gun control, in November only vote for candidates who will ban assault weapons."

Strong addressed women's issues differently than Sykes. She included herself in the group of women she discussed and focused mainly on women's health issues. Strong (2015) started with a joke about intelligence, "Just because I am a woman doesn't mean I'm going to go easy on you people. I'm going to go easy on you people because my brain is smaller. [LAUGHTER]." By saying she is of less intelligence because of her brain size feeds into the notion that women are less intelligent than men in the worlds of politics and comedy. Strong said this satirically to play up the stance in society that women should avoid critiquing issues in society and that they are less intelligent than their male counterparts. This is one of the first lines in her address, after which she criticized many different individuals and groups in society.

After addressing the fact that she is a woman, she moved on to her stance as a comedian. As noted above, Strong (2015) said, "Since I'm only a comedian, I'm not going to try to tell you politicians how to do politics or whatever. That's not my job. That would be like you guys telling me what to do with my body, I mean, can you imagine? [LAUGHTER] [APPLAUSE]" She told everyone in the room she would not tell them how to do their jobs because that would be ridiculous. However, she creates a play on words when she addresses that legislators make decisions about women's bodies all the time when debating health care issues and creating health care policies. A prominent policy she was commenting on was Congress' attempts to defund Planned Parenthood and block women's ability to attain safe abortions (Sullivan & Shabad, 2015). She's saying she won't tell Congress how to decide while satirically attacking them for the

votes they cast dealing with health care. With the lack of women serving in the U.S. Congress, Strong recognized the irony and patriarchy involved when predominately white middle-aged men make decisions about women's bodies.

She stayed on the topic of women's health when she addressed businesses opting out of the ACA when they realized it covered contraceptives. Strong (2015) joked:

Now, it's been a great year for women, as always. Hobby Lobby said they didn't want to pay for health care if it included things like contraceptives.

Which is weird, because all I asked was what aisle is the yarn in? I do love Hobby Lobby. I went in there this morning, and I bought the cutest wicker basket to hold all of my morning after pills. [LAUGHTER]

Hobby Lobby was one of the largest corporations to opt out of the ACA due to the mandated access to contraceptives (Liptak, 2014). The U.S. Supreme Court, in a five to four decision, ruled that the contraceptive mandate infringed on religious beliefs (Liptak, 2014). Strong commented on the ruling of the Supreme Court by bringing up the morning after pills, which many conservatives are opponents of due to moral beliefs that the pills constitute abortion. While using humor, Strong expressed the need for contraception accessibility for average American women without directly attacking anyone. She criticized Hobby Lobby but did so in a manner that did not personally offend anyone, all while enacting the role of a consumer adhering to the stereotypical U.S. women's roles of shopping and knitting.

Shifting away from women's health issues, Strong addressed the issue of putting a woman representative on U.S. currency. This topic was debated earnestly during the 2016 Presidential primaries. Strong (2015) said, "President Obama came out in support of

putting women on money; as opposed to the DEA agents who prefer to put money on women." The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) came under scrutiny in 2015 when they were participating in sex parties (French & Bresnahan, 2015). While the U.S. public was debating about which woman to put on the ten-dollar bill, some DEA agents were found to be engaging in parties with prostitutes in Columbia while on assignment (French & Bresnahan, 2015). The joke made by Strong affirmed the progress women have made in the United States. At the same time, it shows progress still needs to be made within other areas of the bureaucracy of the Presidency of the United States.

**Intersectionality.** The addresses given from Sykes and Strong represent multiple groups in society on the stage of the WHCD. Women typically find themselves representing more than one group when they are speaking out in public (Crenshaw, 1989; Campbell & Jamieson, 1978). Sykes talks about being a woman, African-American, and (even though she does not mention it during this address) a member of the LGBTQ community. Sykes' positionality is a complicated identity and representation of black, lesbian womanhood in U.S. culture.

Sykes addresses her ethnicity by being so proud of having an African-American man as president. Sykes (2009) also warned him about the pressure to succeed because of it:

But this is amazing. The first black president. I know you are biracial—but the first black president. I'm proud to be able to say that. The first black president and that's unless you screw up. Then it is going to be what's up with the half white guy? Who voted for the mulatto? [LAUGHTER]

President Obama is the United States' first black president. Sykes warns him in her address that if he screws up, the black community will recognize him as the "half white guy." She's proud of how far her race has come through history and is honored to be part of his first WHCD. The "half white guy" (Sykes, 2009) phrasing also argues that if Obama screws up, his half whiteness will be more prominent than his blackness to the black community. She is qualified to make this comment based on her membership in the black community and enacts this part of her identity by simply giving the speech. Sykes (2009) related specifically to black women when she celebrated the addition of the bust of Sojourner Truth to the White House. This shows her intersectionality as a woman, specifically within the black community.

Strong also represented other groups outside her identity as a woman as well. Strong (2015) began her address with, "Good evening; I am Cecily Strong. You may know me from 'Saturday Night Live,' or as the ethnically ambiguous girl from every college brochure. I am a mash-up of all the people in Hillary's announcement video. [LAUGHTER]." Strong did not address what ethnicity she is during her address, but she identified with many people by saying her ethnicity is "ambiguous." During Hillary Clinton's bid for president, she had a video of endorsements with people from all types of backgrounds (Chozick, 2015). By saying she is "a mash-up of all the people" from the video, Strong identifies with various groups of people. This is also a satirical take on the explicit use of diversity with ethnicity and gender that politicians and colleges use to recruit minorities and show how inclusive they are of others.

Strong (2015) shifts from identifying with ethnicities to calling out the issues of police brutality in the country, as noted earlier: "I'm just kidding, let's give it up for the

Secret Service. Yeah. [APPLAUSE] They are the only law enforcement agency in the country that will get in trouble if a black man gets shot. Are you saying, 'boo' or 'true'?" Towards the end of her address, she addresses the issue of police brutality again. Strong (2015) says, "After six years in office, your approval rating is at 48%. Your gray hair is at 58%. Your hair is so white; it can talk back to the police. [LAUGHTER] [APPLAUSE]." Even though Strong is not a member of the African-American community, she shows the intersection of her identity with that of other minorities when discussing these issues. Strong's address was during one of the key times for the #BlackLivesMatter movement (Lowery, 2017). By addressing the issue of race in society, Strong aligns herself with the #BlackLivesMatter movement. She aligns with this group by calling upon the power framework provided by President Obama. By talking about the power of the presidency, Strong aligns her argument with average black citizens who don't have the same privilege of the Obama's by being protected by the Secret Service. The Secret Service protects the president; while at the same time, society typically vilifies the average black male citizen. The audience has some dissent with Strong's stance on this particular social movement. She calls out the audience by asking if they are saying "boo or true," and makes them think about their privilege when dealing with police and race.

In the media, Strong (2015) commented about the portrayal of minorities on television:

We are in a golden age of television. I still see so many negative portrayals of black and gay people. I mean, it's 2015, and we still have characters like Don Lemon, it's ridiculous. The cast of Blackish is here,



which I think is inappropriate, after the way they treated those whales at SeaWorld. [LAUGHTER]

Don Lemon is a CNN host who Republican leaders criticize (CNN, 2017). He is another example of intersectionality of groups because he is a member of minority groups of the black and LGBTQ community (Huffington Post, 2011). Strong tries to identify with those who don't believe there should be a television show called Blackish by turning it on its head to be a joke about Blackfish. Blackfish is a documentary on Netflix that shows the inhumane treatment of killer whales at SeaWorld (Borum Chattoo, 2015). She satirically addresses issues about race by tying them to other popular culture references, as seen in the progress and success of the show Blackish (Blake, 2017). While television is making advancements for minorities, they still receive backlash, proving the need to increase positive representations of minorities and other intersectional groups in the media.

**New knowledges.** By addressing the WHCD as some of the only women in history to do so, Sykes and Strong presented audiences with new ways of understanding issues in society. According to Wood (2005), since women have different lives in society, they bring “new knowledges” (p. 61). Sykes and Strong both give insight into powerful issues in society. Sykes gave new knowledge to the audiences when she talked about torture in American society. Strong gave new knowledge to audiences when she talked about the future of the United States with the 2016 election.

Sykes is known to make controversial statements about topics in society. One political topic addressed by Sykes was the United States' use of torture. Sykes (2009) stated:

Dick Cheney is trying to defend torture. He is trying to defend torture. We released the memos to show all the information we got from our practices. You can't defend torture. That is like me robbing a bank and then going in front of the judge and saying, 'Yes, your Honor, I robbed the bank, but look at all these bills I paid.' [LAUGHTER]

One of President Obama's agenda items was to close Guantanamo Bay and end the United States' use of torture (Alvarez, 2016). Many Republicans tried to defend the use of torture, especially when dealing with terrorism (Herszenhorn, 2009). Sykes took this topic and came up with an analogy that related to the common people in America. This analogy also comments on the disproportionate number of black citizens incarcerated in the U.S. prison system (Anderson, 2017). U.S. citizens know that robbing a bank is wrong and that your good record can't make up for such a crime. Sykes is pointing out how flawed our thoughts about torture are through this analogy.

Strong stayed on the theme of women's advancement for her new knowledge. Strong alluded that the next President should be, and would be, a female. There are multiple examples of this in her address. Strong (2015) first did this by saying, "Feels right to have a woman follow President Obama, doesn't it?" This joke hinted at Hillary Clinton following Obama in the Oval Office, while at the same time emphasized the fact that a woman (Strong) followed Obama in the presentation of speeches at the WHCD.

Strong (2015) then went into a segment about who was running for President: So many great people have already announced they are running. It's like, who is better than Marco Rubio? Hillary. Who's better than Rand Paul? Hillary. Who's better on the economy than Hillary? Bill. Hillary's

campaign slogan is- it's your time. Which I assume she says to herself in the mirror while she dead lifts 200 pounds.

Strong (2015) mentioned she wasn't endorsing Hillary for President because she didn't play her on SNL. She did, however, give audiences new thoughts about what was to come after the Obama administration. Strong hinted at the fact that Hillary has been reaching for this goal since she lost the nomination to Barack Obama in 2008. While she had to run a hard fought campaign against Democratic challengers, Republicans, and the media, Strong was confident about her comments about Hillary, and hinted at her success when she talked to Michelle Obama about Bill changing the garden, insinuating that the next occupants of the White House would again be the Clintons (Strong, 2015).

**Recovering women's lost voices.** Throughout history, there have been many strong women. However, these women tend to be forgotten by many historians because of our patriarchal society (Campbell & Jamieson, 1978; Southard, 2011; Zaeske, 2003). Sykes allows and comments on the recovery of voices through mentions of powerful women in society. Strong recovers women's lost voices by talking about subjects discussed by men, but that affect women immensely.

Sykes, while supporting Obama's candidacy, commented about interactions between Obama and Biden. Sykes (2009) said, "You two can't hang out together. Whose idea was that? Nancy Pelosi's? [LAUGHTER] Hey, why don't you boys go out and get a bite? [LAUGHTER] You know she [Pelosi] was a Hillary supporter. What's wrong with you?" Senator Nancy Pelosi has been a staple of the Democratic Party on Capitol Hill for many years (Bolton, 2017). Sykes gave credit to Pelosi for making Obama and Biden relatable to the public. While Sykes admitted Pelosi had power over party decisions, she

also mentioned the other powerful woman in the Democratic Party at the time- Hillary Clinton. By mentioning these two powerful women from Washington, Sykes is helping to show women's voice in society, and why it should be brought forward and acknowledged in the successful election of Obama and Biden.

Sykes commented about Sojourner Truth as well, in speaking about recovering women's lost voices. She applauded the unveiling of the bust by Michelle Obama. Sykes (2009) said:

And I could say to the First Lady, kudos to you for unveiling the bust of Sojourner Truth in the White House. Could you do me a favor and make sure it is nailed down real well? You know when the next white guy comes in they are going to move it to the kitchen. [LAUGHTER]

Sojourner Truth is a powerful part of women's history. She was an abolitionist and women's rights activist. She was an outspoken woman at different women's rights conventions (Butler, 2017). However, history books in our society have largely forgotten her in their pages (Bliss, 2017). Sykes' comment also addresses the advancement women have made within society. Throughout history, women have been caretakers of the family (Wood, 2005). Sykes' (2009) comment about "moving to the kitchen" talks about white, male privilege that American society has typically seen about gender roles. The comment also ties back to the historical aspect of black females enslaved from the founding of the nation to the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863.

Strong didn't specifically call out the lost voices of women in society, but she did help women recover their voice by advocating for women's issues in society. From advocating for health care for her fellow women (Strong, 2015) to helping out a woman

running for office, Strong not only advocated for but also encouraged women's voices. Strong compared Hillary Clinton to Meryl Streep. Strong (2015) said, "I'm excited about Hillary running. I'm not sure she's excited about having to run, I think she feels the same way Meryl Streep feels when she has to audition for something- 'Are you kidding me?'" By making this analogy, Strong highlighted two powerful women in American society. Meryl Streep is an acclaimed actress and highly regarded within Hollywood (Bruculleri, 2017). The 2008 election focused on Clinton's wardrobe choices instead of her stance on policy issues. Heading into the 2016 election cycle, Strong (2015) encouraged the media to focus on Clinton's rhetoric and not her clothing choices (Retter, 2008).

### **Rhetorical Analysis of Rhetorical Citizenship Enacted by Sykes and Strong**

Sykes and Strong engaged in rhetorical citizenship while addressing their diverse audiences of media, American citizens, and political leaders, who may otherwise not understand their viewpoints and perspectives as intersectional female citizens of the United States. They do this through speaking at a public forum (Keith & Cossart, 2012) at the WHCD and through encouraging social change (Rai, 2010; Asen, 2004; Keith & Cossart, 2012; Voet, 1998). Because their rhetorical strategies address citizenship, they encouraged others to speak out about issues that Sykes and Strong believed needed attention by American society.

**Public forum of the WHCD.** The WHCD allows for the speaker to address issues in a humorous way while communicating to a broad audience that they normally do not have direct contact. This unique setting occurs a few times a year with events in Washington, D. C. (Johnson, 2012; Fabry, 2016). Sykes and Strong used this stage to share their viewpoints in society. Both of them commented on the magnitude of the event

and even the physical location of the White House and Washington, D.C. in describing citizenship and citizens' responsibilities through their speeches. Both speeches are historical because they are two of only four comedic women who have addressed the WHCD.

Sykes (2009) sets the stage for the size of the occasion when she repeats people asked if she was nervous to take the stage at the WHCD. While Sykes might be nervous to take this stage, she makes a satirical comment about the new administration. This was a unique occasion for Sykes to speak on because it was one of President Obama's first events in his administration; the last female host was Elaine Boosler during the Clinton administration in 1993 (Kahn, 2015). With about 2,600 people in attendance at the event (Andrews-Dyer, 2015), it's a great forum for Sykes to be able to "hold court" and talk about issues the president and the public may have to deal with. By simply taking the stage of the WHCD, Sykes represented a constituency that has been historically marginalized in American society—black women (Hill Collins, 1997). Sykes was the first African-American woman comedian to take the stage at the WHCD in history this allowed her to address issues that are not given much coverage in the media. One such issue she covered from a new perspective was President Obama being bi-racial. A majority of America considers him the first black president; Sykes pointed out that he was bi-racial, meaning he is a member of both black and white races.

Strong didn't mention nerves when she set the scene for her address. She did comment on the power structure of the occasion, though. Strong (2015) said, "The White House Correspondents' Dinner is a chance for all of you to unwind, relax, and laugh as soon as you notice someone slightly more powerful than you laughing. [LAUGHTER]."

Even though the event is supposed to be fun and relaxed, Strong noted that everyone was overtly aware of the hierarchy of power. For example, if Strong were to insult the president, but he didn't find it funny, not many people in the room would likely laugh. However, she held the power of the stage, so in her public forum, any topic was fair game for criticism. Strong was honored to be able to take the stage because it gave her the unique ability to appear as herself and not an SNL character (Day & Thompson, 2012). Appearing as herself, Strong was able to enact citizenship by speaking up about women's issues, as an American woman, on a national public stage. The WHCD allowed her to bring issues to the forefront and encouraged audience members to take action on women's issues. She gave voice to women's reproductive rights by specifically calling upon American women to realize most of the choices about their healthcare comes from a specific group made up of specifically white men.

**Encourage social change.** By engaging in rhetorical citizenship, Sykes and Strong encouraged social change through their audience. While they may not have overtly described political actions or changes required of the average American citizen, both Sykes and Strong addressed issues and called upon their diverse audiences (media, politicians, etc.) to act in various ways. Sykes used humorous instances of change. Strong used humor but was more direct with her solutions.

Sykes' (2009) first area to encourage change was education:

The states need the money, especially our school systems. I am so happy you are doing something about education and that you want to pay our teachers more because our teachers are grossly underpaid. That's right.

Pay the teachers more money- maybe then they will stop sleeping with the students. [LAUGHTER]

Sykes encouraged social change by talking about education funding. She also encouraged change overtly by stating to fix a societal harm we should increase teacher pay. She asked people to consider the consequences of not paying our teachers very well. Her advocacy for education allowed the audience of politicians to consider it as a policy while also being entertained by the humor. She called upon American citizens realize the lack of pay for educators across the country. By using a criminal action such as sleeping with students, Sykes (2009) created a call to action for American citizens to support increasing teacher pay to stop the criminal action in a humorous way.

The second area of social change addressed by Sykes (2009) was taxes:

So maybe next April 15 you have like a big tax ball. Give everyone some champagne, bring Rascal Flatts in, have it at the convention center. See people getting all ready for it. Girls getting their nails done. What are you doing? Girl, I'm getting ready to go pay my taxes. [LAUGHTER]

By addressing tax issues with this joke, Sykes put into notion the idea that people spend money on many other superfluous items besides taxes. She contended that if the government restructured paying taxes at a glamorous event, people would turn from hating paying their taxes into jubilant taxpayers. While adding this fantasy context into paying taxes, Sykes (2009) turned the negative frame of paying taxes into a magical land of a "ball," and "getting their nails done." Sykes was persuading her audience of decision makers and wealthy celebrities to realize taxes are a part of citizenship; taxes do not have to be disliked by American citizens. She's referring to the fact that upper-class Americans



have no qualms about paying to attend fundraisers for political candidates or causes, but they detest the idea of paying for taxes, which in essence are similar to the fundraisers attended by big money donors because taxes support government issues such as infrastructure, welfare, and education.

Strong (2015) encouraged social change from specifically the media when she asked the media to take an oath about reporting the 2016 presidential election. The oath encouraged a social change in the way the media reports about women in politics. As I previously stated, Hillary Clinton was defined by her pantsuits in the 2008 election. Strong encouraged the media to ethically report on actual newsworthy events besides what color pantsuit she decided to wear. It was a humorous moment in her address, but one that also had a large response of laughter. Strong's (2015) media oath encouraged the media to enact social change by having them report on issues instead of wardrobe. If the media changed the frame and discontinued the practice of reporting on female politicians' wardrobes, it could translate into social change from how American citizens talk about female politicians to how male politicians perceive their female counterparts.

Strong (2015) encouraged social change in society when she commented on race in America particularly dealing with law enforcement, and the Black Lives Matter movement. Her address called upon politicians to acknowledge the race issues in America. She called upon American citizens to realize there are still issues with race as it pertains to discrimination by law enforcement. By addressing this issue, Strong was able to address a controversial issue in a way that may have made her white majority audience slightly uncomfortable when checking their racial privilege.

### **Rhetorical Analysis of Sykes' and Strong's Rhetorical Agency at the WHCD**

When considering the rhetors' use of rhetorical agency, invention and artistry (Campbell, 2005; Zaeske, 2003; Geisler, 2004) guided the flow of the speeches of Sykes and Strong. Their use of form (Campbell, 2005; Campbell & Jamieson, 1978) potentially made their messages memorable to their audiences. At times, both rhetors engaged in defamatory communication (Campbell, 2005). However, with the digital age of agency (Geisler, 2004; Campbell & Jamieson, 1978) in today's society, audiences are still able to view and interpret messages sent by rhetors throughout history.

Sykes (2009) addressed issues in a serious tone, and then flipped them to critique society:

And finally, they even gave you grief about the dog, about Bo. Even animal rights people are on you. Why didn't he get a rescued dog? The man has to rescue a country that has been abused by the previous owner. Let him have a fresh start with a dog.

The set up of Sykes' joke shows that she first described a serious issue in society, and then she spun it into a satirical joke. In the example above, she addressed the issue of the Obama's not adopting their dog, Bo. Then she commented on how President Obama had to rescue the country from the previous administration, so the groups who are criticizing him should understand and give him a break. She uses this analogy to tie to something that ties together American society; popular culture was obsessed about the selection of the "First Dog" (Greene, 2009), but Sykes (2009) likened the critiques of the dog to the state of the country when Obama entered his presidency.

Strong goes about her address slightly differently than Sykes. Strong (2015) called upon certain groups, and then turned the entire situation into a joke:

Huffington Post is here. Hey, way to go on that partnership with AOL. Everyone in my chatroom won't stop talking about it. BuzzFeed is here, but I can show you a listicle of 17 reasons why they shouldn't be. USA Today is here. They are only here because they slipped under the hotel door. That's USA Today unless today is Saturday or Sunday.

[LAUGHTER]

Strong first stated a specific group followed by a joke about them. She did this specifically with the media, but then also with politicians who had announced their intent to run for president (Strong, 2015). She creatively came up with ties to specific media groups when calling them out about issues in society. She commented not only on journalism in society, but also critiqued what constitutes good journalism. For example, when she discussed the media outlet BuzzFeed, Strong (2015) said, "I can show you a listicle of 15 reasons they shouldn't be." This created an open dialogue for Strong to discuss concerns with these groups because they were attentive of her criticism of them, which in turn made them more likely to listen to her criticism of issues.

**Invention.** When looking at the word choice and formation of Sykes' and Strong's addresses, a similar pattern emerges. The addresses by Sykes and Strong both fit this description with their use of humor while addressing serious issues. While both women used humor, they both go about it in different ways. This is true for many of the comedic addresses at the WHCD. There are many similar critiques between Sykes' and Strong's speeches. They both comment upon the President, Secret Service, Republicans, and

media representations. Campbell (2005) described how women who use agency are tied to outside institutions, laws, and norms when they speak. Sykes critiqued more masculine issues, such as the economy and terrorism (Lakoff, 2008), than Strong. Both women use the invention of their addresses to encourage women to break typical norms society binds them in and speak up on issues they feel passionately about.

Sykes' (2009) invention starts with talking about how proud she is of President Obama. She identifies with him when it comes to race. This invention is a tie previous comedic speakers have had at the WHCD because of their racial orientation. This links Sykes and Obama together because they are both tied to external forces placed upon their race in society. For example, the upward mobility of the black community in American society overshadowed by institutional racism and tensions with law enforcement (Anderson, 2017).

Sykes (2009) then addressed ways to create education reform and how the tax system should be reformed with a ball. This invention is similar to her male counterparts as she addressed an economic issue of taxation, but also addressed a typically feminine issue of education reform. By addressing men and women's political issues, Sykes' increases the awareness of external forces in society (Campbell, 2005). While her political satire was similar to the jokes men have often made at the WHCD, she also addressed issues tied to her gender.

Sykes (2009) made controversial comments about Rush Limbaugh, who said, "I hope America fails." She talked about the United States' stance on torture and elitism. This connects to the invention of her address because she has a different view on society than the people running the country. While her word choice surrounding Limbaugh may

have been controversial, her message came across clearly. If he were going to make controversial remarks, she would similarly respond with controversial remarks.

Strong (2015) addressed President Obama and the fact they both grew up in Chicago. Like Sykes, she commented on his basketball skills. However, the invention was different. Instead of connecting to him via race, Strong connected to Obama through their shared hometown experiences of Chicago. While they may not be from the same racial background, they share similar shared experiences through their lives in Chicago, which Strong (2015) satirically addresses.

Strong (2015) critiqued the Secret Service, while also addressing police and race issues going on in society. This invention was similar to Sykes' (2009) address, but racial tensions were more prominent in 2015 than they were in 2009. Even though Strong isn't a member of the black community, she shows solidarity with black Americans by speaking up about racial tensions (Campbell, 2005). This allows Strong to identify and align with this community during her address.

**Artistry.** There are many common themes regarding the content and political issues addressed by both Sykes and Strong, but their ability to shape words into ideas is vastly different. This is seen in their use of satire and irony. By using satire as part of their artistry, Sykes and Strong encouraged audiences to do their own investigation into issues (Hart, 2013). The rhetors must be careful about the ways they share ideas because audiences may misinterpret their jokes (Innocenti & Miller, 2016). Sykes created fantasies, whereas Strong used artistry in her use of multimedia presentations. The artistry used by Sykes and Strong brought new ideas to how their audiences view society.

This can encourage future WHCD hosts to expand upon the artistry previously used with finding new ways to connect with their audiences.

Sykes (2009) started her speech by using a play-on-words with Obama's transparency in his administration:

It is funny to me that they have never caught you smoking, but they somehow always catch you with your shirt off. [LAUGHTER] I know you are into this transparency thing, but I don't need to see your nipples.

[LAUGHTER] Is there a beach at Camp David? What the hell? There was never a nipple portrait of Lincoln. I am sorry. [LAUGHTER]

Sykes' use of humor showed President Obama as a relatable American who can more closely align to the average citizen than previous Presidents like Lincoln. While this is a comment about his transparency, it may have also been a critique about how he should be careful about what he is seen doing in public as he held the highest office in the United States. Sykes (2009) also used metaphors to discuss the issues Obama faced entering his term in office:

You look at your beautiful vase, and say what is that? Who broke my vase? I gotta say, he broke a lot of stuff, sir. He broke a lot of stuff. You thought you were going to find a new home. You got a fixer-upper.

While she didn't outright state the broken economy, that is what Sykes was hinting at with her broken vase metaphor. She told President Obama he inherited a broken country, and it was his job to fix it up without ever saying those exact words. Her artistry extended from metaphors to new invention of ideas. By using this metaphor, Sykes was able to

connect everyday ideas with government, which resonates with audiences as they draw the connection for themselves.

When talking about raising taxes, Sykes (2009) came up with a creative way to collect taxes when she said a "tax ball" should be held to encourage positivity with taxes. While it may not be a practical solution to paying taxes, it does offer a new way of thinking for many American citizens. Sykes used her creativity to find a solution that would resound with society about different people paying taxes. A middle class or blue collar American wouldn't fathom spending \$2,000 for a fundraiser, but someone who is in the upper caste of American society would be more willing to spend the money on a fundraiser. She related to all types of people with this idea, not just politicians and celebrities.

Strong (2015) took an unconventional approach to her use of artistry by creating a PowerPoint presentation to talk about a former U.S. Representative who was involved in a scandal:

The cast of Downton Abbey is here. Thanks for the generous donation from the constituents of Aaron Schock—speaking of Aaron Schock, you may notice I'm a little tan. I just got back from the most fabulous trip that Aaron took me on, and I brought my Instagram photos to share with you.

Strong had a PowerPoint of Instagram photographs going on a screen next to the stage that included her and former U.S. Representative Aaron Schock, who resigned from his seat after being caught misusing political funds (Gerstein, 2017), on a "vacation." She used photos from Aaron Schock's Instagram account but photoshopped herself into the photos (Strong, 2015). Her unique approach to criticizing this political scandal was a new

form of expression at the WHCD. Use of visual aids is a rare occurrence at the WHCD. This artistry informs the audience through a new medium about corruption going on in the government. The slideshow connects society by using a popular social media site to display the fictitious photos in a powerful stance of what the misuse of money was going towards.

**Effect through form.** Both Sykes and Strong used satire as their main form. They critiqued the power structures of society. Previous scholarship (Becker & Waisanen, 2013; Waisanen, 2009; Boukes et al., 2015; Hart, 2013) has studied men's use of political satire, but not women's use of satire. With the use of satire, Sykes and Strong could encourage the audience to search for more information on a subject (Hart, 2013), or their jokes could turn away audience members if they don't understand a joke or do not agree with it (Innocenti & Miller, 2016). They also used repetition as a rhetorical form during their addresses. The power of repetition helps make a speech more memorable (Campbell, 2005). The rhetorical strategy of repetition helped the messages sent by Sykes and Strong become salient to their audiences, making them easier to recall in everyday conversation.

Sykes showed this by her use of repetition of people's names when she got to a certain section in her address. For example, Sykes (2009) talked about President Obama's opponent in 2008:

Mr. President, you have had your fair share of critics. Even Senator McCain. He gave your grief about the new helicopters that you didn't order. I think Mr. McCain was bitter because he wanted to be in the new



helicopters. Tell Mr. McCain, I'm sure if you ask nicely, your wife will buy you a helicopter. [LAUGHTER]

She used satire to point out that Senator McCain came from a privileged background that can afford the cost of a helicopter. The repetition of Senator McCain's name reminds the audience of whom she is speaking about. By using his direct name, she solidified her view of Senator McCain and allowed people to know whom she was specifically talking about. Sykes used satire and repetition to get her point across. She also took the story out of context and framed it to further her argument about Republicans being against President Obama.

Strong took notes from the speakers before her and used satire to make her jokes. Her speech followed a pattern that relied on repetition. One area was when she interjected Hillary Clinton's name after listing ideas. Strong (2015) said, "It's like, who is better than Marco Rubio? Hillary. Who's better than Rand Paul? Hillary. Who's better on the economy than Hillary? Bill." With the repetition of the asking of the question and the answer, Strong emphasized the idea of Hillary Clinton being the best candidate in the minds of viewers. The only time that changed was when she asked who was better than Hillary? The answer was the person who would be in the White House with Hillary, Bill Clinton. This form followed a certain pattern that allowed for humor at the end when she answered "Bill." This effect drew upon the popularity of the Clinton's and specifically, former President Bill Clinton's economic policies from the 1990's (Krugman, 2017). By using these particular references, Strong reinforced the state of the nation during President Clinton's administration and alluded to her belief that Hillary Clinton should be the next President.

**Defamatory language.** The ability to speak publicly allows for the ability to use rhetoric negatively. The speaker must be ethical and thoughtful when addressing different groups of people (Campbell, 2005). Failure to be ethical in one's speech can have damaging repercussions (Campbell 2005). Both Sykes and Strong used some language in their addresses that could be deemed by others as defamatory. Both Sykes and Strong used elements of defamatory language in their addresses to emphasize the severity of the issues. For Sykes, the issue is torture; for Strong, the issue is race.

Sykes (2009) made controversial statements about one of President Obama's biggest critics:

Rush Limbaugh, one of your big critics. Boy, Rush Limbaugh says he hopes this administration fails. He is like I don't care about people losing their homes, or jobs, -- or our soldiers in Iraq. He just wants the country to fail. To me that is treason. This is something like Osama Bin Laden would say. You may want to look into him. I think he was the 20th hijacker, but he was so strung out on oxi-cotton to continue his missed flight.

[LAUGHTER] But you are laughing inside. I know you are. Rush Limbaugh. 'I hope the country fails.' I hope his kidneys fail. How about that? [LAUGHTER]

While most people laughed, the White House distanced itself after the airing of the speech due to the language choices made by Sykes (Fox News, 2009). Many Americans are still sensitive to the terror events that transpired on September 11, 2001. The American public found her comments more hateful than controversial (Fox News, 2009). Sykes had a responsibility as a speaker to respectfully address others. Using language

such as, "I hope his kidneys fail" abused the power of her voice on the stage. Campbell (2005) warned against the use of defamatory language when given a public stage. By demeaning Limbaugh, Sykes is "reflecting certain assumptions" (Campbell, 2005) about him to a mass populous, which the media negatively reflected the day after Sykes' (2009) address.

Strong also used some defamatory language in her speech. While calling out different people, she mentioned one Congressman whose name is unfortunate. Strong (2015) stated: "Senator Tom Cotton got other senators to sign an open letter he wrote to Iran. The most surprising thing is that a guy named Tom Cotton is a U.S. Senator and not a rabbit from an old racist Disney cartoon." The language used by Strong wasn't as controversial as the words used by Sykes. Strong took advantage of the name of a Senator and painted a picture of him that does not represent the actual Senator. Strong's comment was defamatory because she directed it at a single individual. In contrast, Strong's controversial statements about police brutality and race issues did not use unethical language towards anyone specifically. This stance of Strong's (2015) statement about a common name like Tom Cotton is indirectly tied to the term "racist." This comment assumes white Congressmen are "old racist Disney cartoons" (Strong, 2015).

**Agency in the digital age.** As stated in earlier chapters, the digital age of agency is a factor in the analysis of these speeches (Geisler, 2004). Both speeches are still available on YouTube. This allows for conversation to continue about these addresses. Both Sykes and Strong have over one million views of their speeches, and some of their arguments are comparable to events happening in the world today.

Sykes' address has 1,325,403 views on YouTube as of April 13, 2017. The last comment was posted the same day of April 13, 2017. People all over the world view the speech and leave comments. Resounding arguments about President Obama being shirtless and comments about torture are comparable to today's context with the sexualization of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Editors of GQ, 2016), and the outrage of the 2016 election results in the United States after the victory of Donald J. Trump and his stance on torture. This is important to note because the agency demonstrated by Sykes in 2009 is still of relevance today. Comments about her speech draw attention to particular comments made by Sykes in the address are still relevant issues in society today.

Strong's address has 1,899,210 views on YouTube as of April 13, 2017. The latest comment was posted on April 9, 2017. People all over the world view the speech and comment on her address. Arguments are relevant today with policies and race issues still of prominent discussion in America, especially surrounding women's reproductive health. While rhetoric develops throughout time, the agency of Strong's 2015 address is still relevant in 2017 and may be in years to come. With access to these speeches online, individuals can splice certain aspects of arguments into short clips to be shared on social media.

As demonstrated, both Sykes and Strong are important WHCD addresses to assess through feminist standpoint theory, citizenship theory, and rhetorical agency. Sykes and Strong both give voices to typically marginalized groups in American society. They encourage others to take action about issues by simply speaking about them to influential audiences and American citizens. By simply taking the stage, both women are using

agency by representing females, who typically don't get to take the stage at the WHCD, for the comedic tradition to follow. However, both Sykes and Strong show they utilize political satire to comment upon issues in American society they believe need to be addressed. In the next chapter, I turn to the implications from these two WHCD speeches.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND AREAS FOR FUTURE STUDY**

The worlds of political satire, women, and politics all converge during the unique situation set forth by Sykes' and Strong's WHCD performances. In this chapter, I discuss the significance of this study to rhetoric; specifically, expanding on the frameworks provided by feminist standpoint theory, rhetorical citizenship, and rhetorical agency. Then I answer the research questions, discuss broader implications for this study, address limitations, and posit directions for future studies. This study aids our knowledge of how women comedians address women's issues in society, and creates calls to action by the American public, with the use of political satire.

### **Review of Texts and Research Questions**

I received transcripts for Sykes' and Strong's address through inquiry to CSPAN. The texts I received were closed caption, so I edited them to portray the correct messages sent from Sykes and Strong. The editing was through listening to the speeches while reading and correcting the transcripts as mistakes were seen from the closed caption. These are the texts that I analyzed in Chapter 4 and offer implications for in this chapter.

Three research questions were developed in Chapter 1 to analyze how Sykes' and Strong's addresses fit within each perspective used. The first research question (RQ1) about feminist standpoint theory asked, "How, if at all, do Sykes and Strong attempt to use their feminist standpoints and experiences to engage multiple audiences about women's political issues at the WHCD?" The second question (RQ2) focused on citizenship, asking, "How, if at all, do Sykes and Strong attempt to rhetorically create engaged citizens at the WHCD?" The third research question (RQ3) focused on rhetorical

agency asked, "How, if at all, do Sykes and Strong attempt to cultivate rhetorical and political agency in their audiences, to take action on women's political issues?" These research questions allowed for guided application and analysis of Wanda Sykes' and Cecily Strong's WCHD addresses in Chapter 4. I now address the implications for each of these critical perspectives for rhetorical studies and the larger communication studies discipline.

### **Implications for Rhetorical Theory and Communication Studies**

Sykes' and Strong's WCHD addresses provided unique insights into women's use of political satire at the WHCD. First, I answer RQ1 and analyze the implications for feminist standpoint theory. Second, I answer RQ2 while examining the rhetorical citizenship enacted by Sykes and Strong. Third, I answer RQ3 while analyzing their use of rhetorical agency, especially as it relates to their varied audiences.

**Implications for feminist standpoint theory.** The first research question sought to examine how Sykes and Strong used their feminist standpoints and experiences to engage multiple audiences about women's political issues at the WHCD. Sykes and Strong both did this by appealing to politicians, celebrities, the media, and average citizens by using their experiences as women in America who have encountered women's political issues, such as the gendered wage gap and women's reproductive health (Lakoff, 2008). Sykes and Strong both used different types of appeals to target each audience.

Sykes (2009) targeted politicians by discussing the 2008 Presidential election; specifically, she commented on the Republican defeat as Obama was elected. When Sykes (2009) addressed the media, she commented mainly upon conservative talk show pundits, such as Rush Limbaugh. Sykes (2009) called upon all of her audiences to think

critically about societal issues such as education, torture, and black women's advancement in society.

Sykes (2009) expanded her reach into the LGBTQ and black communities because she is a member of both these communities; her intersectionality of groups allowed her to share a unique standpoint with her audiences (Hill Collins, 1997). While she advocated for black women specifically with her comments about Sojourner Truth (Sykes, 2009), she largely neglected to address her LGBTQ community members throughout her address directly. The Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that same-sex couples have a constitutional right to marriage equality in 2015 (Liptak, 2015). This ruling could be why Sykes (2009) decided not to touch on her homosexuality during her address since the United States did not acknowledge same-sex marriage nationwide until 2015.

Strong (2015), however, addressed the LGBTQ community when she called attention to her heteronormativity during her address. While she is not a direct member of the LGTBQ community, Strong (2015) built credibility with members of this community by pointing out her gender identity, and how it is considered "normal" by society. Strong's (2015) address came a few months before the Supreme Court decision upholding the right of same-sex couples to marry nationwide (Liptak, 2015). While pointing out her societally accepted sexual orientation, she was also calling attention to the movement of homosexual individuals trying to obtain the same right granted to heterosexual individuals in the United States.

Strong (2015) addressed politicians in the audience by commenting on their decisions about women's reproductive health, a conversation that is still prominent in Congress in 2017 with the anticipated repeal and replacement of the Affordable Care Act.



She also used those remarks to call upon average American citizens, specifically women, to advocate for themselves about the policies that affect them. Strong (2015) specifically addressed the media and celebrities when she satirically introduced each news source and television cast in attendance; specifically, Strong (2015) had the media take an oath not to report on Hillary's fashion choices in the in 2016 election. This oath gave critical thought to what society considered newsworthy as it pertains to women in the media spotlight.

Sykes and Strong brought unique standpoints to the stage of the WHCD; a stage typically held by straight white men (White House Correspondents Association, 2015). They were able to bring women's issues in society to the attention of the audiences they spoke to, directly and indirectly (Voet, 1998; Campbell, 2005; Wood, 2005). They were able to convey feminist messages that society typically overlooks (Wood, 2005; Southard, 2011; Voet, 1998). Women have been working to advance their positions in society since seeking the right to vote with the passage of the 19th Amendment (Voet, 1998; Southard, 2011). In today's society, women have taken to the streets, organizing marches across the nation and around the world to promote women's political issues in society (Edison Hayden, 2017). The Women's March on Washington happened the day after the inauguration of the 45th President, Donald J. Trump. The march drew in more attention than the inauguration in the number in attendance and by the media (Wallace & Parlapiano, 2017). The march was in response to the remarks made about women throughout the 2016 Presidential election by President Trump.

The rhetorical remarks of Sykes and Strong reinforced feminist standpoint theory because they challenge their audiences to understand their unique views of society (Wood, 2005). The current rise of women's protesting and advocacy are challenging the

typical patriarchal society constructed by American norms. Sykes (2009) and Strong (2015) held the power of the WHCD stage to share messages that are typically unheard on a stage reserved for some of the most powerful people in Washington, the media, and Hollywood.

**Implications for rhetorical citizenship.** The second research question sought to explain attempts made by Sykes and Strong to rhetorically create engaged citizens through their WHCD addresses. These addresses are worthy of study because of the enthymematic calls to action by both Sykes and Strong.

Sykes' (2009) created a call to action for women of color's advancement in American society when she warned First Lady Michelle Obama to make sure the bust of Sojourner Truth was nailed down, because "when the next white guy comes in they are going to move it to the kitchen" (Sykes, 2009). She enacted rhetorical citizenship by noting the upward mobility of black women in society but warns them if they don't stand strong together, white patriarchy would potentially move them backward. This enactment of citizenship furthers our understanding of rhetorical citizenship because a female member of the black community is speaking to similar members of her community to keep advancing into the male, whitewashed areas American society (Asen, 2004; Keith & Cossart, 2012).

Strong (2015) called out the media specifically by having them take an oath not to report about Hillary's fashion choices. This call to action by the media extended to American citizens, encouraging them to critique media that focuses a women's worth on her appearance rather than her policies and ideas. By calling attention to the reporting of women's attire instead of their stances on certain issues, Strong (2015) enacted

citizenship—and encouraged audience members to critically think about the media they consume about women (Keith & Cossart, 2012; Marsh et al., 2010; Asen, 2004).

These specific examples of citizenship are unique because they are given to particular audiences to act. Many other famous people have used stages to engage in citizenship, but Sykes (2009) and Strong (2015) were given the opportunity to speak directly to the media, Hollywood, policymakers, and the American public. While many famous women have followed suit speaking up about women's issues while accepting awards for performances, most notably Meryl Streep's acceptance speech for the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2017 Golden Globes (Bruculieri, 2017); Sykes (2009) and Strong (2015) were able to speak directly to specific audiences of policy makers besides the celebrities of Hollywood (Marsh et al., 2010). This expands on the theory of rhetorical citizenship because it shows democracy in action outside of political institutions (Asen, 2004) as issues merge into the world of entertainment.

**Implications for rhetorical and political agency.** The final research question sought to explain how Sykes and Strong cultivated rhetorical and political agency in their audiences to take action on women's political issues. Sykes taking the stage was an act of agency because she has the power of physically representing members of the LGBTQ community and black women. Strong, in herself, enacted agency by taking the stage as an ethnically ambiguous straight woman. Since the WHCD has few women comedians host the event (Kahn, 2015), the fact they were invited to speak is an act of rhetorical agency in and of itself (Campbell, 2005; Southard, 2011). However, their use of political satire furthers their arguments, as it is not commonplace for women to use political satire; instead, women typically use the comedic forms of parody and juxtaposition to make

comments about women in society (Patterson, 2012; Landay, 1999; Esralew & Young, 2012). The form of the words spoken by Sykes and Strong made their arguments more compelling because they are delivering them in a traditionally masculine comedic style. Political satire is a strategy that allows the follies and vices of society exposed to the audiences (Burke, 1984; Colletta, 2009), who can take the humorous arguments made by Sykes (2009) and Strong (2015) and act upon them if they so wish. Many scholars (Waisanen, 2009; Becker & Waisanen, 2013; Hart, 2013; Innocenti & Miller, 2016; Boukes, et. al, 2015) have focused on only men's use of political satire; here I have shown women are also able to address issues in a satirical way if given the stage.

There is a need for women's voices to be recovered, not only in society but academia as well. As society progresses, it is imperative for scholars to give credit to women rhetors who contribute just as much to persuasive messages in communication. Scholars in communication have under studied famous women in American society; instead, their male counterparts receive the majority of the analysis of speech (Becker & Waisanen, 2013; Waisanen, 2009; Innocenti & Miller, 2016; Boukes, et. al, 2015; Hart, 2013). The patriarchal society of America means that women's voices are more powerful when used to expose the downfalls of society because of their unique ability to bring a new voice to the stage. Sykes (2009) and Strong (2015) further our understanding of rhetorical agency because they used their appearance on the WHCD stage and their rhetoric to encourage various audiences to take action on political issues (Southard, 2011). By being ladies of the comedic world, they show women with various personas can create satirical arguments in the same way male comedians can (Geisler, 2004; Campbell, 2005). However, our understanding of agency is challenged because, as

women, some of the topics they covered may seem defamatory (Campbell, 2005) because they were outside the societal norm of feminine political issues (Lakoff, 2008).

Sykes (2009) and Strong (2015) developed political agency in their WHCD addresses. They both potentially created political change within their audiences when they addressed political issues facing the audiences. Sykes (2009) talked to each of her audiences about education, torture, and the changing administration. Strong (2015) talked to her audience about corruption in government, women's reproductive healthcare, race, and women's representation in the media. Both addresses challenged the general audience and target audiences to take action on political issues such as torture, race, and women's advancement in society (i.e. reproductive health, black women, education). With the recent women's movement within the United States since the election of Donald J. Trump, I could foresee these speeches coming back into circulation on social media sites, such as Facebook or Twitter.

### **Implications for Society, Politics, and the Media in the United States**

**Implications for society.** Sykes' (2009) and Strong's (2015) addresses have societal impacts on political satire, women in comedy, and social movements. Political satire has typically been a man's world dominated by pundits such as Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, and Seth Meyers (Becker & Waisanen, 2013; Colletta, 2009; Waisanen, 2009; Hart, 2013). Sykes (2009) and Strong (2015) have opened doors for women comedians to engage in political satire. Other famous funny ladies have broken into mainstream satire in 2017. Samantha Bee hosts her own political satire show called *Full Frontal* on TBS, where she satirically critiques political issues such as Stephen Colbert and John Stewart (Full Frontal with Samantha Bee, 2017).

Sykes (2009) and Strong (2015) showed that women could expose the pitfalls of politics while addressing it in comedic ways, without having to play a character other than themselves. This allows more women in comedy to not only experiment with different forms of humor that are historically uncharacteristic of women to indulge in, but also to make enthymematic jokes about issues in society. Most recently, *SNL* has used women comedians to parody the men within the Trump administration (Respers France, 2017). This portrayal of women comedians playing male government officials shows the social movements happening in society today.

Women are united across the world to make their voices heard; the Women's March on Washington was organized to show women standing in solidarity with their basic fundamental rights. The U.S. 2016 election saw the now president use rhetoric that degrades women and other minority groups; the hashtag #repealthe19th, referring to women's right to vote, was trending on Twitter in misogynistic backlash of women backing Hillary Clinton and denouncing Trump (BBC News, 2016). This is why it is important for women to speak on behalf of women and other minority groups in society because silence hurts women, and speaking up can emphasize women's issues.

**Implications for politics.** This analysis also enhanced the way celebrities influence politics. Sykes and Strong both used their status as celebrities in America to advocate for political issues that reside within society. They both hold a unique power as female celebrities, specifically as they use their rhetorical agency to enact citizenship. In American society, celebrities are idolized and listened to (Street, 2012), as was shown with Oprah Winfrey's endorsement of Obama (Kuehl, 2010). Sykes (2009) further

reinforced the presidency of Obama during her remarks; Strong (2015) alluded to a Hillary Clinton presidency following the term of Obama.

Beyond influencing celebrity politics, both women influenced policies being discussed by Congress. Sykes (2009) talked about the inhumaneness of torture; a discussion that was brought up in the 2016 Presidential election by President Trump who has stated he is "pro-torture" (Rejali, 2017). Strong (2015) talked about women's reproductive healthcare and the Affordable Care Act; Congress is considering repealing and replacing the ACA with much debate (Peters, 2017). Both of these instances show how important it is for American citizens, elite and average, to pay attention to what is happening in politics.

Issues from 2009 and 2015 are still prevalent in today's American world of politics. The WHCD is a stage for celebrities to engage multiple audiences with issues that surround them. Sykes (2009) and Strong (2015) brought their unique societal standpoints to the stage of the WHCD. The year before Strong appeared on the stage, an article was written about how the ball was dropped when another white, heterosexual man was picked to be the WHCD host for 2014 (Mora, 2014). This shows the need for a diversified list of speakers for the WHCD because given the audience composition, the WHCD has become a political stage to speak out on issues instead of just accepting White House Correspondents Association awards.

**Implications for the media.** This analysis has shown the unique relationship between American government, Hollywood, and the press. During the Obama administration, there was a harmonious relationship between the three outlets. President Obama took the jokes delivered by Sykes (2009) and Strong (2015) with a smile on his

face. The only time there was a rift was when Sykes (2009) talked about Rush Limbaugh and 9/11, calling him the 20th hijacker. The Obama administration did denounce that joke as many people still grieve the horrific events that transpired on September 11, 2001 (Staltonstall, 2009).

However, in 2017, there is a distrust built around the media by the Trump administration (Ingram, 2017). The 2016 election introduced the United States society to an era of fake news shared on Facebook (Chaitin, 2017). President Trump and his cabinet barred some news organizations from attending White House press briefings with Press Secretary Sean Spicer (Rascoe, 2017), and this tension between the Presidential administration and the media has shifted greatly from the working relationship most Americans are used to. President Trump has even said he will not be in attendance at this year's WHCD because of the fractured relationship between his administration and mainstream media (Wang, 2017). Cecily Strong (2015) had the media take an oath to report actual news, not the wardrobe choice of Hillary Clinton going into the 2016 election; today, the American public is ultra-critical of the mainstream media because of the distrust built between the government and media. The media condemns the administration for giving, as presidential adviser Kellyanne Conway stated, "alternative facts" (Fang, 2017); and the administration resorts back to chastising the mainstream media as "too liberal" (Ernst, 2017), creating a circle of he-said-she-said the American public has to sift through to get to the truth.

### **Limitations**

This study is limited in that it only analyzed the addresses from Wanda Sykes in 2009 and Cecily Strong in 2015 at the WHCD. There are many WHCD addresses



available for viewing from the Obama administration; however, Sykes and Strong were purposely selected solely because they diversified the typical stage of the WHCD as women (White House Correspondents Association, 2015). This limited the study as the men who took the stage at the WHCD may have mentioned some of the same themes seen in Sykes' and Strong's performances during the Obama administration. Although Sykes and Strong bring unique feminist standpoints, if the male hosts brought up women's political issues, then it could potentially discredit the emphasis of the feminist standpoint and experiences when discussing issues relevant to those standpoints.

Another limitation is the time of the study. Since the beginning of this analysis, a new president has been elected in America. During the time of this writing, Hillary Clinton won the 2016 Democratic National Primary and ran a hard campaign against Donald J. Trump (AP, 2016). She lost the Electoral College in 2016, but won the popular vote by 3 million ballots (AP, 2016). She has remained out of the public eye since; however, she did appear at his inaugural luncheon in an all-white outfit to pay homage to the women suffragists who came before her (Chozick, 2017). It is important to note that both Sykes (2009) and Strong (2015) made references to Hillary Clinton in their WHCD speeches. This limitation is of significance because since the election of Donald Trump, supporters of women's rights have been outspoken with organizing marches around the world, wearing white in honor of women suffragists, and even held "A day without a Woman" on March 8, 2017, as well as celebrated international women's day, where people across the world wore red in honor of the day. While there is no direct link between Sykes' (2009) and Strong's (2015) addresses to today's movement, the rhetoric

they shared can be heard in the resounding voices of millions of women who share their viewpoints across the nation in 2017.

This exposes another limitation, which is Americanization. Since the WHCD is a dinner unique to the United States, this study could be hard to replicate internationally. The United States has the uniqueness of intersections between politics, Hollywood, and the media (Street, 2012). With the outcry of the Trump administration's proposed policies from Hollywood, the media, and the American public, this study has become oddly unique as the future relationship of these intersections fractures. The media has traditionally been the 4th estate to government reporting the happenings to the American populous. The news is how the American populous learns of events going on in the nation and world; it helps create transparency within the government. Since the inauguration of President Donald Trump, distrust between the administration, media, and the American public has grown in the span of a few months (Ingram, 2017). The 2016 election created an era of "fake news" shared by media outlets, and a world of "alternative facts" shared by the Executive Branch (Kurtzleben, 2017). This becomes a limitation because of the turmoil facing politics, the media, celebrities, and the American populous. The relations of government, the media, and Hollywood have become as polarized as the political parties in the United States are today. The once good-natured satirical addresses heard at the WHCD may become more pointed and cynical if the fracturing continues.

The rhetorical method of this study is another limitation. In rhetorical scholarship, effect claims about the impact of a message on an audience cannot be made. The messages may have had potential impacts on audience members; however, a different

study would have to be conducted to know the extent of the impact, or if the speeches had any impact at all. I further suggest different methods be used in examination of these addresses to explore potential impacts.

### **Future Studies**

Scholars should continue to study WHCD dinner addresses from the past and those to come in the future. Specifically, scholars should look at all the WHCD hosts during the Obama administration to see if there are common themes threaded throughout addresses. Scholars should study future WHCD speeches, especially if the divide between the media and government continues in the Trump administration. President Trump has said he will not attend the 2017 WHCD (BBC News, 2017); this may influence the significance of the WHCD as a public forum because Alec Baldwin, who plays a parody of Donald Trump on *Saturday Night Live*, has reportedly offered to attend the WHCD in President Trump's place (Andrews-Dyer, 2017). This creates an entirely new situation of the use of a different form of comedy at the WHCD—parody. Studies should be conducted rhetorically, but also in the form of content analysis to code for themes. Quantitative scholars may also be intrigued by audience reactions. Surveys can be given to those who were in attendance at the WHCD or could fill out a survey after viewing certain WHCD addresses, which measures the effect of the messages on the audience.

Women rhetors need to be given voice in all disciplines. Future scholars should continue to expose the inequities of the genders within their fields of study. Women bring a unique perspective to a patriarchal society, and their contributions should not be neglected (Wood, 2005). When given the opportunity to speak out about issues, women

bring light into the darkness furthering American society and the world. Studies should continue to examine the shattering of glass ceilings across disciplines as it pertains to gender and racial differences.

### **Summary**

Now, more than ever, it is imperative to study the messages being sent by minority groups to mass audiences. Wanda Sykes and Cecily Strong are only the tipping points for a mass wave of celebrity women using national stages to comment on the conditions imposed upon women in society. The unique opportunity for Sykes and Strong to address specifically politicians and the media is of significance. Many famous women are able to make remarks about the state of American society, but rarely are they given the opportunity to address politicians in a face-to-face manner about women's issues in society. Celebrities like Meryl Streep and Octavia Spencer have used their wins at their award shows to comment on the state of the country (Victor & Russonello, 2017). With Donald J. Trump as president, there has been a divide between politics, the American people, and the media. President Trump has banned certain media outlets from the White House press briefings because he considers them "fake news" (Rascoe, 2017). President Trump will also not be in attendance at the White House Correspondents' Dinner this year because of the disconnect between his administration and the mainstream media (Wang, 2017). The future of the WHCD is uncertain as the tensions in American society between the government, people, and media continue to grow in the Trump administration.

**APPENDIX A: WANDA SYKES' COMPLETE REMARKS AT THE 2009  
WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENTS' DINNER**

Thank you. Thank you. This is truly an honor to be here. It really is. [APPLAUSE]

I keep getting asked the same question. Are you nervous? Are you nervous? I'm like with this administration? What is there to be nervous about? If I do a good job, I get great press, and if I screw it up royally, Tim Geithner will give me a bonus. [LAUGHTER]

I understand. It is hard to poke fun at the president because he is so likeable. Everybody has t-shirts, and bumper stickers, and people are listening to the radio, and people are dedicating songs. I would like to send out "Always and Forever" to the president. People love you, even the media. You guys have been very favorable towards the president. It is funny to me that they have never caught you smoking, but they somehow always catch you with your shirt off. [LAUGHTER]

I know you are into this transparency thing, but I don't need to see your nipples.

[LAUGHTER]

Is there a beach at Camp David? What the hell? There was never a nipple portrait of Lincoln. I am sorry. [LAUGHTER]

But this is amazing. The first black president. I know you are biracial—but the first black president. I'm proud to be able to say that. The first black president, and that's unless you screw up. Then it is going to be what's up with the half white guy? Who voted for the mulatto? [LAUGHTER]

I must say, Mr. President, I thought that when you got into office that you would put a swift end to your basketball pickup playing. I mean come on. First black president playing basketball. That is one step forward, two steps back. [LAUGHTER]

I bet you think your game is really nice right now, don't you? You think you have got good moves. Nobody is going to give the president a hard foul with the secret service standing there. [LAUGHTER]

He is probably bragging and everything. You should have seen me today, baby. I was ballin'. [LAUGHTER]

They are just stroking your ego. They are like Mr. President; you really shook me that time. [LAUGHTER]

I thought you were going this way, and then I saw secret service do this, so I went that way. Right to the hole, sir, right to the hole! [LAUGHTER]

But that is the thing about you, sir. You are so likable because you are so accessible.

You're playing basketball. I bet you rappers give you their demo. Can you get this to Jay-Z for me? And then you are taking the First Lady out on dates. I wouldn't be surprised if I walked past the White House and see you out there mowing the lawn. Don't let them get a John Deere, please. >>

You hang out too much. You and Joe Biden out getting a hamburger. You two can't hang out together. Whose idea was that? Nancy Pelosi's?[LAUGHTER]

Hey, why don't you boys go out and get a bite?[LAUGHTER]

You know she was a Hillary Supporter. What's wrong with you? Oh, and God forbid if Joe Biden falls into the hands of terrorists. If there is ever a hostage situation, we are done. They won't even have to torture him. All they have to do is go, "How's it going, Joe?" He will come back with stacks of information. What did you do, did you water board him? No. I just said nice weather, and he's still talking. I can't listen to him anymore. It is like torture. [LAUGHTER]

So if you guys are running out like that, the Secret Service, you guys have to stay on point. You have to step up your game. You made me a little nervous when those shoes got past you. Throwing shoes at Bush. I did speak to the to the head of the Secret Service, and he said we just don't know how much footwear they stopped. [LAUGHTER]

I got to say this about President Bush. He knows how to leave town. We haven't heard anything from him. He is just quiet. He leaves like that houseguest that breaks something in your house and hurries up and gets out of there before you find out. [LAUGHTER]

You look at your beautiful vase, and say what is that? Who broke my vase? I gotta say, he broke a lot of stuff, sir. He broke a lot of stuff. You thought you were going to find a new home. You got a fixer-upper. There are a lot of things that need to be fixed. You are trying to help, and I'm amazed at some people not allowing you to help. What is up with the governors who turn down money? Who turns down money? Maybe you should get Oprah to give it away. Oprah would say, "Okay, governors, look under yours seats.

[LAUGHTER]

I know Governor Sarah Palin, she's not here tonight. She pulled out at the last minute.

Somebody should tell her that is not really how you practice abstinence. [LAUGHTER]

Oh, shut up. You're going to be telling that one tomorrow. Shut up. [LAUGHTER]

The states need the money, especially our school systems. I am so happy you are doing something about education and that you want to pay our teachers more, because our teachers are grossly underpaid. That's right. Pay the teachers more money- maybe then they will stop sleeping with the students. [LAUGHTER]

You'll tell that one too, I am telling you. And tax problems. Everybody complains about taxes. Nobody wants to pay their taxes. Everybody is complaining about don't raise

taxes! Me, I don't mind paying my fair share. I gladly pay my fair share. A lot of people have problems with it. You to go dinners like this, and fancy occasions, and fundraising events, and you see people shelling out big money for charity dinners, like \$2,000 a plate. It is not the problem that people don't like writing a check. I think they just like to dress up. So maybe next April 15 you have like a big tax ball. Give everyone some champagne, bring Rascal Flatts in, have it at the convention center. See people getting all ready for it. Girls getting their nails done. What are you doing? Girl, I'm getting ready to go pay my taxes.[LAUGHTER]

First Lady, beautiful as always, looks very nice. [APPLAUSE]

And how dare you people give her grief about baring her arms. The country is broke, and sleeves cost money. [LAUGHTER]

And you have lovely arms, so I am glad you are showing off your arms. That's right.

You let some of these little floozies out here know. You can try some funny business if you want to, but you are going to get one of these babies around your neck.

[LAUGHTER]

You have beautiful arms, unlike some of the previous First Ladies. They needed sleeves.

Some of them needed ponchos. I didn't name any names. [LAUGHTER]

But you do need to keep your arms to yourself sometimes. You went over to London and touching the Queen. You can't do that. You are over there patting the queen on the back like she just slid into home plate. Way to go, Queen. [LAUGHTER]

And whose idea was it to give the Queen an iPod? What an awful gift. What is she going to do download Lady GaGa? What are you going to give the Pope, a Bluetooth?

[LAUGHTER]



You should have given the queen something like a memento of our country, something that says America. Give her Texas. [LAUGHTER]

And I could say to the First Lady, kudos to you for unveiling the bust of Sojour Truth in the White House. Could you do me a favor and make sure it is nailed down real well?

You know when the next white guy comes in they are going to move it to the kitchen.

[LAUGHTER]

Mr. President, you have had your fair share of critics. Even Senator McCain. He gave your grief about the new helicopters that your didn't order. I think Mr. McCain was bitter because he wanted to be in the new helicopters. Tell Mr. McCain, I'm sure if you ask nicely, your wife will buy you a helicopter. [LAUGHTER]

Rush Limbaugh, one of your big critics. Boy, Rush Limbaugh says he hopes this administration fails. He is like I don't care about people losing their homes, or jobs, -- or our soldiers in Iraq. He just wants the country to fail. To me that is treason. This is something like Osama Bin Laden would say. You may want to look into him. I think he was the 20<sup>th</sup> hijacker, but he was so strung out on Oxi-cotton to continue his missed flight. [LAUGHTER]

But you are laughing inside. I know you are. Rush Limbaugh. "I hope the country fails". I hope his kidneys fail. How about that? [LAUGHTER]

He needs to go to water boarding. That is what he needs. Sean Hannity said he was going to get water boarded for charity for armed forces. He hasn't done it yet, I see, like can he take one. Please. You might be able to take a water boarding by someone you know or trust. But let someone from Pakistan water board him or Keith Olbermann. He could take

a water boarding. I can break Sean Hannity just by giving him a middle seat in coach.

[LAUGHTER]

Oh, I think I need legroom. Dick Cheney, he's a scary man. He scares me to death. I tell my kids, if two cars pull up and one has a stranger and the other car has Dick Cheney, you get in the car with the stranger. [LAUGHTER]

Dick Cheney is trying to defend torture. He is trying to defend torture. We released the memos to show all the information we got from our practices. You can't defend torture. That is like me robbing a bank and then going in front of the judge and saying, "Yes, your Honor, I robbed the bank, but look at all these bills I paid." [LAUGHTER]

And finally, they even gave you grief about the dog, about Bow. Even animal rights people are on you. Why didn't he get a rescued dog? The man has to rescue a country that has been abused by the previous owner. Let him have a fresh start with a dog. Thank you all very much. Good night. [CHEERS AND APPLAUSE]

**APPENDIX B: CECILY STRONG'S COMPLETE REMARKS AT THE 2015  
WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENTS' DINNER**

Feels right to have a woman follow President Obama, doesn't it? Good evening, I am Cecily Strong. You may know me from "Saturday Night Live", or as the ethnically ambiguous girl from every college brochure. I am a mash-up of all the people in Hillary's announcement video. [LAUGHTER]

I'm also the first straight woman to host this in 20 years; so, we finally made it, straight people. Where my heterosexuals at, huh? [LAUGHTER]

Just because I am a woman doesn't mean I'm going to go easy on you people. I'm going to go easy on you people because my brain is smaller [LAUGHTER]

I feel very lucky to be here. Last year's host, Joel McHale, proves that speaking at this dinner is an amazing opportunity that can take you from starring on a show on NBC all the way to starring on that same show, but on Yahoo! [LAUGHTER]

I took Amtrak here. It was way more luxurious than I thought. Did you know they have massage seats available? All you have to do is sit in front of Joe Biden. hands don't get tired, somehow. I hope everybody enjoyed dinner. We tried to get Memories Pizza to cater this event, but they heard a rumor that Barney Frank might be here, so thanks a lot, Barney. We could of have that world famous Indiana Pizza. I can make that joke about Indiana because I am from Illinois.[LAUGHTER]

The White House Correspondents' Dinner is a chance for all of you to unwind, relax, and left as soon as you notice someone slightly more powerful than you laughing.

[LAUGHTER]

Just so weird to be up here. Since I'm only a comedian, I'm not going to try to tell you politicians how to do politics or whatever. That's not my job. That would be like you guys telling me what to do with my body, I mean, can you imagine? [LAUGHTER]  
[APPLAUSE]

Tonight's event is being broadcast on C-SPAN. To viewers watching at home, hello. To most viewers watching at home on C-SPAN, meow. [LAUGHTER]

If you don't know how to find C-SPAN, you just press the guide button on your remote, and hit page up until your thumb cramps up. I just want to do a camera check. Okay, camera one. And that's it. [LAUGHTER]

It is great to be here at the Washington Hilton. Is something a prostitute might say to a congressman. The Washington Hilton, you guys. Man, if these walls could talk, they would probably say, clean me. It's crazy to think that our president is right here in the ballroom of a Washington Hilton. It's even crazier to think that our vice president is right now in the ball pit of a Washington Chuck E. Cheese. But seriously, the Washington Hilton is great. I bet that, when the president walks in and saw all those bellhops, he thought, finally some decent security. [LAUGHTER]

I'm just kidding, let's give it up for the secret service. Yeah. [APPLAUSE]

They are the only law enforcement agency in the country that will get in trouble if a black man gets shot. Are you saying, "boo" or "true"? You are all in this together, from the networks at front, to the Internet and cable in the back, all the way to the print journalists who are bussing the tables. [LAUGHTER]

MSNBC is here. I love MSNBC. Even their call letters are longwinded. Just a great variety of shows, Rachel Maddow, Locked Up Abroad, Lock Up Raw, Lock Up SVU,

Lock Up en Espanol, Lock Up Bloopers. MSNBC shows so many prison documentaries they are making Ed Schultz get a teardrop tattoo. Fox News is here. Fox News has been losing a lot of viewers lately, and may they rest in peace. That's nice to say. It's all just hot blonde ladies and old dudes. Every show on Fox News looks like a party scene from "Weekend at Bernie's". You've got to give it up for CNN. It's comforting to know that whenever a big story breaks, I can turn to CNN and watch Anthony Bourdain eat a cricket. [LAUGHTER]

Huffington Post is here. Hey, way to go on that partnership with AOL. Everyone in my chatroom won't stop talking about it. BuzzFeed is here, but I can show you a listicle of 17 reasons why they shouldn't be. USA Today is here. They are only here because they slipped under the hotel door. That's USA Today, unless today is Saturday or Sunday.

[LAUGHTER]

NPR is here. NPR had a lot of success with the "serial" podcast, which finally answers the question, "What would it be like if somebody gently whispered an episode of dateline? Sarah Koenig must have really been pissed about Jinx. It's like serial but with an ending. Next season; pick somebody who definitely did it, like Amanda Knox. There's DNA on the knife, you guys. NBC is here. Even us at SNL got criticized this year for making fun of ISIS. It's unfair. If anybody is guilty of taking ISIS too lightly it's umm, you know (gestures to Obama). You know? What can I say about Brian Williams?

Nothing, because I work for NBC. [LAUGHTER] [APPLAUSE] There are so many stars from so many great shows here. We are in a golden age of television. I still see so many negative portrayals of black and gay people. I mean, it's 2015, and we still have

characters like John Lemon, it's ridiculous. The cast of Blackish is here, which I think is inappropriate, after the way they treated those whales at SeaWorld. [LAUGHTER]

The cast of Game of Thrones is here, and they tell me that even they have never seen this many nerds before. Naomi Campbell is here. Naomi, you are lucky Hillary is not here, as if you threw your blackberry at her, she would delete everything right off it.

[LAUGHTER]

Hillary said she used her private e-mails because she didn't want to use more than two devices. If that sounds familiar, it's also one of the rules from the sex contract in 50 shades of grey. The cast of Downton Abbey is here. Thanks for the generous donation from the constituents of Aaron Schock—speaking of Aaron Schock, you may notice I'm a little tan. I just got back from the most fabulous trip that Aaron took me on, and I brought my Instagram photos to share with you. You are probably familiar with this picture of Schock surfing in Hawaii. See, there's me. I didn't even need a surfboard; I just used Aaron's abs. Then we went diving into his swimming pool he had built. It hurt when I landed. Here is me and Aaron skydiving. He said he made his own parachute out of gifts his constituents gave him. -- Isn't that sweet? Here we are at the Eiffel Tower. Paris is so beautiful. Mr. President, you should think about going there sometime. I hear the weather is nice in January. Here we are on our trip to California. We must have done this for hours and hours, just so much wasted water. Fun. Here we are at his own dinosaur island.. Here we are after hunting the dinosaurs. Is that—Brian Williams? What are you doing, you rascal? Aaron and I, we had so much fun. It was not romantic, it was strictly a friendship trip, he reminded me every day. Just because Aaron Schock resigned doesn't mean there aren't any smoking hot congressmen left. Looking out tonight, I see so many

tens. Well, Washington tens, but New York fours- Indiana 30s. Harry Reid was a boxer before he spent five terms as a punching bag. One of my favorite things that happened in Congress this year was when a Senator Jim Inhoff brought in a snowball to prove that climate change isn't real. I mean, that blew my mind. I don't even need to see the other science projects. First prize, Jim. You brought science to life, man! So cool. Senator Tom Cotton got other senators to sign an open letter he wrote to Iran. The most surprising thing is that a guy named Tom Cotton is a U.S. Senator, and not a rabbit from an old racist Disney cartoon. Tom Cotton's defense, he was just trying to repair America's strained relationship with Israel. He doesn't need to worry about that. All relationships will be better in the next administration, as soon as Israel makes a generous donation to the Clinton Foundation. "True" or "boo"? Now, it's been a great year for women, as always. [LAUGHTER]

Hobby Lobby said they didn't want to pay for health care if it included things like contraceptives. Which is weird, because all I asked was what aisle is the yarn in? I do love Hobby Lobby. I went in there this morning, and I bought the cutest wicker basket to hold all of my morning after pills.[LAUGHTER]

A representative recently asked if gynecological exams could be conducted by a woman on camera, and now he and his wife have a perfectly ruined a good Go Pro. President Obama came out in support of putting women on money; as opposed to the DEA agents who prefer to put money on women.- So much to talk about this year. The big story, the republicans finally succeeded and Obama is being forced out of office in 18 months. You did it! So many great people have already announced they are running. It's like, who is better than Marco Rubio? Hillary. Who's better than Rand Paul? Hillary. Who's better on

the economy than Hillary? Bill. Hillary's campaign slogan is- it's your time. Which I assume she says herself in the mirror while she dead lifts 200 pounds. I'm excited about Hillary running. I'm not sure she's excited about having to run, I think she feels the same way Meryl Streep Feels when she has to audition for something- "Are you kidding me?" This next part is a repeat after me. I want all the media to put their hands up and swear something this election season, okay? I solemnly swear not to talk about Hillary's appearance because that is not journalism. [LAUGHTER] [APPLAUSE]

Also, Cecily Strong looks great tonight. [LAUGHTER]

I don't want you to take any of this as an endorsement for Hillary Clinton, because I would never blindly endorse a candidate I do not play on SNL. Hillary Clinton has her work cut out for her. Her democratic challengers are a who's who of who's that. Jim Webb, Lincoln Chafee, Silas Phelps, Peters Wilks. Those las two are characters from the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, but you didn't even notice, did you? Let's not forget Martin O'Malley. I don't have anything to add, that's just his actual campaign slogan. [LAUGHTER]

Lincoln Chafee running for president is like watching a dog look for its dead owner. A lot of people want Elizabeth Warren to run, but many think she is too idealistic and her purposed policies are too liberal. But look at President Obama, people thought the same thing about him. He didn't end up doing any of that stuff. [LAUGHTER]

The republican field is ideologically diverse, including people like Ted Cruz who's a tea partier, Rand Paul who's a libertarian, and people like Chris Christie, who is a Democrat, Jeb Bush is probably in the race. The presidential race, not the Hispanic race. That was an accident. Marco Rubio is running. When Jeb Bush found out he said, ay, dois mio. Marco



Rubio makes Mitt Romney look relaxed on the air. I just hope Marco gets comfortable before he gets on camera to endorse Jeb. Chris Christie said if he was elected president eh would crack down on states who have legalized marijuana as it is a gateway drug. So, like a bridge to other drugs? And he wants to shut down a bridge? Polls show that his approval ratings in New Jersey are low. The only thing New Jerseyans approve of less is “that Dominican guy”. Ted Cruz, it’s like the right-wing thought what’s the opposite of a black president? How about a Canadian Latino who will never be President? It’s true. He was born in Canada, a child of Cuban immigrants. I kind of can’t believe he wasn’t in Hillary’s announcement video. [LAUGHTER]

Carli Fiorina is running for president. Seems like a lot of work just to be a Fox News pundit. Rand Paul has announced he is taking over the family’s not being president business. And yes, that is Rand, as in, he didn’t get elected, but at least he “Rand”. He is a libertarian, which is just a republican you have to block on Twitter. Rand Paul’s campaign slogan is defeat the Washington machine, unleash the American Dream. The American Dream, of course, is the model name of Rand Paul’s wig. Enough talk about 2016. Let’s talk about the most important person in the room, my leader, the person I am so glad is in the White House, Michelle Obama. [LAUGHTER] [APPLAUSE]

Michelle, take care of that garden while you can, because you know Bill is going to turn that thing into an above ground pool. [LAUGHTER]

Seriously, Michelle Obama, what an amazing woman. Harvard educated lawyer, a fierce advocate for LGBTQ rights, and the founder of the Let’s Move campaign to combat child obesity. It is a dream to sit next to you, but it’s a nightmare to eat next to you. I have a

confession. When I got up to go to the bathroom for like 20 minutes? I hid a cheese pizza behind the toilet and I ate it. I'm sorry. [LAUGHTER]

And of course, Mr. President, thank you for taking time away from being on Jimmy Kimmel to be here. It's amazing to be seated next to the President and I know this must have cost a ton of food stamps, so thank you. I can say that, a lot of you probably don't know this, but Obama and I grew up together in Chicago. I remember when we used to go down to the basketball court. I would lace up a pair of Jordans, he would slip on his mom jeans. We would just miss three-pointers until sundown. Of course, that's when he'd have to stop and pray to Mecca. Those were simpler times. Now you have problems with Congress, Vladimir Putin, and Israel. You said it yourself. We can't solve problems by holding hands and singing Kumbaya—is the village in Africa he was born in. After six years in office, your approval rating is at 48%. Your gray hair is at 58%. Your hair is so white, it can talk back to the police.[LAUGHTER] [APPLAUSE]

We will high-five about that later. I bet you wish you were coming into office in 2016 instead of 2008. Mr. President, you probably get this a lot, you are a lot like Madonna. You both have given this country so much, but you gotta stop. Mr. President, it was an honor to be here tonight. Thank you to the White House Correspondents' Association, whatever that is. I have to finish up, as the exterminators need to get into this room. I have a bathroom pizza to finish. Thank you so much, good night! [LAUGHTER]  
[APPLAUSE]

**APPENDIX C: VISUAL OF FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY,  
RHETORICAL CITIZENSHIP, AND RHETORICAL AND POLITICAL  
AGENCY**



The image above is of First Lady Michelle Obama addressing the 2016 Democratic National Convention (DNC) from ABC News (2016); this photo shows the intersection of feminist standpoint theory, rhetorical citizenship, and rhetorical and political agency. Obama is using her unique standpoint as a woman to address members of the DNC and television viewers about their duties as American citizens to do their part in the 2016 election while discussing issues in American society (rhetorical citizenship/ rhetorical and political agency).

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