An Ideal Candidate: A Functional Analysis of *Madam Secretary*'s Political Campaign Discourse

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By

William Bryan Paul

Thesis Chair:

Kevin A. Stein, Ph.D.

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Abstract

This paper strives to further unpack the phenomenon of political messaging prevalent in U.S. entertainment media's political genre by analyzing Seasons 1 and 2 of *Madam Secretary* (2014-) through the lens of Benoit's functional theory of political campaign discourse. My work reveals that utterances of acclaim exceed utterances of attack and defense, which conforms to Benoit's original theoretical predictions. Moreover, I observe that comments on- and attribution to- character are more frequent than those related to policy, which does not conform to Benoit's original predictions. I also consider the implications of my analysis and relevant research questions for the future. Notwithstanding limitations, my research seems to connect well to a growing movement within academia to treat fictional entertainment media, and fictional political portrayals in particular, as a site of study to be taken more seriously in the field of political communication.

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More Than Pure Entertainment

At the very heart of U.S. entertainment media's *political genre*- movies and television series steeped heavily in political contexts and subtexts- is the artistic license for Hollywood filmmakers and series creators to communicate, and widely disseminate, their perceptions and interpretations of sociopolitical values, public debates, and current events for mass consumption (Alford, 2010; Parenti, 1992). The cinematic and televisual storylines produced in this vein tend to reflect both familiar political circumstances and the hot-button issues of the day, making such content more accessible and more relatable to viewers (Alford, 2010; Engelstad, 2008; Frame, 2014; McCabe, 2013; Murray, 2010). Archetypal, often romanticized, protagonists at the center of these plots generally symbolize and advocate for certain policies and ideals to make America (and the world) a better place (Coyne, 2008; Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 2006; Scott, 2011). Whether deliberately intended by filmmakers and series creators to be more than pure entertainment, the political genre is such that it is impossible to view its conceived content and not consider the political messaging at play (Eilders & Nitsch, 2015; Holbert, 2005; Jackson, 2009; Murray, 2010; Van Zoonen, 2005).

Entertainment content like *Madam Secretary* (2014-)- the televisual portrayal of a fictional female U.S. secretary of state contemporaneous to former secretary of state Hillary Clinton (Stanley, 2014)- reaffirms that "current entertainment television is not in its entirety devoid of political messages" (Jackson, 2009, p. 66). The substance of these messages- whether in classic films like *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* or in acclaimed television series like *The West Wing*- closely aligns with "the way in which we send, receive, and share information that shapes our political discourse and decision making" (Tuman, 2008, p. 6), which, by definition, is political communication. Much like its predecessors, *Madam Secretary* (currently in its third

season) communicates multiple political messages via its main protagonist, rhetorically framing her as a positive force for good in government amongst characters that vocally support and oppose her. In effect, the series casts its leading lady as an ideal "candidate" for what makes the United States great and how it can be even better. This campaign-esque quality of the series, reminiscent of a recurrent narrative structure within the political genre (Scott, 2011), leads me to believe that examining *Madam Secretary* as one would any real-life political campaign would serve as a timely and crucial contribution to the ongoing dialogue within U.S. popular culture and political communication more broadly as to the nature and implications of political messaging via entertainment media. To that end, this paper applies Benoit's (2007) functional theory of political campaign discourse to Seasons 1 and 2 of *Madam Secretary* to better understand the series' particular approach to delivering political messages in its first two seasons.

Literature Review

My functional analysis of *Madam Secretary* connects to and builds upon a grand heritage of scholarship that has long elucidated and debated the content, consequences, and merits of the relationship between politics and entertainment in the United States (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Bosshart & Hellmuller, 2009; Brownell, 2014; Eilders & Nitsch, 2015; Hinck, 2016; Holbert, 2005; Jackson, 2009; Murray, 2010; Paletz, 2005; Parenti, 1992; Van Zoonen, 2005). Moreover, it complements the subset of literature addressing political portrayals in film and television, wherein fictional political depictions are generally not scrutinized in the same theoretical manner as nonfictional political artifacts (Alford, 2010; Coyne, 2008; Engelstad, 2008; Frame, 2014; Graber, 2012; Holbert et al., 2005; McCabe, 2013; Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 2006; Riegert, 2007; Scott, 2011; Takacs, 2011; Zenor, 2014).

Politics and Entertainment

Both Murray (2010) and Brownell (2014) observe that the intersection of U.S. politics and entertainment media is nothing new. According to Murray, this long history of mutual influence has evolved into a special (practically inescapable) symbiosis between politics and popular culture, wherein popular culture enhances political interconnectivity (via entertainment channels) and politics represent a new "national pastime" (2010, p. 192), reflecting what Brownell describes as "showbiz politics" (2014, p. 232). In her historical overview of Hollywood's influence on political life, Brownell highlights how vast political changes following the Second World War- from the Watergate scandal's devastation of civic trust to the Twenty-sixth Amendment's expansion of the voting age to Ronald Reagan's political rise- "paved the way for celebrities to voice their political beliefs and for entertainment forums, especially television shows like *Saturday Night Live*…to become places for political engagement" (p. 230). Brownell specifically pinpoints Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign as the moment when "the line between politics and entertainment…had fully disappeared" (p. 227; see also Frame, 2014; McCabe, 2013). Since then, researchers have gradually observed increased viewing of entertainment programs for political information (Hinck, 2016).

While little doubt exists among scholars that entertainment media occupy a central place in our political lives, questions persist regarding its content classification (Bosshart & Hellmuller, 2009; Eilders & Nitsch, 2015; Holbert, 2005; Murray, 2010; Paletz, 2005), social impact (Bosshart & Hellmuller, 2009; Hinck, 2016; Jackson, 2009; Parenti, 1992), and general merits (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Brownell, 2014; Van Zoonen, 2005). On the question of content classification, Eilders and Nitsch (2015) argue that the innate heterogeneity of fictional entertainment has made it difficult for researchers to discern distinct patterns, structures, and

routines for political representation in movies and television series. Bosshart and Hellmuller (2009) side with like-minded scholars who believe that content borne of the "politainment phenomenon" (p. 15) deserves careful attention "from a political perspective because the messages offered via entertainment outlets qualitatively differ from those offered through news…[engaging] the audience on an emotional level and [treating] the audience as physically present within the program" (p. 16).

Such political content, according to Murray (2010), allows viewers to "consider different political ideals without the baggage of [their] last vote or [their] ideology" (p. viii). Moreover, she states that entertainment media, in their development of "fictional political worlds," are cognizant of current events and "change their messages when major political events [such as 9/11] happen" (p. viii). Paletz (2005) classifies this type of political content as expressed intentionally, yet implicitly, "by depictions of the protagonists, the values they espouse…their means of achieving these values…and the resolution of the situation…" (p. 97). In this mode, political messages are generally not on the content surface, which makes it difficult to prove a politically motivated intention on the part of the content's producer. Within Holbert's (2005) typology of content classification, fictional political dramas rate high in the area of audience members expecting the content to be primarily political and display a mix of explicit and implied sociopolitical messages.

The question of entertainment media's social impact impels researchers to look beyond what the content *is* to what it potentially *does*. Parenti (1992), for instance, dismisses the notion of intent, predating Paletz's (2005) comment on it, and argues that "[even] if supposedly apolitical in its intent, the entertainment industry is political in its impact" (1992, p. 1). He further argues that audience members' own "perceptual editing" of entertainment content is

undermined by the subtle conditioning of "previously internalized images" (p. 5), making viewers "active accomplices in [their] own indoctrination" (p. 6). Jackson (2009) reports a slightly related trend. Based on an extensive multinational study, Jackson discovers that "[preference] for certain [television] programming among U.S. respondents appears to correlate with the holding of the political beliefs endorsed by the program," noting that "there may be a backlash due to saturation of liberal messages" (p. 82). Other scholars, in assessing entertainment media's potential impact, quickly acknowledge the complexity and inconsistency of this type of work. Hinck (2016) believes that research complications generally stem from the very nature of the subject matter itself: subjective attitudes and behaviors formed by highly subjective media texts. This high degree of subjectivity suggests to Hinck that (1) popular culture artifacts possess multiple meanings; (2) the political use of such artifacts is "not automatic or guaranteed" (p. 14) since it depends on the choice of the viewer or fan to accept and act on mediated premises; and (3) access to these artifacts is not democratic, but varies with one's location and power status. Bosshart and Hellmuller (2009) attribute the inconsistency across studies as to the "political impact of entertainment media" to the fact that "news media are supposed to be more useful to learn about political issues, whereas the entertainment media shape our views about personalities and political lifestyles" (p. 17), thus, again, inferring a high degree of subjectivity that is difficult to measure.

Finally, some scholars have taken special interest in the question of entertainment media's general merits for political life. Brownell (2014) recounts both sides of the perennial debate, with Neil Postman and like-minded critics on one side arguing that "entertainment had trivialized American politics," citing low voter turnout among other disconcerting factors, and intellectuals on the alternate side "[concluding] that entertainment can engage as much as it can

trivialize in an era in which politics is packaged" (p. 230). Bartsch and Schneider (2014) observe a "seemingly contradictory pattern of research and theoretical positions suggesting both positive and negative roles of entertainment in political communication" (p. 370), with some scholars suggesting that entertainment helps, and others suggesting that it hinders, political knowledge and issue awareness. Unlike more skeptical critics, Van Zoonen (2005) argues for a more positive outlook on how popular culture and entertainment can help politics remain viable in the lives of citizens. Her work submits that "popular representations of politics, in which character and narratives are central, provide people with an opportunity to pick up and confirm a broad sense of politicians and the political process, and enable them to express general political reflections and judgments" (p. 139). However, she believes that people will be more likely to use entertainment media to "sharpen their overall angle on politics" than to deliberately evaluate and seek better understanding of specific issues (p. 139).

Of questions related to entertainment media's content classification, social impact, and general merits in the political context, my analysis of *Madam Secretary*'s first two seasons most aligns with past research addressing the question of content classification (i.e., what the content *is*). In that intellectual vein, I attempt to identify potential rhetorical patterns in how a particular product of fictional entertainment portrays politics. However, unlike Eilders and Nitsch (2015), who try to make sense of movies and television series on a massive scale (regardless of their apparent political substance levels), I opt to explore just one television series with dominant political themes. Based on their suggestions for future research, my analysis seems to combine considerations of content- "how the political conditions of the country in which the program is developed affect the depiction of politics" (p. 1577)- and audience- how viewers use, approach, and interact with different types of fictional entertainment- but not effects- "which types of

movies and TV series affect which political beliefs and attitudes under which conditions of media use" (p. 1578). Furthermore, as Eilders and Nitsch (among others) have recognized:

> Although cultivation theory already considers fictional entertainment as a potential source of effects, approaches regarding political effects such as priming, agenda setting, and knowledge gap will need to be extended to fictional sources. So far, few studies in political communication research have considered fiction (e.g., Holbert et al., 2003; Holbrook & Hill, 2005) (2015, p. 1578).

Indeed, my work seems to connect to a larger scholarly effort to treat fictional entertainment as something to be taken more seriously in the field of political communication, and this effort is especially relevant to fictional political portrayals such as *Madam Secretary*.

Political Portrayals in Film and Television

Research on the pronounced portrayal of politics in movies and television series (i.e., the political genre) is also well-established (Alford, 2010; Coyne, 2008; Engelstad, 2008; Frame, 2014; Graber, 2012; Holbert et al., 2005; McCabe, 2013; Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 2006; Riegert, 2007; Scott, 2011; Takacs, 2011; Zenor, 2014) and ties into the body of literature addressing political communication via entertainment channels (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Bosshart & Hellmuller, 2009; Brownell, 2014; Eilders & Nitsch, 2015; Hinck, 2016; Holbert, 2005; Jackson, 2009; Murray, 2010; Paletz, 2005; Parenti, 1992; Van Zoonen, 2005). Alford (2010) defines the political genre (or, as he calls it, the "Political Drama genre") as film and television content that "focuses on the inner workings of powerful institutions" (p. 124). In his estimation, this type of entertainment "[has] tended to champion liberal politics" and "has been more liable…to raise questions about US [sic] foreign policy" (p. 149). More broadly, the

current subset of literature addressing the political genre appears to rest on the assumption that

political messaging, animated by one persuasion or another, pervades the genre's diverse

narratives (e.g., Engelstad, 2008; Scott, 2011; Takacs, 2011). Generally missing from this subset,

though, is any practical analysis of this type of political messaging *as* political messaging,

utilizing methods of inquiry traditionally reserved for real-life (i.e., nonfictional) political

artifacts to make sense of it. Given the tightening, often confusing intersection between politics

and entertainment media (Zenor, 2014), I believe that such analysis can help us better understand

how fictional political portrayals via film and television fit into the "discursive process by which

political information is shared and promotes awareness, ignorance, manipulation, consent,

dissent, action, or passivity" (Tuman, 2008, p. 8).

When it comes to political storylines related to U.S. campaigns and elections, Scott

(2011) indicates that Hollywood tends to obsess over and "[invest] in character, over and above

ideology, party relations and career trajectory" (p. 85). This phenomenon is perhaps symptomatic

of entertainment media's *modus operandi* to elicit in viewers emotional rather than logical

responses and experiences (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Bosshart & Hellmuller, 2009; Brownell,

2014; Engelstad, 2008). Scott (2011) asserts that the industry's "electoral movies," attracted

heavily to character issues, regularly employ the same narrative structure: "There has to be a

hero, a saviour [sic], a leader, who will save the day in the last reel" (p. 85). Emphasis on

character and personality in the midst of political conflict allows Hollywood to simplify plots to

dynamic dichotomies of good and evil "as a means to investigate, condemn or condone theories

of state and national power that are acceptable or antithetical to the prevailing norms" (p. 86). In

Scott's opinion, whether intended or not, this recurrent narrative structure has gradually

permeated and ultimately influenced U.S. politics today, especially in campaigns and elections.

Simultaneous to the influential expansion of Hollywood's political genre is its increased representation of presidential leadership (Coyne, 2008; Frame, 2014; McCabe, 2013; Scott, 2011; Takacs, 2011; see also Brownell, 2014). According to Coyne (2008), "[the] US [sic] presidency symbolizes the pinnacle of promise in America," and the country's presidential elections every four years convey "the same mythic hope that lies at the heart of many classic American movies: the conviction that one good man truly can make a difference" (p. 41). Analyses of NBC's *The West Wing* abound in this area (Engelstad, 2008; Holbert et al., 2005; McCabe, 2013; Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 2006; Riegert, 2007; see also Frame, 2014; Graber, 2012; Zenor, 2014) and are highly relevant not only because of the series' widespread acclaim and popularity, but also, in my opinion, because of its tonal and stylistic resemblance to *Madam Secretary*. To the best of my knowledge, *Madam Secretary* has yet to be the subject of formal academic investigation itself, but past research on *The West Wing* illuminates how researchers could potentially approach *Madam Secretary* as an artifact of study as well as how such work could potentially complement the literature to date.

Of the past research I evaluated, Holbert et al.'s (2005) study of *The West Wing* represents a clear departure from the traditional rhetorical scrutiny of fictional political depictions. Like Eilders and Nitsch (2015), Holbert et al. take the position that "[there] is a need to understand the ways in which entertainment-based television content communicates messages about the American political system and those who serve as public officials" (2005, p. 516). To accomplish this objective, they "[extend] the theory of framing in political communication to include more than just news" (p. 517), thus raising fictional political portrayals to the same level of theoretical consideration as nonfictional political artifacts. Their project serves as a crucial antecedent to my own, both mirroring and validating my analytical intentions with *Madam*

Secretary. My analysis shares the same underlying belief that a "wide range of television content helps shape citizens' political consciousness" and that "our political world is presented to viewers through a diverse set of messages" (p. 517). Also like them, I strive to extend a theoretical framework traditionally reserved for nonfictional political artifacts (i.e., political campaigns) to better understand fictional content as actual political messaging. Of course, at this stage, it is unclear whether Benoit's (2007) functional theory will prove as effective and useful a tool of analysis as framing to make sense of the political discourse found in a fictional artifact like *Madam Secretary*.

My project also builds upon Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles' (2006) textual analysis of *The West Wing*'s convergence of popular culture and U.S. nationalism. The researchers specifically assert that "with predictable regularity in films and television programs, presidents are often heroic figures, men (*and they are always men*) who do what is right and are noble, true, and committed to good causes and pure ends" (p. 22, italics added). More than a decade later, it appears that Hollywood has made purposeful effort to intensify its depiction of women in high-level positions of power, political and otherwise (Blake, 2016; Gilbert, 2015; Leahey, 2013; Rothkopf, 2015; Stanley, 2014). Strong female protagonists such as *Madam Secretary*'s Elizabeth McCord as well as *Veep*'s Selina Meyer and *Parks and Recreation*'s Leslie Knope, among others, seem to represent an accelerated reversal of the gender gap within the political genre, a gap noted by Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles (2006). What is more, these fictional political portrayals also seem to redress the political genre's hierarchical gap, extending the genre beyond presidential leadership (at least as the main site of action) to include underrepresented public offices and private roles (legislative positions, bureaucratic department heads, spouses, etc.). (Previous exceptions to the norm of presidential protagonists include film classics such as *Mr.*

Smith Goes to Washington and *Advise & Consent*.) Despite these advances, though, little to no

formally published work of which I am aware has addressed these female characters, their

political narratives, or the extent to which they reflect, and affect, public perceptions of political

leadership. The current trend of female leadership being depicted so prominently in fictional

political contexts, contemporaneous to the nonfictional presidential campaign of Hillary Clinton

(Healy & Martin, 2016; McCaskill, 2016), makes the thoughtful study of it especially

meaningful and timely.

Several other studies of *The West Wing* have also focused on the series' presentation of

presidential leadership and the extent to which it accurately and effectively does so (Engelstad,

2008; Frame, 2014; Graber, 2012; Holbert et al., 2005; McCabe, 2013; Riegert, 2007; Zenor,

2014). These studies manifest an array of avenues by which researchers could potentially

approach *Madam Secretary* as political artifact: the series as a performance of political

socialization (Frame, 2014); the series' level of appeal to various audience segments in its story

and character development (McCabe, 2013; Zenor, 2014); the series' degree of balance between

"pathos-heavy melodrama" and political talk (Engelstad, 2008, p. 322); the series' level of

positive depictions of government (Graber, 2012; see also Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 2006)

against its potentially counterproductive representations (Riegert, 2007).

Multiple political communication scholars, according to Hinck (2016), "have recognized

that major shifts in political communication and civic practices are occurring" (p. 3). She

references Delli Carpini's prognostication that "the major question for political communication

researchers…in the future will be: how should we study these new forms of civic action based on

new sources of political information" (p. 3). Holbert et al. (2005) demonstrated one way to

pursue this question in the fictional political context. Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles (2006) hinted

at one area needing greater attention (i.e., fictional depiction of female leadership). Other

scholars have simply drawn attention to the ongoing relevance and informational impact of

fictional political content (Engelstad, 2008; Frame, 2014; Graber, 2012; Holbert et al., 2005;

McCabe, 2013; Riegert, 2007; Zenor, 2014; see also Jackson, 2009; Van Zoonen, 2005). As for

me, I follow Holbert et al.'s initiative with *The West Wing* and seek to elevate *Madam Secretary*,

as fictional political artifact, to a standard of rhetorical analysis on par with nonfictional political

artifacts. As the media landscape continues to evolve (Edgerly & Thorson, 2016; Houston &

McKinney, 2016), with people turning to entertainment media options for political information

and guidance (Hinck, 2016), the study of fictional political portrayals *as* political messaging

becomes more compelling and critical.

Benoit's Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse

By looking at the political genre- and *Madam Secretary* specifically- as a form of

political messaging on analytical par with nonfictional political discourse, it makes sense to

analyze it as one would any real-life political artifact to better classify and understand its overt

(and implicit) political themes. Benoit's (2007) functional theory of political campaign discourse

offers a powerful lens through which political communication researchers can ascertain the

rhetorical strategies a candidate for public office employs to increase his or her favorability or

preferability in the eyes of the public and secure votes for electoral victory. Like nonfictional

political candidates, fictional protagonists of the political genre appear to give voice not only to

relevant policy issues, but also to national anxieties and aspirations (Coyne, 2008). This display

of discourse gives the political genre a very campaign-esque quality (regardless of whether the

content itself ultimately aims to persuade viewers), which, in turn, justifies consideration of the

genre as artistic campaign rhetoric suited nicely for functional analysis.

Benoit's theory operates on six key axioms. First, it posits that "[v]oting is a comparative act" (p. 32), or an opportunity for citizens to critically weigh and choose from different candidate options. Second, it maintains that in this comparative context, "[c]andidates must distinguish themselves from opponents" (p. 34) to win support. Third, the theory holds that "[p]olitical campaign messages allow candidates to distinguish themselves" (p. 35) and (ideally) raise their favorability status among voters. Fourth, it reasons that "[c]andidates establish preferability through acclaiming [i.e., emphasis on personal strengths and benefits], attacking [i.e., emphasis on opponents' weaknesses and costs], and defending [i.e., emphasis on refuting attacks] (p. 36). Fifth, it maintains that "[c]ampaign discourse occurs on two topics: policy and character" (p. 44). Sixth, and lastly, it notes that "[a] candidate must win a majority (or a plurality) of the votes cast in an election" (p. 48).

From these axioms, Benoit (2007) derives three important theoretical predictions of behavior: (1) "[c]andidates will use acclaims more frequently than attacks" (p. 43), (2) "[p]olitical candidates will use attacks more frequently than defenses" (p. 43), and (3) "[p]olicy comments will be more frequent than character comments in presidential campaign discourse" (p. 47). To support his predictions, Benoit reasons that acclaims are more likely to generate positive reactions from voters because they completely focus on personal preferability without going negative. Attacks may have some positive impact for a candidate, but voters generally dislike political fights, and thus, would be turned off by them. Defenses, while good at restoring credibility, carry three drawbacks: (1) "[t]hey are likely to take a candidate off-message," (2) "they risk informing or reminding voters of a potential weakness," and (3) "they may create the impression that the candidate is reactive (defensive) rather than proactive" (p. 43).

Regarding the topical dichotomy of policy and character, functional theory divides each topic into three classifiable forms (Benoit, 2007). Policy is divided into past deeds, future plans, and general goals. *Past deeds* relate to outcomes of candidates' actions and can be used in acclaims and attacks. *Future plans* concern candidates' policy proposals, the means directed toward a specific end. *General goals* represent the ends, not the means, and also relate to the future. Character is divided into personal qualities, leadership ability, and ideals. *Personal qualities* represent a candidates' unique traits involving integrity, courage, and so forth. *Leadership ability* reflects one's experience and track record in getting things done. *Ideals* refer to principles and values espoused by the different candidates. These distinct forms rest on three additional predictions: (1) "[g]eneral goals will be used more often to acclaim than to attack" (p. 54), (2) "[i]deals will be used more often to acclaim than to attack" (p. 54), and (3) "[g]eneral goals will be used more frequently than future plans" (p. 55).

To date, Benoit's functional theory has been used to analyze the political communication found in a cornucopia of campaign artifacts, including U.S. Senate and gubernatorial campaign debates (Benoit, Brazeal, & Airne, 2007), U.S. congressional television spots (Brazeal & Benoit, 2001, 2006), U.S. presidential campaign press releases (Cho & Benoit, 2006), U.S. vice presidential debates (Benoit & Airne, 2005), U.S. presidential direct mail advertising (Benoit & Stein, 2005), newspaper coverage of U.S. presidential primary debates (Benoit, Hansen, & Stein, 2004), U.S. presidential primary debates (Benoit et al., 2002), U.S. presidential television spots (Benoit, 1999b, 2001), U.S. nominating convention speeches (Benoit, 1999a; Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 2000), and U.S. political advertising (Benoit, 2000). Functional theory has also been used to analyze Ukrainian presidential debates (Benoit & Klyukovski, 2006), compare Korean and U.S. presidential television spots (Lee & Benoit, 2004), and examine the relationship of topical

utterances (related to policy and character) and U.S. election outcome (Benoit, 2003). Taken together, all of these studies have greatly enlarged our awareness of the rhetorical patterns and strategies inherent in political campaigns, the ultimate objective of which is to secure votes for public office.

While Benoit concedes a growing intersection between politics and entertainment media in his own exploration of how politicians and popular culture engage each other in the public sphere (Benoit & Anderson, 1996), his work in this area has not addressed how fictional political content might be treated as actual campaign rhetoric, thus meriting functional analysis. The political genre's ability to seamlessly and glamorously dispense political messages, in conjunction with entertainment media's rising influence in politics, leads me to believe that a functional analysis of *Madam Secretary* will enlarge our intellectual appreciation for how a product of the political genre conveys political messages. Grounded in this perspective, I take up Benoit's (2007) theoretical framework and pose for my analysis the following research questions:

RQ 1: How frequently do functions of acclaim, attack, and defense- as made by and directed toward the main protagonist- appear in Seasons 1 and 2 of *Madam Secretary*?

RQ 2: How frequently do topics of policy and character, as concerning the main protagonist, appear in Seasons 1 and 2 of *Madam Secretary*?

Method

Several factors, from the nature of the political genre to the rising interplay of politics and entertainment, fuel my belief that *Madam Secretary* is a suitable artifact for functional analysis and that functional analysis can illuminate *Madam Secretary*'s approach to political messaging.

In this section, I preview *Madam Secretary* as an artifact nicely suited for functional analysis and explain my analytical approach, which involved extending Benoit's (2007) functional theory to accommodate the communicative features unique to fictional political portrayals.

Madam Secretary as Artifact

Created by Barbara Hall and executive produced by Academy Award winner Morgan Freeman, *Madam Secretary* premiered on CBS on September 21, 2014 ("Madam Secretary," 2017), joining the family of political television series (Rothkopf, 2015; Stanley, 2014; "The 44 Best," 2016). The series' pilot episode ran in proximity to Hillary Clinton's concluded tenure as secretary of state (Parnass & Hughes, 2013) and her presidential prospects for the 2016 election cycle (Keilar, 2014). The plot (as obvious from the series' title) centers on the professional and personal life of fictional U.S. Secretary of State Elizabeth McCord, played by actress Tea Leoni. A former CIA analyst turned university professor, McCord is approached by the President to come on board as Secretary of State following the unexpected death of her predecessor (S01E01). Throughout her tenure as State Department head, McCord navigates a sea of complex international issues ranging from a historic Middle Eastern peace deal (S01E05) to an anti-terrorist coalition (S02E20), from a global financial crisis (S01E19) to an important trade agreement (S02E12), and from cyber warfare (S02E01) to refugee aid (S02E16). By the end of the series' second season, McCord accumulates enough favorability for the President to invite her to be his running mate in the upcoming election cycle (Kupfer, 2016), which leads into an intriguing third season premiere (Lockhart, 2016) in timely concert with the actual 2016 U.S. presidential election (Healy & Martin, 2016).

With politics as its focal point of action and conflict, *Madam Secretary* strongly adheres to political genre norms and even employs story elements spearheaded by *The West Wing*. First,

the series manifests a propensity for dramatically depicting political contexts and subtexts

(Blake, 2016; Kupfer, 2016; Lockhart, 2016; "Political drama," 2015; Wieselman, 2017).

Second, while the series is a work of fiction, it situates its chosen contexts and subtexts within a

political climate analogous to its respective time (i.e., our own time). Scenes in this climate range

in their familiarity from specific occurrences- like a U.N. General Assembly address formally

condemning an emergent terrorist syndicate (Blake, 2016), paralleling President Barack Obama's

own appearance at the U.N. (Gordon & Harris, 2015)- to general undertones that allude to

current conditions like political polarization (Warner & McKinney, 2013) by reportedly seeking

to avoid them ("Political drama," 2015; see also Wieselman, 2017).

Third, and like *The West Wing* (Graber, 2012), much of the series' focus is on the main

protagonist, but it also dives into the professional and personal lives of her closest associates and,

moreover, how they interact with and influence each other (Kupfer, 2016; Lockhart, 2016).

Fourth, and perhaps most significantly, the series infuses its storyline and dialogue with a sense

of political romanticism found not only in *The West Wing*, but also in popular political films such

as *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, Dave,* and *The American President* (Blake, 2016; see also

Wieselman, 2017). The significance of this last similarity, in context of all the others, is that

politics and government work are portrayed as noble endeavors with honest, virtuous people

leading righteous causes in the face of controversy and resistance. Thus, *Madam Secretary*

frames its eponymous protagonist as a positive force for good in government and does so with

the rhetorical assistance of other characters that both support and oppose her. In effect, the series

presents Elizabeth McCord as an ideal "candidate" for what makes the United States great and

how it can be even better. This campaign-esque style of characterization makes functional

analysis a viable approach to the series and should enable me to readily identify how the series

dispenses its political messages.

Functional Theory Approach and Extension

At the time of this study, CBS had aired two full seasons of the series (45 episodes total),

and I opted to analyze both seasons in order to obtain as complete a picture as possible of

Madam Secretary's pattern of discourse. This decision proved to require a major investment of

time and energy on my part. The data collection process consisted of watching via DVD each

episode at length and logging in an Excel spreadsheet individual instances of acclaim, attack, and

defense in relation to comments on policy and character, along with their approximate episode

time stamps. On average, I spent two to three hours on each episode, pausing and replaying

scenes as needed to enter codes, taking special care not to miss or incorrectly code relevant

utterances. A simple calculation of time per episode (2-3 hours multiplied by 45 episodes)

reveals that I spent anywhere from 90 to 135 hours coding the content from both seasons, a

substantial coding process by any measure.

In order to effectively analyze the two seasons through Benoit's (2007) theoretical

framework, I procured an unpublished codebook by Benoit to guide my analysis. The codebook

reflected Benoit's theoretical axioms, predictions, and topical divisions as previously discussed

as well as outlined the steps I would need to follow to perform proper functional analysis on each

episode. The first step entailed unitizing *Madam Secretary*'s discourse into distinct *themes*,

which, according to Benoit's codebook, represent the smallest possible coherent expressions of

discourse. Following this step enabled me to more precisely classify the series' content into

functions of acclaim (P, for praise), attack (A), or defense (D) and then into topics of policy (Pol)

or character (Char). (Themes that did not perform one of the three functions were disregarded

because they serve no purpose of analysis.) I next identified each theme's appropriate form of

policy- past deed (PD), future plan (FP), general goal (GG)- or character- personal quality (PQ),

leadership ability (LA), ideal (ID). These steps resulted in a specific code format for each theme:

[Function] [Topic] [Form], or, for example, P Pol PD. Through this rigorous coding process, I

managed to identify and log a total of 9,118 utterances from both seasons for analysis.

Although most of Benoit's theoretical operationalizations and coding rules applied

without need for modification, the nature of my chosen artifact (i.e., a product of fictional

entertainment television) necessitated some theoretical extension to make analysis of it more

feasible. Unlike a political campaign advertisement, speech, or debate (which are generally short,

succinct, and systematic), a television series contains countless sequences of discourse (via

character dialogue) conveying several themes in rapid succession. The pervasiveness of themes

communicated explains why I was able to identify such a high number of relevant utterances in

both seasons. It is also explained by the fact that unlike political campaigns, in which candidates

"talk the talk" about their values and policy positions, a television series depicts its characters in

"real life" and "real time," in an illusively unfiltered (yet obviously scripted) manner in both

professional and personal settings. Moreover, in true dramatic fashion, matters of state are

discussed at various sites during the series (at home, at the office, on the golf course, etc.),

providing viewers with opportunities to consider policy and character in virtual environments

usually untapped during nonfictional political campaigns. This type of televisual depiction

presents viewers with the "whole picture" of who characters really are, beyond sanitized talking

points and stump speeches, with no mechanism in place to shield them from a level of audience

scrutiny most real-life candidates would probably resent. Viewers consequently can take

anything and everything about a character into account as they gauge his or her favorability and

preferability. Thus, in adhering to Benoit's coding rule to put myself in the mindset of the average audience member, I extended my analytical radar to include all sites portrayed throughout the series as part of my search for instances of acclaim, attack, and defense. By doing so, I did not limit my analysis to only those settings where political discourse comes more naturally or is more generally expected to occur.

I further extended Benoit's theory by narrowing my coding of function to only those instances of acclaim, attack, and defense directly related to the main protagonist (McCord), whether originating from her or from other characters. Given how the main protagonist is the unequivocal "candidate" of the series (or "campaign"), driving the plot and giving overwhelming voice to the key issues addressed, it makes sense that analytical focus should rest with her and that all other characters should be considered in light of how they increase (support) or decrease (oppose) her favorability, not their own. Therefore, in looking at utterances that originated from the main protagonist, I accounted for acclaim of herself (but not acclaim of others), attack against others (and, as highlighted in depth later, on herself), and defense of herself (but not defense of others). However, I would make exceptions with utterances of acclaim and defense originating from her on behalf of others if it seemed reasonable that the average viewer would identify them as instances of acclaim of her personally (whether in terms of policy or character). In looking at utterances that originated from other characters, I accounted for acclaim of the main protagonist, attack against the main protagonist, and defense of the main protagonist. For purposes of maintaining focus on the protagonist (i.e., "the candidate" in question), I ignored utterances from other characters that targeted each other, but not her.

Finally, I further operationalized some of Benoit's topical forms to adapt them to the format of fictional television entertainment. As previously noted, the series' "real-time" dramatic

display of administrative leadership allows viewers to see a character actually performing leader-like acts, not just boasting about his or her leader-like acts outside the context of doing them (e.g., telling someone you conducted covert operations for the CIA vs. someone watching you conduct those operations). When a character speaks in the context of performing a job or act, he or she operates in a moment of high credibility because viewers can see firsthand that he or she is truly engaged in that job or act, lending greater weight to that character's abilities. To better code this recurrent televisual display of leadership in action, I broadened the character form of leadership ability (Char LA) to encompass non-policy-oriented administrative acts as they happen in the moment (at the office, in the political arena, etc.) in addition to past government experience and vision (part of Benoit's original theoretical framework). Additionally, for the sake of simplicity, I further broadened the character form of leadership ability (Char LA) to also include past private experience that reflects one's ability to lead and administrate effectively, transferring such experience from the sole province of the character form of personal qualities (Char PQ). Lastly, I classified ongoing government-related plans and polices under the policy form of future plans (Pol FP), streamlining the process, but still allowing for exceptions if the plans or policies in question seemed to be more general or not fully initiated.

Analysis

Upon completing the coding process for Seasons 1 and 2 of *Madam Secretary* as per Benoit's (2007) theoretical framework (with appropriate extensions) and codebook, I bifurcated my 9,118 coded entries into two categories. The first category included the coded entries representing utterances of acclaim, attack, and defense originating from the main protagonist (McCord). The second category included the coded entries representing utterances of acclaim, attack, and defense originating from all other characters (family members, State Department

staff, U.S. government officials and operatives, foreign dignitaries, etc.). Regarding this latter

category, by Benoit's theoretical standards, most characters accounted for in my coding process

alternated between supporting and opposing the main protagonist, including family members.

Given this dual nature of the cast, as well as the obvious fact that acclaims and defenses signal

moments of support whereas attacks signal moments of opposition, it was reasonable to

consolidate all accounted characters outside McCord into a single group for analytical purposes,

a group which I collectively refer to as supporting/opposing forces, or SOF.

Initial appraisal of the data revealed that McCord's utterances drastically surpassed those

of her supporting/opposing forces (SOF). In the first two seasons alone, McCord displayed 6,348

instances of acclaim, attack, and defense on both policy and character, or 69.62 percent of the

total number of utterances detected. In contrast, the SOF collectively displayed 2,770 instances

of acclaim, attack, and defense on both policy and character, or 30.38 percent of the total number

of utterances detected. Such a drastic difference makes sense in light of McCord's prominent

role in the series, which allots her greater narrative presence than the SOF. Moreover, from a

functional theory vantage point, McCord's preponderance of utterances hints at a serious effort

on the creators' part to distinguish their protagonist from the rest of the cast, thus boosting her

favorability and preferability in the eyes of viewers. The general narrative sites of these

utterances range from home to the workplace, from domestic government institutions (the White

House, the State Department, etc.) to foreign locations (Iran, Turkey, Venezuela, India, etc.).

Acclaim, Attack, and Defense

After initial bifurcation and appraisal, I further ordered and categorized the data for

McCord and her supporting/opposing forces (SOF) by function- acclaim, attack, and defense- to

ascertain the frequency of each function by each party (see Table 1). In general, utterances of

acclaim, attack, and defense in *Madam Secretary*'s first two seasons vary in the degree to which

they address themes that the average viewer would likely recognize from his or her own

experience prior to watching. They also vary in their explicit, literal meanings, which demands

careful consideration on the coder's part as to whether a given utterance truly expresses or

represents an instance worthy of note (as opposed to an inconsequential statement of fact or

process). These two features represent the dual essence of each functional instance identified in

the series' first two seasons.

Table 1

Functions of Madam Secretary Seasons 1 and 2

	Acclaims	Attacks	Defenses
McCord	**4,942 (77.85%)**	*706 (11.12%)	**700 (11.03%)**
**SOF	813 (29.35%)	**1,717 (61.99%)**	240 (8.66%)
Total	**5,755 (63.12%)**	2,423 (26.57%)	940 (10.31%)

*Includes "attacks on opposing forces" and "self-attacks"

**All utterances directed toward "McCord"

Of the total number of functional instances identified from the first two seasons, instances

of acclaim dominated the matrix, comprising 63.12 percent of the total number, or 5,755 out of

9,118 utterances. Within acclaim's proportion, McCord displayed 4,942 such instances,

outpacing the SOF's instances of acclaim of her (813) by a wide margin. Based on these

findings, acclaim ranks as McCord's most used function (77.85 percent) and as the SOF's second

most used function (29.35 percent) in the first two seasons. McCord's mass use of acclaim

establishes her as her chief source of support and, once again, hints at a serious effort on the

creators' part to positively distinguish their protagonist from other characters, thus (ideally)

boosting her favorability and preferability in the eyes of viewers.

Throughout the first two seasons, acclaims address a number of themes that the average viewer would likely comprehend and relate to quickly based on normal human experience prior to watching. These instances identify in McCord attributes recognized by most (if not all) people as noble, as happens early in the series when the President explains in three words why he believes McCord is the right choice for secretary of state- "I trust you." (S01E01)- and later when McCord's husband echoes this praise on a larger scale- "You're a good person, Elizabeth." (S02E11). Simple utterances like these emphatically praise McCord for her more favorable qualities, establishing for viewers that she apparently possesses commonly known and positive attributes. McCord consistently validates these relatable instances of praise throughout the first two seasons, even when pressed by opposing forces to participate in questionable political strategies not just once- "I don't need to invoke anything but the truth." (S01E22)- but twice- "If I can't win on the merits, then I deserve to be boxed out of the [President's] circle…" (S02E03). These utterances of acclaim straight from the main protagonist are likely to register easily with the average viewer because they express themes generally understood on a societal level to be good and praiseworthy.

Other acclaims address themes that the average viewer would likely recognize as support for McCord, but probably not as anything he or she has experienced personally. For example, McCord frequently refers to her past work as a CIA analyst to bolster her credibility with her superiors: "Twelve years of working in the CIA under you. I was trained to recognize a global hot spot." (S01E02). She also mentions it often to her colleagues and subordinates: "I led an op back in the '90s, in Sarajevo, called Operation Broken Kingdom." (S01E08). While certainly recognizable instances of praise for experience, it is unlikely that the average viewer would fathom what that type of work (i.e., government intelligence and covert operations) actually

entails; thus, his or her understanding would stop at superficial recognition of the instance per se.

Other utterances of acclaim in this vein portray McCord as performing her job admirably, such

as when she stands by her decision to risk her career and livelihood to thwart a treasonous U.S.-

backed coup oversees: "So, Mr. Chairman, I'd say the only reason that we're here today,

luxuriating in the smug banality of a Senate hearing instead of ducking for cover in all-out war,

is because I had the decency to violate Section 793 of Title 18." (S01E22). She further displays

favorable job performance in her regular rebuke of diplomatic intransigence, as with the

Ukrainian government: "You tell your President to hand Zelinski over to the Russians or the

United States is out and you are on your own. This is coming from the White House. If you think

I'm bluffing, you little son of a bitch, try me." (S02E11). Such utterances would likely register

with the average viewer as instances of acclaim for McCord because they depict her apparently

doing her job well. Nevertheless, the magnitude of McCord's utterances would probably be lost

on the average viewer because of their reflection of duties that fall far outside normal human

experience.

      In addition to their degree of likely relatability to viewers, acclaims also appear to vary in

their explicit, literal meanings. On one end of meaning, utterances of acclaim express themes that

conspicuously place McCord on the right side of an issue or trait. These highly explicit and

literal utterances originate both from McCord and from her supporting/opposing forces (SOF).

Instances on this end of meaning see McCord taking clear and apparently responsible policy

positions- "I support the military option." (S01E08)- as well as vocalizing specific and favorable

attributes- "I have no such ambitions!" (S01E14). Instances on this end of meaning also see the

SOF directly praising McCord for her policy work, ranging from past government experience-

"It changed our policy…Following your article, we did a lot of training…I think in this case it

paid off." (S01E02)- to ongoing executive decisions- "You know what pisses me off the most? The speech worked. The President thinks you're right." (S01E06). The thematic substance of all of these utterances leaves little room for viewers to miss the praise being articulated for McCord, whether by herself or by the SOF.

On another end of meaning, utterances of acclaim represent less conspicuous displays of preferable behavior and personality. These less explicit and literal utterances primarily originate from McCord and require the coder to carefully distinguish truly noteworthy themes from inconsequential statements of fact or process (e.g., routine household or office discourse). Such utterances, supplemented by their respective contexts, serve to insinuate McCord's praiseworthy attributes, such as humility- "You're joking…you can't be serious…Why?" (S01E01)- compassion- "Well, at least let me get Jessica and the kids out." (S01E02)- sincerity- "I am really sorry…" (S01E15)- and devotion to family- "Just…you get me to that game." (S01E09). They also animate dramatic or comedic instances that simply aim to increase McCord's general likability among viewers, such as when she boldly confronts other government officials- "We need to talk. In private. Now!" (S01E08)- or when she adds personal charm and wit to otherwise dry formal gatherings- "Now eat!" (S01E09). Overall, instances on this end of meaning illustrate moments where viewers, due to the all-inclusive presentation format of televisual narrative, can truly take into account every word or phrase uttered by the main protagonist in order to gauge favorability.

Instances of attack paled in comparison to instances of acclaim in the first two seasons of *Madam Secretary* by more than 36 percentage points (see Table 1). Of the total number of functional instances identified, 2,423 utterances (26.57 percent) were classified as attacks. Of that number, only 706 attack-based utterances originated from McCord (11.12 percent of her

personal total), whereas 1,717 attack-based utterances originated from the SOF (61.99 percent of

their collective total). Thus, the SOF (collectively) constituted the primary conveyor of attack in

the first two seasons and displayed attack more than any other function. These instances of attack

originating from the SOF against McCord offer McCord multiple opportunities to make her case

and reassert her favorable features. Furthermore, McCord's comparatively fewer utterances of

attack amid her surplus of personal acclaim help to paint her as a more positive force for good,

boosting her preferability over opposing forces.

As mentioned earlier, the SOF consists of characters who are intermittently staunch

supporters and fierce opponents of McCord. Consequently, viewers can witness someone as

loyal as a family member or work colleague in an instance of acclaim only to then witness that

same character in an instance of attack. For example, McCord's husband frequently praises his

wife for her professional success- "I told you you'd be great at this job." (S01E03)- but suddenly

turns to attacking her when her actions no longer seem appropriate to him- "How dare you."

(S01E03). The President's chief of staff is another character whose support of McCord is as

intermittent as his opposition to her. Viewers can see him in an instance of acclaim for McCord-

"Seriously, nice deflection in there." (S01E05)- followed quickly by an instance of attack- "I

hear you found a way to offend the Canadians. How'd you manage that?" (S01E05). The

functional versatility of recurring characters within the SOF ensures that no character, not even a

family member or close work associate, is ever in complete support of McCord in the series' first

two seasons.

Regardless of their origin, utterances of attack identified in the first two seasons are

mostly explicit and literal in meaning as they generally address clear opposition to specific parts

of McCord's policy positions and character. Viewers can see these utterances articulated by

various foreign officials like the Saudi Arabian ambassador- "Madam Secretary, that would be

an act of war." (S02E10)- as well as by domestic government administrators like the President's

chief of staff- "So, you either get on board and you stay there or you get the hell out of the way."

(S01E21). Rarely will viewers witness an ambiguous or less than literal attack on or from

McCord because it seems that the general convention of rhetorical attack is to strike directly at a

party's attributes, actions, or ideas.

Beyond their explicit and literal nature, instances of attack range in the degree to which

they relate to the average viewer's own experience prior to watching. Such instances manifest, at

the very least, mere disagreements with McCord that originate from family members like

McCord's eldest daughter- "We have philosophical differences. And…I just can't get on board

with her side." (S01E13)- and from work colleagues like political insider Mike B.- "Don't say I

didn't warn you." (S02E03). Instances of attack in this case generally reflect expressions of

opposition found in normal human experience and, thus, are likely to resonate with the average

viewer's own experience. Other instances, though, see the SOF demonstrating outright

belligerence or resentment toward McCord on themes that tend to fall outside normal human

experience. Utterances displayed in this vein once again pit family members like McCord's

father-in-law against her on matters of personal and professional ethics- "She says she cares

about workers like me. She's buddy-buddy with some slave-owning prince!" (S01E13). They

also feature foreign heads of state like the Venezuelan president upbraiding McCord's perceived

diplomatic indiscretion: "You want to humiliate me and the people of Venezuela? Then I will

humiliate you." (S01E11). While the average viewer would likely recognize these attacks as

such, he or she would unlikely relate to them based on personal experience prior to watching.

Compared to instances of acclaim and attack, instances of defense, the third and final function, appeared far less throughout the first two seasons of the series, trailing acclaim by more than 52 percentage points and attack by more than 16 percentage points (see Table 1). Of the total number of functional instances identified, only 940 utterances (10.31 percent) were deemed instances of defense. A breakdown of that proportion sees 700 defensive utterances originating from McCord, placing her use of this function in a virtual tie with her use of attack (11.03 percent), and sees 240 defensive utterances originating from the SOF on McCord's behalf, making defense the SOF's least used function (8.66 percent).

Despite the passion with which the SOF may attack McCord, the characters thereof alternately show equal passion in defending her. For example, the ferocity with which McCord's eldest daughter initially attacks her for past deeds- "It was still wrong. Not to mention against the law." (S01E10)- is eventually replaced with heartfelt allegiance when another character attacks McCord's character later- "Mom doesn't lie. She doesn't pretend to be better than she is. And she faces up to the things that she's done." (S01E13). McCord's husband also defends his wife's character and abilities on a regular basis- "I don't get how that's your fault." (S02E04)- and McCord's chief of staff, even when not in complete agreement with McCord, stands by her superior's decisions once they are made- "Because the secretary said so!" (S01E09). In effect, as in instances of acclaim, the SOF act as an assembly of surrogates that sustains McCord whether she is in the room at the time or whether she is able to speak on her own behalf.

Regardless of their origin, utterances of defense are mostly explicit and literal, which makes sense given that defenses arise, according to Benoit's codebook, in direct response to attack. For example, following the President's initial opposition to her unilateral and unorthodox actions, McCord feels compelled to respond in order to justify herself: "You said you didn't want

a politician in this post. Well, this is me not being a politician…I came here to do the job that you said only I could do. So for God's sake, Conrad, let me do it." (S01E01). In another instance, McCord demonstrates her capacity to respond quickly with viable alternatives when fellow government officials question her proposals: "Uh, actually, Admiral, I may have a plan for that, too." (S01E08). These utterances of defense are unmistakable in meaning and relate directly back to whatever attacks first prompted them.

Furthermore, as with functional instances of acclaim and attack, some instances of defense from the first two seasons address themes that the average viewer would likely recognize from his or her own experience prior to watching. These moments include, for example, McCord's justification for arbitrarily involving her husband in a critical international deal- "Henry, I know. I was desperate." (S01E03)- as well as McCord's reassurance to her staff about her intended negotiations with a member of the Bahraini royal family- "Don't worry about it. I can take him." (S01E13). While the circumstances surrounding these defensive utterances are certainly extraordinary, the themes expressed in the utterances are likely to resonate with the average viewer's own experience. Nevertheless, a significant number of defensive utterances seem to address themes far outside normal human experience. Such instances range from McCord's nearly sarcastic responses to presidential priorities- "I've been a little busy trying to avoid war with Iran." (S01E05)- to her more solemn explanations for past deeds- "We were at war. Changes the landscape." (S01E10). The thematic substance of these defensive utterances reflects duties and choices the average viewer rarely experiences in his or her life, and thus, would likely not relate to on a personal level.

Policy and Character

Per Benoit's (2007) theoretical framework and codebook, I delved deeper into my data to classify *Madam Secretary*'s functional instances of acclaim, attack, and defense in Seasons 1 and 2 into topics of policy and character (see Table 2) followed by the forms of those topics (see Table 3). This two-step process of classification allowed me to determine the communicative frequency of policy and character and the distribution of each topic, and its respective forms, between the main protagonist (McCord) and her supporting/opposing forces (SOF).

Table 2

Topics of Madam Secretary Seasons 1 and 2

	Policy	Character
McCord	755 (11.89%)	**5,593 (88.11%)**
*SOF	**829 (29.93%)**	1,941 (70.07%)
Total	1,584 (17.37%)	**7,534 (82.63%)**

*All utterances directed toward "McCord"

First, I consider the frequency and distribution of policy and character as general topics (Table 2). Of the total number of topical instances identified from the first two seasons (instances being drawn from the total number of functional instances), instances addressing character (7,534) sharply outweighed instances addressing policy (1,584) by a margin of 65.26 percentage points (82.63 percent character compared to 17.37 percent policy). Considering the series' ubiquitous portrayal of the main protagonist's life, and in light of past research highlighting the role of character in the political genre (see Holbert et al., 2005; Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 2006; Scott, 2011), character's prevalence over policy is a logical outcome. In addition, instances of policy and character are not isolated to select locations (e.g., policy discussions at the office, but not at home). The series' narrative structure takes great liberty in stirring up dialogue on

character and policy at various sites and does not overly concern itself with keeping certain issues away from home or the office.

Given the topical derivation of policy and character from functional instances of acclaim, attack, and defense, it should be understood that comments on character and policy in *Madam Secretary*'s first two seasons vary in the degree to which they address themes that the average viewer would likely recognize from personal experience prior to watching. It also should be understood, based on previous analysis, that these comments vary in the extent to which they are explicit and literal in meaning. Within this topical taxonomy, character comments tend to be more versatile in relatability and meaning than policy comments because they contain a myriad of personalized themes revealing who McCord is in both direct and subtle terms. More direct comments on McCord's character include, for example, her idealistic stance on pursuing justice in spite of the politics at stake- "I also believe that the linchpin of our democracy is human rights. Can't really put a price on that." (S01E13)- as well as her confident awareness of her status in relation to other government officials- "Excuse me, but I'm the secretary of state, and you'll speak to me with the respect that that office demands." (S01E06). More subtle comments on character, by contrast, include McCord's insinuated dislike for institutional patriarchy- "You think it's a departmental thing or a guy thing?" (S02E14)- as well as the SOF's deference to her good judgment- "She's saying this is the best thing, and we have to trust her." (S01E12). This all-inclusive, personalizing portrayal of McCord permits viewers to gauge levels of favorability and preferability based on every word or phrase she utters.

Policy comments tend to be more explicit in meaning- and less relatable to the average viewer- due to their concrete political substance within a sphere of human experience outside the norm for most viewers. For example, as ethnic tensions escalate in a small African nation,

McCord defends her proposal for U.S. military aid in plain terms the average viewer likely

cannot relate to on a personal level: "Look…you know I'm a realist. But there are events that

transcend national interests, and I believe this is one of those." (S01E06). Later, McCord

mentions her plan to "[give] a speech to the U.N. General Assembly asking them to formally

condemn Hizb al-Shahid" (S02E20), a policy utterance both clear in meaning and outside the

realm of normal human experience. In another instance, the Chinese foreign minister attacks

McCord for extraordinary actions taken by the U.S. government: "Madam Secretary, my

government is gravely concerned about your incursion into Pakistan." (S02E22). These

comments on policy are not incomprehensible to viewers on a linguistic level, but they are

incomprehensible in that the average viewer likely has never had to engage rhetorically on these

particular subjects in real life.

Within character's proportion of the total number of topical instances (7,534), McCord

displayed 5,593 such utterances, constituting 88.11 percent of the total instances identified as

originating from her. By contrast, the SOF collectively displayed 1,941 character-related

utterances, representing 70.07 percent of the total instances identified as originating from the

group as a whole. A simple subtraction of the SOF's total character utterances from McCord's

total character utterances (5,593 McCord - 1,941 SOF) reveals that McCord displayed a

staggering 3,652 more utterances on character than did the SOF. Each party's extremely high

proportion of character-based comments in relation to its total number of identified instances

aligns with the political genre's traditional narrative structure, in which matters of character and

personality prevail (Holbert et al., 2005; Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 2006; Scott, 2011; see also

Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Bosshart & Hellmuller, 2009; Brownell, 2014; Engelstad, 2008 for

consideration of entertainment media's *modus operandi* to elicit in viewers emotional rather than

logical responses and experiences). Character-related comments also work to cast McCord, the

series' main protagonist and "candidate" of consequence, in the best possible light by way of

thematic material that viewers can most easily grasp (e.g., comments about her work ethic vs.

comments about her stance on the country's nuclear non-proliferation policy). Comments on

character in this dataset do not address trivial, irrelevant themes related to taking out the trash,

cleaning the office space, travelling abroad, and so forth unless such comments, from the

perspective of an average viewer, seem to indicate something meaningfully distinguishable about

McCord's personal qualities, leadership ability, or ideals.

Unlike topical instances of character, topical instances of policy occurred comparatively

infrequently in *Madam Secretary*'s first two seasons (see Table 2). This numerical divide does

not necessarily mean policy comments in the series' first two seasons carry less import or impact

with viewers, but it does suggest that utterances related to policy, unless exceedingly

provocative, will be less likely to stay at the forefront of viewers' minds while watching than

utterances related to character. Policy's proportion of the total number of topical instances

identified (1,584) comprised 755 policy-related utterances that originated from McCord (11.89

percent of McCord's total number of instances so identified) and 829 policy-related utterances

that originated from the SOF as a group (29.93 percent of the SOF's total number of instances so

identified). Though only a difference of 74 instances (829 SOF - 755 McCord), the SOF

nevertheless holds a slight edge over McCord on frequency of policy utterances. In my opinion,

though, this difference is not significant enough to warrant greater consideration at this time.

With a better understanding of policy and character as general topics in *Madam*

Secretary's first two seasons, I further classify my topical instances into the specific topical

forms delineated in Benoit's (2007) theoretical framework and codebook (see Table 3). Of the

three policy forms- past deeds (PD), future plans (FP), and general goals (GG)- utterances related

to acclaims of or attacks on future plans (823) markedly surpassed those of or on past deeds

(265) and general goals (161) in the first two seasons. This high number of instances referencing

future plans constitutes 9.03 percent of the total number of topical instances identified. One

possible explanation for this form's predominance may lie with my slight extension of Benoit's

theoretical framework to count most (if not all) ongoing government-related plans and policies as

"future plans," which streamlined the coding process, but still allowed for exceptions if the plans

or policies in question seemed to be more general or not fully initiated.

Table 3

Forms of Policy and Character in Madam Secretary Seasons 1 and 2

	Policy						Character				
	PD*		FP		GG		PQ		LA		ID	
McCord	36	53	**254**	60	**66**	13	**2,594**	338	**1,932**	235	**60**	7
**SOF	**79**	**97**	153	**356**	32	**50**	237	**550**	305	**648**	7	**16**
Total	115	150	407	416	98	63	2,831	888	2,237	883	67	23
	265		**823**		161		**3,719**		3,120		90	
	(2.91%)		(9.03%)		(1.77%)		(40.79%)		(34.22%)		(0.99%)	

*acclaims/attacks

**All utterances directed toward "McCord"

Of the three character forms- personal qualities (PQ), leadership ability (LA), and ideals

(ID)- utterances related to acclaim of or attack on personal qualities (3,719) surpassed those of or

on leadership ability (3,120), and utterances in both respects far outpaced such utterances related

to ideals (90) (see Table 3). As a proportion of the total number of instances identified, instances

of acclaim or attack referencing personal qualities constituted 40.79 percent of the aggregate,

with instances of acclaim or attack referencing leadership ability close behind at 34.22 percent.

Prominence of character instances related to personal qualities and leadership ability- dominating

the aggregate at 75.01 percent, or approximately three-quarters of all instances identified- makes

sense in light of character's all-inclusive, personalizing essence throughout the series (see analysis related to Table 2, pp. 38-39). Nevertheless, the numerical inferiority of utterances related to ideals in *Madam Secretary*'s first two seasons does not necessarily mean such utterances carry less import or impact with viewers. It does suggest, though, that utterances related to ideals, unless exceedingly provocative, will be less likely to stay at the forefront of viewers' minds while watching than utterances related to personal qualities and leadership ability.

Also noteworthy is the functional dichotomy (i.e., acclaim vs. attack) within each topical form (see Table 3). In all areas except past deeds (PD), McCord's utterances of acclaim exceeded her utterances of attack; however, her utterances of attack never exceeded those of the SOF in any topical form, which reflects the SOF's general dominance in the area of attack (see analysis related to Table 1, p. 34). Only in utterances related to past deeds did the SOF's acclaim of McCord surpass her own personal acclaim. Further dissection reveals that policy utterances related to general goals were mostly acclaims (98) while utterances related to future plans and past deeds were mostly attacks (416 and 150 respectively). Utterances within all three forms of character were primarily acclaims.

Discussion

The findings of my functional analysis of *Madam Secretary* reveal that utterances of acclaim markedly exceed utterances of attack and defense in the series' first two seasons (see Table 1), which conforms to Benoit's (2007) original theoretical predictions. Moreover, my findings show that comments on- and attribution to- character in the first two seasons are more frequent than those related to policy (see Tables 2 and 3). This phenomenon does not conform to Benoit's original predictions, albeit may relate to his noted exception of television talk shows

(see Benoit, 2007, p. 47). Either way, based on Benoit's framework, it seems fair to conclude

that the series' political campaign discourse for its main protagonist ("the candidate") consists of

an abundance of acclaim rooted deeply in character. The frequent acclaim for McCord is

specifically articulated by McCord herself. Conversely, McCord's supporting/opposing forces

(SOF) are seen to attack more than acclaim her. While McCord does defend herself and even

attack her opponents, these instances rank far below her instances of personal acclaim. In fact,

her use of attack against opposing forces is less than half of her opponents' use of attack against

her (see Table 1). McCord's greater use of acclaim and defense, and the SOF's predominant use

of attack, all highly pronounced on the topic of character, seem to demonstrate *Madam*

Secretary's strict adherence to a recurrent narrative structure within the political genre, which

serves to frame heroic and romanticized protagonists in a favorable and preferable light and

utterly distinguish them from other characters (Holbert et al., 2005; Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles,

2006; Scott, 2011). This dramatic functional arrangement across episodes clearly and frequently

enhances McCord's finer qualities and abilities in the eyes of viewers, thus increasing the

likelihood that they will approve of and side with her, thereby connecting them emotionally to

her successes and setbacks throughout the series.

Implications and Future Research

Findings from my functional analysis uncovered fascinating implications for future

research. Some general (and perhaps patent) avenues for future research include: running

functional analyses of other television series within the political genre (e.g., *Veep*) and

comparing results; extending previous research on media preferences for political information

(Edgerly & Thorson, 2016; Graber, 2012; Houston & McKinney, 2016) to explore the extent to

which media consumers use fictional political portrayals to better understand, interpret, and cope

with real-life political phenomena; analyzing *Madam Secretary* and other political series through

the lens of Eilders and Nitsch's (2015) typology to determine where they respectively fall on the

spectrum of political intensity and realism; developing multi-method approaches, per Holbert et

al. (2005), to systematically classify *Madam Secretary*'s content and measure potential media

uses and effects. Beyond these possible approaches, I argue for future research to especially

focus on two particularly striking implications I observed: the self-attack tactic and political

genre as media echo-chamber.

The Self-Attack Tactic

During the course of my analysis of *Madam Secretary*'s first two seasons, I noticed a

startling phenomenon of *self-attack*, or instances where the main protagonist (McCord) would

explicitly attack herself (see Table 4). Such attacks constituted approximately 13.17 percent (93)

of the total number of attack utterances originating from McCord. Though certainly not as

frequent as her attacks against supporting/opposing forces (SOF), McCord's conspicuous use of

self-attack, and its formal construction within the series, demonstrate a unique "campaign" tactic

deserving further attention.

Table 4

Target of Attack in Madam Secretary Seasons 1 and 2

	McCord	SOF
McCord	93 (13.17%)	613 (86.83%)
SOF	1,717	*N/A

*My analysis considers only attacks made against "McCord" by "opposing forces" and attacks

made by "McCord" against "opposing forces" (and herself).

At its least hostile, self-attack in the first two seasons of *Madam Secretary* included

moments of relatively harmless self-deprecation, such as McCord's acknowledgement of

oratorical liberty taken during her U.N. General Assembly address- "Yeah, sorry. I went a little

rogue there for a minute." (S02E20)- or her abrupt objection to a promotion based on personal

feelings of inadequacy- "I'm not an operative, sir." (S01E22). More conspicuous and

extraordinary, though, are instances of self-attack manifesting outright self-contempt and self-

loathing. In one instance, McCord attacks herself over her apparent ignorance of her daughter's

life: "Alison thinks I'm not interested in her. And you know why she thinks that? Because she's

not a crisis. And that's what I do. I deal with one crisis after another crisis after another…while

my life just passes by." (S02E05). In another instance, McCord goes as far as to impugn the

integrity of her own executive decision-making, blaming herself for a close friend's unexpected

assassination: "Yes, and if I hadn't, then he might still be alive!" (S01E13). Several self-attack

comments that follow this one build upon McCord's personal disdain for past decisions that

irrevocably affected other people's lives, decisions related to a historic peace deal with Iran-

"And now I can't stop thinking…what if this treaty I fought so hard for, that people close to me

died for, is really all a big mistake?" (S01E21)- as well as regarding strenuous attempts to avert

war with Russia- "I'm just thinking about all the lives that we've lost trying to make this peace

deal work…I just feel like I'm moving all these lives around on this chessboard, and for what?"

(S02E11). On their own, these utterances of self-attack undercut the political genre's recurrent

narrative structure by notably diminishing (at least at a rhetorical level) the romantic hero's (i.e.,

McCord's) favorability and preferability, effectively transforming the main protagonist into an

anti-hero.

What truly makes self-attack a palatable tactic within the narrative of *Madam Secretary* is

the appearance (usually) shortly thereafter of functional *vindication*, expressed sometimes by

McCord but more often by her supporting forces or "surrogates." Generally family members and

close work associates, vindicators in the series act as voices of defense, reason, and conscience in

direct response to McCord's utterances of self-attack. Sequences of self-attack followed by

vindication serve to simultaneously reprimand and absolve the series' main protagonist, thus

practically nullifying the rhetorical instance altogether and preserving the integrity of the

traditional narrative structure. When overcome with self-loathing due to her friend's potentially

avoidable death, McCord receives an impassioned reminder from her husband about the virtue of

her precursory actions: "Look, you pushed him to do what was right." (S01E13). When forced to

admit a touch of oratorical license at the U.N., McCord is instantly justified by her speechwriter:

"Hey, that's how we roll." (S02E20). When in despair over the hard ramifications of her political

tenure, McCord learns from the President what it means to lead in a capricious world: "That's all

we can do, Bess. Lead as wisely as we can, and then carry the weight of it as best we can."

(S02E11). This functional phenomenon, which may or may not be peculiar to *Madam Secretary*,

reflects a scripted "campaign" that points all narrative features toward increasing the main

protagonist's favorability and preferability.

    Admittedly, absent utterances of vindication, I probably would not have been inclined to

code self-attack as actual attack at all. The notion of a character as "candidate" attacking herself

violates Benoit's original conception of attack as per his codebook, which holds that acclaims are

about self and attacks are about opponents. Benoit seems to assume that, in a nonfictional

context anyway, instances of self-attack would either be classified as personal acclaim (as a sign

of humility, self-awareness, etc.) or be non-existent and, thus, unnecessary to code. This

assumption is reasonable given how inconceivable it would be to witness any political candidate

openly attacking his or her own character or policy positions on the campaign trail. (One can

only imagine the aneurysm a campaign manager would develop upon witnessing such an act, not

to mention how a political consultant worth the money he or she charges would ever suggest or

allow such a moment to unfold!) Granted public apology and clarification of the record may be

possible and appropriate at times during a campaign, but (1) even a candidate's harshest critic

would probably interpret an apology or clarification as either acclaim or defense, not attack, and

(2) such an instance of *apologia* would probably not go as far as political self-flagellation.

The highly subjective nature of televisual discourse (Hinck, 2016) makes it very difficult

to determine (short of utilizing more coders) whether viewers would be more inclined to classify

instances of self-attack as acclaim, attack, or defense. Some viewers may be more inclined to

assess at face value or take literally an instance of self-attack, whereas other viewers might rely

on some deeper cultural paradigm regarding the proper role of self-deprecation and self-

contempt in society to make sense of it. Still other viewers might simply look at such instances

as derivatives of good entertainment and ignore it. Notwithstanding the content's subjective

quality, the tactical construction of self-attack in *Madam Secretary*'s first two seasons is cause

for us to pause and evaluate not only the very nature of attack (or *kategoria*), but also how we

use and perceive it. Its presence specifically begs two questions of interest: (1) whether there are

certain attributes or actions that we as a public are more likely to tolerate or admire as viewers of

fictional political portrayals than as voters in real-life elections, and (2) whether the attributes

and actions that characters display in a television series like *Madam Secretary* are what we as an

electorate really want from our government officials, as opposed to just accepting all of it as

good entertainment. With the line between entertainment and politics becoming less and less

discernible (Brownell, 2014; see also Frame, 2014; McCabe, 2013; Zenor, 2014), and with more

and more people getting their political information from a wider variety of sources that include

sites of entertainment (Hinck, 2016), future research may need to explore this question in greater depth.

Political Genre as Media Echo-Chamber

Warner and Neville-Shepard (2014) define media echo-chambers as "media environments in which multiple sources echo the same perspective" (p. 2). The idea of the political genre performing as a type of media echo-chamber for viewers- which, to the best of my knowledge, has yet to be formally explored- comes from my personal synthesis of key literature previously reviewed. As covered earlier, the highly subjective nature of fictional entertainment lends itself well to multiple readings or interpretations by viewers (see Eilders & Nitsch, 2015; see also Hinck, 2016; Zenor, 2014), which complicates Benoit's functional coding standard to think like the average viewer when classifying themes. Jackson (2009) further observes how "[preference] for certain [television] programming among U.S. respondents appears to correlate with the holding of the political beliefs endorsed by the program" (p. 82), specifically noting the media consumption differences between young liberals and young conservatives. These scholarly considerations naturally lead me to wonder to what extent (if any) political ideology would influence how an average viewer would classify functional instances in a political series like *Madam Secretary* (e.g., Would a more conservative viewer perceive and classify utterances of acclaim differently than a more liberal viewer?).

In conjunction with considerations of subjectivity and preference is a related consideration of effects. Eilders and Nitsch (2015) assert that fictional entertainment's "varying degrees of political intensity and realism," along with viewers' "different usage…in terms of frequency and preferences for different types," will likely lead to mixed effects for viewers (p. 1578). Benoit's (2007) own acknowledgement of the general limitation in persuading viewers to

alter their thinking during nonfictional political campaigns parallels Eilders and Nitsch's (2015) sentiment: "Mass communication (including election campaigns) rarely change the attitudes of viewers; effects are more likely to be activation and reinforcement of existing attitudes" (2007, p. 31). Taken together, these considerations cause me to question the benefit of effects studies in relation to fictional entertainment content (i.e., the political genre) that varies so drastically in meaning and usage as to almost render such studies futile. With evidence suggesting certain television series appeal to different demographics (Katz, 2016) and supporting the notion of an increasingly polarized electorate (Warner & McKinney, 2013), it might prove beneficial and very timely to move past a discussion of media effects (at least in terms of fictional entertainment potentially influencing or changing attitudes and behaviors) and instead investigate political series like *Madam Secretary* as echo-chambers reinforcing viewers' already established presumptions.

Of course, such an investigation of potential echo-chamber features would need to first ascertain whether a political series like *Madam Secretary* does in fact appeal to certain demographics over others (politically and ideologically) and, assuming it does, whether there is stark enough contrast between those demographics in how they perceive or interpret the series. Some researchers have already laid the groundwork for this type of inquiry, examining fictional political content as a performance of political socialization (Frame, 2014) and its level of appeal to various audience segments in its story and character development (McCabe, 2013; Zenor, 2014). Media echo-chamber research would complement these projects and directly study if and how fictional political portrayals reaffirm what viewers and loyal fans already think, believe, and know ideologically prior to watching. This research probably would not go as far as to demonstrate direct causality between fictional political portrayals and political polarization, but it

possibly would serve to reflect and highlight politically polarized segments of the population. Other related research questions might include how viewers actually use the content outside alleged echo-chambers (if at all), how that content influences social phenomena like groupthink and herd mentality over time, and whether people view fictional political portrayals as useful sites of political information (as opposed to just good entertainment).

Limitations

Although my functional analysis of *Madam Secretary*'s first two seasons aligns well with past research on fictional political portrayals via film and television- from character's predominance over policy issues (Holbert et al., 2005) to the political genre's recurrent narrative structure (Scott, 2011; see also Coyne, 2008; Engelstad, 2008; Graber, 2012; Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 2006)- it stops short of demonstrating actual media effect and whether Benoit's (2007) theoretical framework is truly useful in deconstructing this type of artifact. Regarding media effect, Benoit's functional theory seems more geared toward content classification (akin to Bosshart & Hellmuller, 2009; Eilders & Nitsch, 2015; Holbert, 2005; Murray, 2010; Paletz, 2005) and what identified rhetorical patterns could potentially mean for content consumers without going as far as to gauge actual effects. Even if functional theory did seek to ascertain media effect, the highly subjective nature of fictional entertainment (Eilders & Nitsch, 2015; see also Hinck, 2016; Zenor, 2014) makes political use of entertainment artifacts like *Madam Secretary* neither automatic nor guaranteed (Hinck, 2016), and thus, difficult to measure.

Madam Secretary's subjective televisual content also generally explains the complication inherent in determining functional theory's usefulness in this research context. While Zenor (2014) believes that the subjective nature of entertainment artifacts like *The West Wing* (and, I would argue, *Madam Secretary*) contribute to their successful audience reception, Eilders and

Nitsch (2015) argue that the innate heterogeneity of fictional entertainment has made it difficult

for researchers to discern distinct patterns for political representation in movies and television

series. As Hinck (2016) observes, the subjective attitudes and behaviors formed by highly

subjective media texts suggest that popular culture artifacts are rife with meaning for people to

read as they wish, and this capacity of an entertainment artifact like *Madam Secretary* to

facilitate multiple readings makes it difficult to reliably code themes.

     My extensions of Benoit's (2007) theory did not completely counteract the difficulty

behind assigning distinct codes to richly subjective and dramatized themes. In some cases,

operating in the mindset of the average viewer, I vacillated between acclaim and attack. For

example, I officially coded the following three themes as instances of attack originating from the

main protagonist (McCord): "Honestly? You couldn't have cleaned up a little bit?" (S02E06);

"To keep an eye on the little perv." (S02E19); "Which the Russians will view as an act of war."

(S01E20). The literal expression of attack on other characters' personal qualities (Char PQ) and

future plans (Pol FP) served as the deciding factor for me in coding these instances. However,

the context clues for each scenario could justifiably lead another viewer to conclude that these

are instances of acclaim for McCord's personality (as with the first two themes) or for her

perceptive leadership (as with the last theme). The massive scale of acclaim identified in *Madam*

Secretary's first two seasons shows that my analytical findings were not radically altered by

choosing attack over acclaim in these instances. This particular coding complication does

demonstrate, though, how viewers can differ on thematic interpretation based on how they

choose to perceive any given utterance (e.g., what is literally uttered vs. what is evinced by what

is uttered). Benoit's codebook insists that how the average viewer would interpret a given

utterance should take precedence, but from a coder's standpoint, that rule is complicated by

content generally open to an array of interpretations. Also open to interpretation are the nature of functions (e.g., Does mere disagreement constitute attack?), nonverbal images (which, based on Benoit's theoretical framework, were outside the scope of this analysis), and the qualitative import or impact of certain character or policy comments (which I allude to, but do not delve into during analysis).

Conclusion

This functional analysis of Seasons 1 and 2 of *Madam Secretary* sought to further unpack the phenomenon of political messaging prevalent in U.S. entertainment media's political genre. My work here revealed that utterances of acclaim exceeded utterances of attack and defense in the series' first two seasons, which conforms to Benoit's (2007) original theoretical predictions. Moreover, I observed that comments on- and attribution to- character were more frequent than those related to policy, which does not conform to Benoit's original predictions. This analysis stopped short of demonstrating media effect or the degree to Benoit's functional theory is truly useful in deconstructing a fictional political artifact like *Madam Secretary*. However, it did align well with past research on fictional political portrayals in film and television, from character's predominance over policy issues (Holbert et al., 2005) to a recurrent narrative structure within the political genre (Scott, 2011; see also Coyne, 2008; Engelstad, 2008; Graber, 2012; Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 2006).

I further reviewed significant implications uncovered during this analysis, with special emphasis on the phenomenon of self-attack and political genre as media echo-chamber. I also considered future research questions related to these implications. Notwithstanding limitations, my research seems to connect well to a growing movement within academia to treat fictional entertainment media, and fictional political portrayals in particular, as a site of study to be taken

more seriously in the field of political communication. Certainly, more work in this area remains,

and I urge that future functional analyses of the political genre utilize multiple coders for

purposes of intercoder reliability, thus more accurately assessing the utility of Benoit's

functional theory in this research context.

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