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The “Oprah Effect”: A Content Analysis of Media Coverage of Toni Morrison and How
the Coverage Changed Post-Oprah

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of Communication
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in Professional Communication

by
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May 2010

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Keywords: Oprah Winfrey, Oprah’s Book Club, content analysis, brand strategy,
agenda-setting theory of communication

ABSTRACT

The “Oprah Effect”: A Content Analysis of Media Coverage of Toni Morrison and How
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by

Mariah Childress

The present study analyzes the way in which Toni Morrison, an established author, was covered by U.S. newspapers in the year before and year following her selection for Oprah’s Book Club. The content analysis method was used in the research, and the results were used to test 6 hypotheses and 6 research questions.

The results indicated that there was a significant increase in the total number of mentions of Toni Morrison in the year after her inclusion in Oprah’s Book Club. The overwhelming trend that was seen in all variable comparisons was that while there were obviously more mentions of Toni Morrison post-Book Club, there were also increases and changes in the tone, page placement, and story placement of the mentions of Toni Morrison.

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CONTENTS	Page
ABSTRACT.....	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	3
CONTENTS.....	4
LIST OF TABLES.....	6
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	7
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	12
The Agenda-Setting Theory of Communication.....	12
Oprah’s Book Club as a Marketing Tool.....	17
The Oprah Winfrey Brand.....	21
Brand Strategy and Image.....	23
Brand Familiarity.....	26
Brand Value and Loyalty.....	27
Brand Extension and Association.....	29
Brand Displays and Retailer Positioning.....	31
Toni Morrison and Oprah’s Book Club.....	34
Research Questions and Hypotheses.....	38
3. METHODOLOGY.....	40
4. RESULTS.....	43
Hypotheses.....	46
5. DISCUSSION.....	54
REFERENCES.....	56

VITA.....67

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. "Date of Story Frequency Table"	43
2. "News or Editorial Frequency Table"	43
3. "Tone Frequency Table"	44
4. "Page Frequency Table"	44
5. "Story Frequency Table"	45
6. "Topic Frequency Table"	46
7. "Number of Mentions of Toni Morrison Pre-and Post-Book Club"	46
8. "Date of Story * Topic of the Mention"	48
9. "Date of Story * Collapsed Topic"	48
10. "Date of Story * Tone of the Mention"	49
11. "Date of Story * Page Placement"	51
12. "Date of Story * Collapsed Page Placement"	51
13. "Date of Story * Story Placement"	53
14. "Date of Story * Collapsed Story Placement"	53

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“The all powerful Oprah Book Club is not so much a club as a ruthlessly influential marketing vehicle, with the power to fundamentally alter best-seller lists, Amazon rankings, and royalty payments” (Pickert, 2008, ¶ 1).

Americans, it seems, have become fixated on the idea of ‘celebrity.’ Chances are that if one were to ask the average American who some of the iconic figures in film, television, and music are, it would be likely that they would hear Oprah Winfrey’s name mentioned. *The Oprah Winfrey Show* is the longest-running daytime program and highest-rated talk show in American television history (Panagopoulos, 2008, ¶ 3). A January 1996 survey on American Political Culture found that 78 percent of Americans held a favorable opinion of Oprah (Panagopoulos, 2008, ¶ 4). Through her television show and other business ventures, Winfrey has opened her life and work up to the world, thereby offering her the opportunity to reach and potentially influence a large number of individuals.

Winfrey was born on Jan. 29, 1954, in Kosciusko, Mississippi (Oprah Winfrey Biography, 2009). Winfrey was raised by her grandmother and was learning to read aloud and perform recitations by the age of 3 (Oprah Winfrey Biography, 2009; Oprah Winfrey Biography-Academy of Achievement, 2009). From age 6-13, Winfrey lived in Milwaukee with her mother and endured a troubled adolescence that involved being sexually abused by some of her male relatives and friends of her mother (Oprah Winfrey Biography, 2009; Oprah Winfrey Biography-Academy of Achievement, 2009). At the age of 13, Winfrey ran away to a juvenile detention home, but was turned away because all beds were full (Oprah Winfrey Biography-

Academy of Achievement, 2009). After this Winfrey moved to Nashville to live with her father Vernon Winfrey (Oprah Winfrey Biography, 2009; Oprah Winfrey Biography-Academy of Achievement, 2009). Winfrey's father imposed a strict midnight curfew, "and he required her to read a book and write a book report each week" (Oprah Winfrey Biography-Academy of Achievement, 2009). Winfrey said that "As strict as he was, he had some concerns about me making the best of my life and would not accept anything less than what he thought was my best" (as cited in Oprah Winfrey Biography-Academy of Achievement, 2009, ¶ 1). At age 17 Winfrey began working for WVOL radio in Nashville, and at 19 she became a reporter and anchor for WTVF-TV (Oprah Winfrey Biography-Academy of Achievement, 2009). Winfrey later attended Tennessee State University where she majored in Speech Communications and Performing Arts (Oprah Winfrey Biography, 2009; Oprah Winfrey Biography-Academy of Achievement, 2009).

Winfrey moved to Baltimore in 1976, where she hosted a TV chat show called *People are Talking* (Oprah Winfrey Biography, 2009). In January 1984 Winfrey came to Chicago to host WLS-TV's *A.M. Chicago*, which eventually went from last place to first in the ratings, beating out Phil Donahue (her major competitor) by 100,000 viewers (Oprah Winfrey Biography, 2009; Oprah Winfrey Biography-Academy of Achievement, 2009). Winfrey's and Donahue's shows were very similar in that Donahue was a lifelong supporter of women's causes and was very pro-women in the workplace, to which Winfrey acknowledges "if there hadn't been a Phil, there wouldn't have been a me" (Phil Donahue Biography, 2008). The format of *A.M. Chicago* was soon expanded to 1 hour and was renamed *The Oprah Winfrey*

Show in September 1985 (Oprah Winfrey Biography-Academy of Achievement, 2009). Winfrey was able to gain ownership of the show from ABC and put it under the control of her own production company, Harpo Productions, in 1986 (Oprah Winfrey Biography, 2009). Winfrey's show strayed away from the other talk shows of the time and did not cover any tabloid topics. This initially hurt her ratings, but Winfrey later gained the respect of her audience and experienced a surge in her popularity (Oprah Winfrey Biography, 2009). *The Oprah Winfrey Show* is still popular today, but Winfrey recently announced that her show would end in September of 2011, after its 25th season (Oprah Winfrey Ending Talk Show, 2009).

Some of Winfrey's other projects include film roles such as her Academy Award nominated performance in *The Color Purple*, a 1989 TV miniseries called *The Women of Brewster Place*, and Winfrey started *O: The Oprah Magazine* in 2000 (Oprah Winfrey Biography, 2009; Oprah Winfrey Biography-Academy of Achievement, 2009). *O: The Oprah Magazine* has a paid circulation of nearly 2.4 million but has experienced a newsstand sales slump of 6% in the first half of 2009 and a decrease of 26% in advertising pages (Kelly, 2009, ¶ 6). One of Winfrey's longest-running projects has been Oprah's Book Club. Oprah's Book Club began in 1996; its first book recommendation was *The Deep End of the Ocean* by Jacquelyn Mitchard (Complete List..., 2009). Oprah's Book Club has been running steadily since then, with novels by such authors as Maya Angelou, Leo Tolstoy, and Bill Cosby being recommended to readers (Complete List..., 2009). Oprah's Book Club serves as a guide for existing book clubs and also helps viewers start their own clubs. Oprah's Book Club boasts more than two million members, a website that allows

viewers and readers to post their thoughts about selected readings, and advice about how to go about reading what some would consider “hard books” (Pickert, 2008, ¶ 1). Oprah’s Book Club still makes new selections regularly with the most recent being in September of 2009 with *Say You’re One of Them* by Uwem Akpan (Tarm, 2009, ¶ 2).

Oprah’s Book Club has continually helped both unknown and previously established authors and Winfrey herself garner both positive and negative news coverage (Luscombe, 2009; Oldenburg, 2001). Some authors such as Jonathan Franzen have been unhappy when one of their novels has been selected for Oprah’s Book Club. Franzen’s *The Corrections* was the 43rd Oprah’s Book Club selection, and although a number of the authors that Winfrey has selected are considered to have written highly respected novels, Franzen said that “she’s picked enough schmaltzy, one-dimensional ones that I cringe, myself, even though I think she’s really smart and she’s really fighting the good fight” (as cited in Fialkoff, 2005, ¶ 3). Then, and possibly more infamously, author James Frey sparked a controversy over his novel *A Million Little Pieces*, which he admitted was mostly fabricated after Winfrey had publicly praised his work. Frey later reappeared on Winfrey’s show and Winfrey questioned him about his motives and why he felt the need to fabricate and embellish details in his novel. Frey admitted that “...certain facts and characters had been altered, but the essence of his memoir was real” (Frey admits..., 2006, ¶ 4). By May of 2009, though, Winfrey issued an apology to Frey for her behavior in bringing Frey and his editor, Nan Talese, back on her show (Luscombe, 2009).

Whether controversial or beneficial, Oprah's Book Club has become a benchmark by which authors can gauge the level of their success. Since Winfrey is such a well-known and widely recognized individual, having the "Oprah" brand on a novel could cause a consumer who would not normally have bought the book to reconsider that decision after the book has Winfrey's "seal of approval." McMenemy (2007) said "Oprah's power can see books catapult to the top of best seller's lists after being featured on the show, but importantly since its inception, Oprah's Book Club has sought to ensure libraries were central to the process" (p. 354).

Even though the overall consensus is that Oprah's Book Club can bring immense success to newer, lesser-known authors, another avenue for research could be a study of whether or not the influence of Oprah (along with other factors) could make a difference for a more established author as well. If Winfrey's influence is still a major factor, then this could offer even more insight into the influence that Winfrey has been able to achieve in her years as a public figure. This paper examines brand exposure and strategy and the agenda-setting theory of communication as they apply to Winfrey and her Book Club.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Agenda-Setting Theory of Communication

Baran and Davis (2006) defined the agenda-setting theory as “the idea that media don’t tell people what to think, but what to think about” (p. 316). There has been a large amount of agenda-setting research (Brosius, 1998; Clegg-Smith & Wakefield, 2006; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Some of the more prominent topics in agenda-setting research have been how it relates to health issues such as smoking or cancer (Clegg-Smith & Wakefield, 2006), but one of the most widely research topics is how agenda-setting is used with political issues and campaigns. The work of Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw is regarded as extremely important to the advancement of this theory.

Brosius (1998) called McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver the “grandfathers of the agenda-setting approach” (¶ 1). McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver describe the frameworks of agenda-setting research and how it is used in the political arena. They state that based on evidence from previous studies there is a positive correlation and a causal relationship between media agendas and public agendas (as cited in Kaid, 2004). They go on to describe the agenda-setting theory as well as a concept called second level agenda-setting. The authors say that rather than focusing on each object or unit of analysis, second level agenda-setting focuses on the attributes that those objects carry (McCombs et al.; as cited in Kaid, 2004). It could be said that second level agenda-setting intends to probe deeper into the issues that viewers pick up on from the media.

Iyengar and Kinder performed a series of studies that were designed to further develop the ideas of agenda-setting. Iyengar and Kinder wanted to cement agenda-setting as an actual theory, not just a “metaphor,” as they called it (as cited in Baran & Davis, 2006, p. 318). Iyengar and Kinder were able to demonstrate causality, and said “people who were shown network broadcasts edited to draw attention to a particular problem assigned greater importance to that problem” (as cited in Baran & Davis, 2006, p. 318). They also found that “Powerfully presented personal accounts (a staple of contemporary television news) might focus too much attention on the specific situation or individual rather than on the issue at hand” (as cited in Baran & Davis, 2006, p. 318). Iyengar and Kinder also found that lead stories were effective in agenda-setting. Finally, Iyengar and Kinder found that priming occurs in agenda-setting. They found that “through priming [drawing attention to some aspects of political life at the expense of others] television news [helps] to set the terms by which political judgments are reached and political choices made” (as cited in Baran & Davis, 2006, p. 319).

McCombs (1997) examined the reasons behind the news media’s involvement in agenda-setting and gave an overall background of the theory itself. McCombs explained, “agenda-setting is about the transmission of salience, not the determination of opinions pro and con about a particular issue” (p. 433). In other words, the news media set the agenda by reporting issues that are important to viewers and listeners. McCombs also said that “news media...do not consciously and deliberately set the agenda. But they do set it inadvertently as a by-product of the necessity to choose a few topics for attention in each day’s news report” (p. 433).

Although McCombs's (1997) research is mainly applied to political issues, he offered some insight on how a community comes to a consensus on important issues and how the media reduces group differences. McCombs said that there must be "consensus about what the priorities of the community are" (p. 434). McCombs contended that because the public has a very short attention span, there must be a "constant stream of new information and new angles to feed the story" (p. 434); otherwise, an issue will disappear from the news agenda. The news media and the community must come to a substantial consensus about the issues that top the agenda (McCombs, 1997).

Regarding the reduction of group differences, McCombs (1997) reviewed the work of Shaw and Martin in which they found that agenda-setting can bring some community groups closer together (McCombs, 1997). Shaw and Martin examined five different groups (those who differed among race, gender, age, income, and education) to see if consensus increased with increased exposure to the news (McCombs, 1997). They found through a statewide survey in North Carolina that increased readership of daily newspapers brought about increased consensus among these subgroups (McCombs, 1997).

McCombs (1997) did acknowledge that there are limitations of the media's influence. He said that, "The news media help to achieve consensus, they do not alone determine what the consensus will be" (McCombs, 1997, p. 437). Even though an issue may be prominent on the media agenda, it will not appear on the public agenda if it does not resonate with that public (McCombs, 1997). McCombs stated,

“the public and the news media are joint participants in the agenda-setting process” (p. 437).

Finally, McCombs (1997) described the four visions of agenda-setting. He said that these four visions range from passive to active in nature and “describe both what the agenda-setting role of the news media is and the professional views of journalists about what the agenda-setting role of the news media should be” (McCombs, 1997, p. 438). The first of these visions is called professional detachment. This vision simply states that journalists are strictly reporting the news and can stand apart from the community (McCombs, 1997). McCombs stated that this vision undermines what we understand about agenda-setting because “whatever the media do, they have an effect on the community they serve” (p. 438). Simply put, the media may try to objectively report the news, but the community will still feel the effects of how those news reports come across to them.

The next vision of agenda-setting is called targeted involvement. This vision takes on a more “active” stance in that “investigative reporting and editorial campaigns actively seek to move issues onto the public agenda” (McCombs, 1997, p. 438). McCombs stated that these instances not only attempt to set the community’s agenda but the government’s as well because these news reports are often focused on things like corruption in government (McCombs, 1997).

The third vision of agenda-setting is called boosterism. McCombs (1997) stated, “sometimes news media becomes cheerleading” (p. 438). It can be difficult to determine what is newsworthy community interest and what is blatant publicity

(McCombs, 1997). There are continuing debates about the news media's role in specific situations, political or not (McCombs, 1997).

The final vision of agenda-setting is called proactive agenda-setting. McCombs (1997) stated that some journalists "believe that it is the duty and responsibility of the news media to ensure through proactive reporting when necessary that the key issues, situations, and opportunities do come to community attention" (p. 439). McCombs went on to say that journalists are privileged and that "the core assumption of public journalism and proactive agenda-setting is that this privilege should be actively used to benefit the public" (p. 439). Public journalism should build community through communication (McCombs, 1997).

All of this information about the agenda-setting theory of communication helps us to better understand how a public figure like Oprah Winfrey may have such an influence over something like reading. Agenda-setting, in this case, predicts that reading could become an important issue to the public because Oprah's Book Club selections are so heavily covered by the media. Agenda-setting cannot predict that someone will actually start reading just because Oprah says that a novel is worth the time spent reading it. There are other factors that could influence this, such as brand strategy and recognition, but Winfrey does play a part in agenda-setting through her extensive coverage of the novels and authors that she selects for her Book Club. One of the major points of McCombs' research is that the media can bring a community together. The media's coverage of Oprah's Book Club continues to help put reading on the community agenda, which can eventually bring the community closer together.

Oprah's Book Club as a Marketing Tool

The “Oprah Effect” has been widely discussed and applied to a variety of situations. DiCarlo (2003) said that Oprah fans “are not sheep, but they tend to respect her opinions and believe that what she says speaks directly to them” (¶ 4). Scholars and businesses see this and realize that Winfrey has a far-reaching influence over her viewing public.

Thomas studied Winfrey’s influence over consumer sovereignty. The principle of consumer sovereignty states that consumers have the right to choose the products that they use and how often they use them (Thomas, 2007). Thomas went on to state, “companies should never forget that in the free enterprise system, the consumer is sovereign (p. 4). It seems that Winfrey and her producers kept this in mind during the initial stages of Oprah’s Book Club and have developed marketing strategies that have targeted the correct audience, which is evident in the sales of the first 48 Oprah’s Book Club selections. According to Weinman (2009), almost all Book Club selections from 1996-2002 went to number one on the *New York Times* Bestseller List. Also, an Oprah’s Book Club pick was assured additional sales of a minimum of 500,000 copies (Lacayo & Sachs, 2002).

Some would say that the major influence of Oprah’s Book Club is its influence on book sales. Ecco Publishing (the company that published *The Story of Edgar Sawtelle*, a 2008 Book Club selection) publicity director Michael McKenzie said that “having an Oprah Book Club selection is pretty much like the pinnacle for the industry” (as cited in Pickert, 2008, ¶ 4). Winfrey’s Book Club selections have ranged from inspirational selections and selections by new, lesser-known authors

like Jacquelyn Mitchard to classics such as Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, which has made selections like that relevant even after the work has been available for a long period of time. Wyatt (2005) wrote that between 1996 and 2002, "a book's selection for Oprah's Book Club typically resulted in sales of more than a million copies, a boon to authors and publishers in a business where selling 20,000 copies of a literary novel is considered a success" (¶ 4). Jacquelyn Mitchard's *The Deep End of the Ocean* ended up selling more than 700,000 copies, and all 48 Book Club selections from 1996-2002 experienced similar results (Striphas, 2003).

Hussain (2007) studied "The Oprah Effect" and its impact on sales of a variety of products including books. Hussain said, "Oprah's personal selection alone has the ability to launch the success of many new products" (¶ 2). The Oprah Effect is important to marketers because it allows them to "better understand and leverage where passionate and influential customers are directing their attention and trust (Hussain, 2007, ¶ 4). Hussain specifically mentioned three diet books that experienced enormous success after Winfrey featured them on her show: *You: On A Diet*, *Realage.com*, and *The BestLife Diet*. All three experienced almost instant success after being featured on the show, due mainly to Winfrey's seal of approval and the fact that her viewers likely identified with these selections and trust Winfrey's judgment considering she has publicly dealt with her own weight issues.

Finally, Hussain (2007) discussed Oprah's Book Club and its influence on readership and book sales. Butler, Cowan, and Nilsson (2005) studied Oprah's Book Club and its influence on sales and readership and found that *The Deep End of the Ocean* by Jacquelyn Mitchard not only had a boost in sales but also spent 71 weeks

on *USA Today's* bestseller list after being recommended by Winfrey. This information helps to highlight the influence that a celebrity of Winfrey's status can have over consumers. Her show offers a major outlet that allows her to reach a potentially large number of individuals.

Striphas (2003) studied Winfrey's communication strategies with the producers of her television show and how her Book Club is marketed to its participants. Striphas said that Winfrey and her producers have collectively de-emphasized the literary conditions of novels and emphasized the value of books for women. Judging by its success, Winfrey and her producers tapped into the correct audience with Oprah's Book Club. According to several studies (Dortch, 1998; Gabriel, 1997; Kinsella, 1997; Radway, 1984) women ages 18-54 make up *The Oprah Winfrey Show's* primary audience and the largest aggregate book reading public in the United States. Because of this Oprah's Book Club has been able to flourish. Still yet, this has not been without its fair share of criticisms. The *Wall Street Journal* said that neither a dictionary nor "an appreciation for ambiguity or abstract ideas" (as cited in Striphas, 2003, p. 301) were required for Book Club selections. Striphas pointed out that Oprah's Book Club producers (along with Winfrey) had an understanding of and were sensitive to "how books and reading could be made to fit in the routines of women's lives, rather than placing the burden on women to adjust their schedules to accommodate books and reading" (p. 302). This helps further the appeal of Oprah's Book Club to more and more viewers, who are then more likely to suggest the books to others, which still helps to drive sales of Oprah's Book Club novels.

Winfrey's sensitivity to her audience and their needs played to her advantage in the early years of Oprah's Book Club. Sales of Book Club selections have skyrocketed, plus Winfrey was able to connect with her audience even more through Book Club discussion shows and Book Club selections have garnered special displays and packaging in bookstores. Winfrey has the 'book club market' cornered, while other competing programs or publications like *The Today Show*, *Live with Regis and Kelly*, and the *New York Times Book Review* have tried to make the same impact. *The Today Show* Book Club is strictly online and involves one highly regarded author recommending (via an e-mail mailing list) another author's work (Today Show Book Club, 2002), and the *New York Times Book Review* publishes weekly reviews of current fiction and nonfiction books in both the Sunday edition of the *New York Times* and a weekly magazine (New York Times Book Review, 2010).

All of this information is indicative of Winfrey's wide-ranging influence on both her viewers and the media. One could ask if viewers see that Winfrey has endorsed something and then think that Oprah's endorsement must mean that the product is a good one. The answer to that question may not be definitive or similar for all of Winfrey's viewers, but a certain level of trust in Winfrey is evident. Knowing that Winfrey can exert this influence, the question arises of just how extensive that influence has been on the authors she has recommended for Oprah's Book Club. Do all of these authors experience large increases in sales of their novels? Are viewers more eager to start reading if Oprah is making suggestions as to what they should be reading?

The Oprah Winfrey Brand

In being a public figure for so long, Winfrey has become a prime example of a brand name. *O: The O Magazine* continues to be successful despite its 2009 sales slump (Kelly, 2009), and other ventures such as “Oprah’s Angel Network” promote charitable work that helps not only her viewers. Lacayo (1997) summed up how Winfrey’s name and image can influence viewers to make decisions by saying,

“Oprah Winfrey, the greatest force in television, has practically saved the alphabet. It’s simple. Oprah selects a title for the book-discussion club [...]. Then everyone in America buys it. This gives her the market clout of a Pentagon procurement officer” (p. 70).

Hall (2003) examined Oprah’s Book Club and how Winfrey acts as a sponsor of literacy and can be tied to the promotion of reading. Hall illustrated Winfrey’s influence by pointing out that Winfrey’s first Book Club selection, Jacquelyn Mitchard’s *The Deep End of the Ocean*, went from 100,000 to 915, 000 copies in print, and Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* went from 300,000 copies in print to 1,390,000.

Hall (2003) expanded upon Brandt’s concept of a “literacy sponsor” in studying Winfrey’s brand influence. According to Brandt, literacy sponsors “assume responsibility for another person or a group during a period of instruction, apprenticeship, or probation (as cited in Hall, 2003, p. 648). In return the literacy sponsor profits from this act of responsibility. Hall’s expansion of the concept of a literacy sponsor is mainly fueled from Winfrey’s personal story and how she has marketed herself as someone her viewers can trust and identify with. Hall offered

the example of an article and interview with Johnson (1997) in *Life* magazine in which Winfrey was quoted as saying “No one ever told me I was loved. Ever, ever, ever. Reading and being able to be a *smart girl* was my only sense of value, and it was the only time I felt loved” (p. 45). By sharing details about her life and what drives her to be successful, Winfrey is essentially showing her viewers that they can trust her and that she is in a variety of ways very similar to the average American woman (which is her target audience). Hall wrote that Winfrey was able to establish her role as a literacy sponsor by constructing the appearance of intimacy with her viewers, and in doing so Winfrey becomes a “trusted friend” (p. 651). Winfrey’s viewers would essentially “latch on” to that feeling, thereby helping create the Oprah Winfrey brand and supporting the other projects that Winfrey has started or is affiliated with. Hall went on to write that “Winfrey’s goal is to use her narrative, not only to promote herself, but also to show her audience by example how they too can overcome difficulties” (p. 651). By having that image of a “trusted friend,” Winfrey is able to influence her viewers to read (or at least attempt to read) the books that she selects. As Winfrey said in a 1986 *Woman’s Day* article, “People out there think I’m their girlfriend, they treat me like that. It’s really amazing” (Tornabene, 1986, p. 50).

Through all of her successes it seems that Winfrey has come to understand her role as both a brand and as a person with extreme visibility and influence. Hall (2003) wrote

“‘Oprah’s Book Club’ succeeds because the friend viewers already love and trust offers not only to share her own dearest friends-books-but also to

participate with readers in a familiar and intimate setting and get to know and enjoy those new companions” (p. 654).

Winfrey has been able to maintain this camaraderie with her viewers yet still maintain her role as a positive brand. Feldman (1997) called Winfrey “the most powerful book marketer in the United States. On a really good day, she sends more people to bookstores than the morning news programs, the other daytime shows, the evening magazines, radio shows, print reviews, and feature articles rolled into one” (Feldman, 1997, p. 31). Oprah’s Book Club selections have been known to have lavish displays and the books themselves are sometimes reprinted with a seal or other type of advertising reminding the buyer that the book must be a good, reputable work because Oprah Winfrey has chosen to support it.

Young (2001) went on to say that “In our brand name culture, ‘Oprah’ is a brand name, something that publishing houses in America no longer are-if they ever were” (p. 188). Young explained what it is exactly that Winfrey signifies in our culture. Young quoted Masciarotte’s (1991) assessment that “Winfrey crosses multiple cultural boundaries, including race, class, and body image” (p. 109). It has also been speculated “perhaps the phenomenon is more about Ms. Winfrey than about books” (Feldman, 1997, p. 31).

Brand Strategy and Image

Marketers are continually using different strategies to promote products and services, and the same is true for Oprah Winfrey’s television show, Book Club, magazine, and other projects. Martinez and de Chernatony (2004) studied how brand extension affects a product’s overall brand image. The overall purpose of

their study was to determine if brand extension resulted in any changes to the brand's image, and to study the influence of the quality of the parent brand, knowledge or familiarity with the brand, the fit or similarity between the brand and the extension, and attitudes toward the extended product (Martinez & de Chernatony, 2004).

Martinez and de Chernatony (2004) said that brand image is defined as the "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory" (p. 39). Keller said, "Within multidimensional brand images, direct associations are seen with both the product and aspects of the brand" (as cited in Martinez & de Chernatony, 2004, p. 39).

Martinez and de Chernatony (2004) listed some of the reasons for the popularity of brand extension. Martinez and de Chernatony refer to several studies (Aaker; Pitta & Katsanis) that said that "the cost of launching a new brand in consumer markets is very high, and the probability of the success for a new product is higher with a well known parent brand" (as cited in Martinez & de Chernatony, 2004, p. 40).

This phenomenon is evident with Oprah Winfrey's various products. Winfrey has built a large following, starting with her television show. Those who are familiar with and support her television show are most likely to support her other projects. This is most evident with Oprah's Book Club. Regular Winfrey supporters would be most likely to participate in the Book Club and read the novels that Winfrey recommends. Even though Winfrey is so well-known, her attempts at a brand extension will bring about the occurrence of new brand images as a result of

new associations that are created in the minds of Winfrey's viewers, or, in this case, "customers" (Martinez & de Chernatony, 2004).

Martinez and de Chernatony (2004) studied five variables that could be affected by the brand extension of a product (specifically the sportswear market, e.g. Nike, Adidas, and Reebok): perceived quality of the product, familiarity with the brand, the fit of the product, dilution effect, and attitudes toward the extension product. First, their research showed that "brand extension has a dilution effect on a brand's image, confusing the beliefs and associations consumers hold" (Martinez & de Chernatony, 2004, p. 46). They also found that if consumers believe that a brand is one that is of high quality, this perceived quality would get better after extension. Martinez and de Chernatony found that "familiarity with the parent brand's products only influence general brand image, and the level of fit influences product brand image" (p. 47).

All of these findings could apply to Oprah Winfrey and her various business ventures, projects (*O Magazine*, Oprah's Book Club, etc.), and the products that she promotes with her yearly "Oprah's Favorite Things" episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Winfrey has become a trusted brand in the eyes of many of her viewers. This trust and faith in the quality of the Oprah brand is likely to extend to Winfrey's other business ventures such as *O Magazine*. This positive brand image could also apply to Oprah's Book Club, as evidenced in the tremendous sales that her picks achieve (Wyatt, 2005; Striphas, 2003), even for novels like Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, which was 19 years old at the time of its pick for Oprah's Book Club.

Brand Familiarity

Winfrey's longevity as a public figure has made the Oprah Winfrey brand one that has been widely successful and highly recognized. Lange and Dahlen (2003) studied ad-brand incongruency and brand familiarity. Lange and Dahlen quoted studies by Alba and Hutchinson and Dahlen in which it was said, "familiar brands are more easily detected in the advertising clutter" (as cited in Lange & Dahlen, 2003, p. 449).

This is evident with Winfrey's various business ventures: if someone were to see a commercial for *The Color Purple*, for example, it is likely that he or she will think of Winfrey and her role in and continued support of the movie before anything else. However, seeing lots of these types of ads for the same brand could have an adverse effect on the consumer. Tellis and Dahlen both stated, "Advertising for familiar brands wear out quickly" (as cited in Lange & Dahlen, 2003, p. 450).

Also, Machleit, Allen, and Madden said, "Consumers may even get bored with familiar brands" (as cited in Lange & Dahlen, 2003, p. 450). If this happens to Winfrey, it is safe to say that she and her producers or other employees continually try to generate marketing and branding strategies (at least in the case of Oprah's Book Club) to draw in more and more consumers to their product in order to make up for those who get turned off.

Even so, some studies (Kent & Allen, 1994) have revealed that familiar brands are perceived as more important and more relevant, and consumers are more likely to process the ad and the brand related message (as cited in Lange & Dahlen, 2003, p. 451). Also, it takes less effort to process a familiar brand; so more

consumers are likely to process the message (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Haider & French, 1999; as cited in Lange & Dahlen, 2003, p. 451).

Knowing this information, one can better understand how the Oprah Winfrey brand can be processed by such large numbers of consumers. Her longevity makes her very familiar to consumers and they come to understand that they can trust her judgment about the products she endorses, including Oprah's Book Club novels. Whether a person is a loyal follower of Winfrey or not, he or she most likely understands that Winfrey is a respected and trusted individual. A viewer or consumer can derive lots of messages from ads for Winfrey's projects including the notion that Winfrey truly believes in what she is promoting. She assures consumers that the product is worth their time and money and waives very little in her convictions and assures consumers that she supports them and has them in mind. These messages contribute to a continued confidence and familiarity with the Oprah Winfrey brand.

Brand Value and Loyalty

Brand value is defined as "a set of assets and liabilities linked to the brand, its name and symbol, which incorporate or diminish the value supplied by a product or service exchanged with a company's clients (Calderon et al., 1997, p. 294). It could be said that Oprah Winfrey's brand value is extremely high, especially because her net worth is estimated at \$2.7 billion (The World's Billionaires, 2009, ¶ 1). Aaker said that "brand value includes a series of assets which can be grouped into five multidimensional constructs which interact in a complex way: brand loyalty, name recognition, perceived quality, brand identity, and other assets belonging to the

brand (patent, access to the distribution channel, etc.)” (as cited in Calderon et al., 1997, p. 295). The following is a summary of how these constructs apply to the Oprah Winfrey brand.

1. Brand loyalty-Calderon et al. (1997) said that “the loyalty to the brand forms the base of its value and it is created by a variety of factors such as the experience of use, the recognition, the identity, and the perceived quality” (p. 295). Winfrey has been able to transfer viewer loyalty to the other projects that she has taken on (Oprah’s Book Club, *O Magazine*, movies, etc.).
2. Name recognition-Calderon et al. (1997) also wrote, “the notoriety of the trademark is a structure used in marketing that reflects the presence of the trademark in the clients’ minds” (p. 295). Winfrey’s brand and viewer loyalty helps to create a high level of name recognition which could extend positively to her various projects and business ventures.
3. Perceived quality-Aaker said that “it is a consumer’s judgment over the excellence of the global superiority of the product; this is why its transference is possible through the brand” (as cited in Calderon et al., 1997, p. 295). Winfrey’s viewers’ brand loyalty and name recognition help to elevate the perceived quality of the Oprah Winfrey brand. In the case of Oprah’s Book Club, for example, viewers will be more likely to read the selections that Winfrey suggests because they trust her judgment and knowledge of the books.
4. Brand identity-Calderon et al., (1997) said that the identity of the brand is “a question of specifying the sense, the project, the brand’s reason for being” (p.

295). The consumer, through his or her familiarity with the Oprah Winfrey brand, is able to understand the identity of the brand and make buying decision based on that information.

5. Other assets belonging to the brand-if Winfrey's other projects and business ventures are regarded favorably, then any new products that she creates or endorses will likely be regarded in the same way. Winfrey has managed to elevate her success with such ventures as *O Magazine*, Oprah's Angel Network, Harpo Productions (which produces Dr. Phil, Rachel Ray, and a new show hosted by Winfrey's frequent guest, Dr. Mehmet Oz), and the Oprah Winfrey Network with Discovery (The World's Billionaires, 2009, ¶ 1).

After marketing managers assess their brand, they incorporate that brand assessment into their marketing strategies. Their assessment plays a large part in that strategy, especially if marketing managers are attempting to extend their brand. Martinez and de Chernatony (2004) said that a brand's image "is not static and is influenced by the numerous decisions that the company takes about its brand over time" (p. 39). Martinez and de Chernatony studied the concept of brand extension and whether or not it can be beneficial with well-known brands. They said that brand extension strategies are popular for reasons such as the high cost of launching a new brand in consumer markets and the high probability of success for a new product with a well-known parent brand (Martinez & de Chernatony, 2004).

Brand Extension and Association

Martinez and de Chernatony (2004) cited a number of studies (Aaker & Keller; Bottomley & Holden; Dacin & Smith; Park et al.) that have studied brand

extension theory. These studies focus their attention on “how different variables related to the parent brand (e.g. brand quality, brand reputation, brand breadth, familiarity, etc.) and the extension considered (e.g. fit or similarity, consistency, difficulty) influence customers” (Martinez & de Chernatony, 2004, p. 40). All of these factors could be considered or are considered by consumers who have previously bought into the Oprah brand in one way or another and are considering the purchase of a product that is an extension of that brand. Winfrey has always maintained communication with her loyal viewers and other casual consumers through her television show, resulting in brand identity. de Chernatony (1999) said that brand identity must consider aspects like desired positioning and personality, which are “attenuated by the organizational culture and the relationships staff build with stakeholders” (Kapferer, as cited in Martinez & de Chernatony, 2004, p. 40). Kapferer said that through these communication mechanisms, the brand identity helps to form associations in the consumer’s mind, which results in a brand image” (as cited in Martinez & de Chernatony, 2004).

Keller said that brand image “includes associations related to the product (attributes, benefits, and attitudes), favorability of brand associations and uniqueness of brand associations” (as cited in Martinez & de Chernatony, 2004, p. 41). Viewers associate positive attributes with Winfrey, such as a high level of class, trust, and friendship. Winfrey’s viewers trust what she recommends (be it novels or other products) and they trust the associations that she makes with other companies or brands. Winfrey makes these associations on a regular basis and viewers see this through things like her yearly “Oprah’s Favorite Things” episode of

The Oprah Winfrey Show (although these are essentially paid advertisements and product placement for the products she features).

While there are many positive associations that viewers and consumers make with Winfrey, there have been some negative associations as well, and not just where Oprah's Book Club is concerned. Aside from the previously mentioned incidents with Jonathan Franzen and James Frey, Winfrey was famously sued for defamation by a group of Texas cattle producers after they alleged that she made disparaging remarks about perishable food on an episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (Flock, 1998). Winfrey was eventually found not guilty in the case, but because this was widely covered in the media, some viewers or consumers could regard Winfrey in a somewhat negative light because of this.

Although incidents like these were widely talked about and some criticized how Winfrey handled the situations, there is still a great deal of trust in the Oprah Winfrey brand. *O Magazine* is still successful despite its 2009 sales slump (Kelly, 2009), Winfrey is branching out yet again by starting the Oprah Winfrey Network with Discovery, and Oprah's Book club is still active although Winfrey only made two Book Club selections in 2008 and one in 2009 (Oprah Book Club Books, 2009; Tarm, 2009). The continued success of Winfrey's projects and brand associations illustrates the fact that she has been able to create a brand and brand extensions that are highly successful.

Brand Displays and Retailer Positioning

Being that Oprah Winfrey has created a high-profile brand, it would make sense that retailers would create displays that would make her products very

prominent and easy to be seen by consumers. In order to build equity and drive sales, marketers must ensure that high-profile brands such as Winfrey's are prominently displayed. This also helps those consumers who are unsure or unfamiliar with a brand make their decisions to buy or not buy the product.

Buchanan, Simmons, and Bickart (1999) said "the brand's positioning must be supported by product characteristics as well as by the advertising message, price points, and choice of distribution outlets" (p. 345). They went on to say that retailers also "have the potential to influence the overall effectiveness of the manufacturer's strategy for developing and maintaining brand equity" (Buchanan et al., 1999, p. 345). Manufacturers would obviously want their products to have a prominent display so that they can build more and more equity for their product.

Buchanan et al. (1999) posited that "consumers have expectations about retail displays and the relationship among brands and that display conditions confirming these expectations can lead consumers to reevaluate brands" (p. 345). It could be said that this phenomenon is evident with Oprah's Book Club. Young examined the differences in covers of Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* before and after it was selected for Oprah's Book Club. The publisher of *Song of Solomon* redesigned its cover for a paperback reprint series of all of Morrison's novels (Young, 2001). The benefit of this redesign, which Winfrey included in an *O Magazine* article about classic books that she loves (Classics that Made..., 2009) is that it helps to link *Song of Solomon* "to Morrison's general popularity and reputation" (Young, 2001, p. 190).

Song of Solomon's Oprah cover is a bit of a contrast. As seen at *The Toni Morrison Anchor* (n.d.), the size of the original graphic is smaller, the type of print for Morrison's name and the title of the novel has changed, the book is proclaimed a national bestseller, and the Oprah's Book Club stamp is superimposed over the symbol for Winfrey's show, which is the letter "o" bordering the inside of a circle (Young, 2001).

Special covers and special displays in various bookstores illustrate the perceived importance and equity of the Oprah Winfrey brand. Displays for Oprah's Book Club and other bestsellers receive lots of consideration because "situational factors sometimes may influence consumer valuations" (Buchanan et al., 1999, p. 346). The authors point out that established products that are displayed with nonestablished products may cause consumers to alter their opinion of the more established brand. Buchanan et al. (1999) quoted several studies (Feldman & Lynch, Ha & Hoch) that said that "contextual factors can, and often do, lead to changes in judgments and attitudes by influencing what data are relevant or diagnostic to the task and what interpretation of the data is accessible" (Buchanan et al., 1999, p. 346).

Display decisions play a part in these valuations. Buchanan et al. (1999) went on to say that "a mixed display may signal that the retailer-who is perceived as an expert in judging and evaluating brands-believes the brands are relevant to one another" (p. 346). Different book covers, special displays, and prominent placement in a store give consumers contextual clues about the equity and desirability of the Oprah Winfrey brand. If Oprah's Book Club selections were

packaged or displayed with other lesser-known authors or novels, consumers could begin to question the equity of the Book Club selections and Winfrey's perceived expertise in choosing the novels. This could damage Winfrey's credibility and cause some consumers to lose interest in Oprah's Book Club, or in Winfrey herself.

Toni Morrison and Oprah's Book Club

Even before her books were included in Oprah's Book Club, Toni Morrison was already an accomplished author. Morrison was born as Chloe Anthony Wofford on Feb. 18, 1931, in Lorain, Ohio (Toni Morrison Biography, 2009). Morrison's father worked three jobs for 17 years while his children were growing up, and her mother sang in the church choir (Bois, 1996). Storytelling was a large part of her childhood, and Morrison's writing reflects the influence that storytelling had on her life (Toni Morrison, 2007). Morrison's parents had great pride in their heritage, so they told their children many stories of Southern Black folklore (Bois, 1996).

Morrison seemed to value her education from a young age. When she entered the first grade, she was the only black student in her class, and the only one who could read (Bois, 1996). Morrison loved to read and enjoyed works by Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Flaubert, and Austen (Bois, 1996). It was during this time that she changed her name from Chloe to Toni (a shortened version of her middle name) because many people could not pronounce her given name correctly (Bois, 1996). Morrison enrolled in Howard University in 1949 and she graduated from Howard in 1953 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and then went on to earn her Master of Fine Arts degree from Cornell University in 1955 (Toni Morrison Biography, 2009; Bois, 1996). Morrison taught introductory English at Texas Southern

University for 2 years (Bois, 1996). At Texas Southern, there was a Negro history week, which introduced Morrison to the idea that black culture could be more than just family memories; it could be a discipline as well (Bois, 1996). Morrison returned to Howard in 1957 as a member of the faculty, and it was here that she met her husband, Harold (Bois, 1996). During this time, she joined a small writer's group because "she needed company of other people who appreciated literature as much as she did" (Bois, 1996, ¶ 5). The group had a requirement for members to bring a story or poem for discussion each week, so Morrison quickly wrote a story that was loosely based on a childhood acquaintance who prayed to God for blue eyes (Bois, 1996). Although the story was well received by the writer's group, Morrison put it aside, believing she was done with it (Bois, 1996).

That story later became Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, and was published in 1970 (Toni Morrison Biography, 2009). Her next novel, *Sula*, was published in 1973 and was nominated for the National Book Award for fiction (Bois, 1996). *Song of Solomon* was published in 1977, and it won the National Book Critic's Circle Award and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award (Toni Morrison Biography, 2009; Bois, 1996). *Song of Solomon* also became the first novel written by Morrison to be included in Oprah's book club (*The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* were later chosen). *Beloved* was published in 1987 and went on to win the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for fiction (Toni Morrison Biography, 2009). Morrison won the 1993 Nobel Prize for literature and was the first African American woman to win the award and the eighth woman overall to do so (Toni Morrison Biography, 2009). *Beloved* is considered to be Morrison's masterpiece, as the Nobel Prize committee

cited it as her outstanding work (Toni Morrison, 2007). Morrison's characters try to understand the truth about the world that they live in, and Morrison also covers subjects like good and evil, love and hate, beauty and ugliness, friendship, and death (Toni Morrison, 2007). Finally, Morrison became the Robert F. Goheen Professor in the Council of Humanities at Princeton University, which made her the first black woman writer to hold a named chair at an Ivy League University (Bois, 1996).

Morrison has been widely praised by critics and colleagues alike. Shapiro et al. (1994) said that Morrison's "resistance to racism has prompted critics to call her racism's 'avenging angel'" (p. 85). After Morrison won the Nobel Prize in 1993, many of her Princeton colleagues wrote of how and what they felt after Morrison won the award. Harold T. Shapiro said this about Morrison's impact on the Princeton community:

"Toni's presence-that voice which is so marvelous not only on paper but in person, the tremendous intellectual vigor and range, the full throated laughter that springs forth so warmly and so often, the wholehearted commitment to the integrity both of her writing and of her teaching-makes a difference. And the difference her presence has made within the small community of the university, I believe, reflects the larger difference her work has made, now, worldwide" (Shapiro et al., 1994, p. 85).

Robert Fagles said that Morrison's Nobel Prize win was great for women, women writers, African-American women writers, and "for diversity, in short. It's a great thing for the university as well, for Princeton and its distinguished writers, and for all the other colleges and universities with writers in their ranks" (Shapiro et al.,

1994, p. 86). Nell Irvin Painter echoed this sentiment, saying that she felt that Morrison's win "was a gift to me and to black women and to African-American people and to good folks everywhere, and Toni's gracious comments to the press reinforced that impression, for she welcomed the honor in all our names" (Shapiro et al., 1994, p. 86).

Morrison's work has become even more widely known since Winfrey began including her novels in Oprah's Book Club. *Song of Solomon* was announced as Winfrey's second Book Club selection on Oct. 18, 1996. *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* were two more of Morrison's novels that were chosen for Oprah's Book Club in 2000 and 2002, respectively (Oprah's Book Club Books, 2009). *Song of Solomon* tells the story of Macon "Milkman" Dead, who is estranged from his family, community, and his roots (Song of Solomon: Homework Help..., 2009). Morrison tells Milkman's story and describes how he was able to rekindle his broken relationships. *Song of Solomon* had been in print for 19 years when it was selected for Oprah's Book Club. Winfrey's selection of the novel sparked a renewed interest in it, helped skyrocket sales, and changed the way the book was marketed, with much of the same happening for Morrison's other novels and Book Club selections. The alternate covers were made and there were also changes in the price of the hardcover book (Young, 2001). The original price of a copy of *Song of Solomon* in hardcover was \$26, and this was lowered to \$18.95 after complaints from Oprah viewers (Young, 2001). As part of the Book Club discussion of *Song of Solomon*, Winfrey invited a few select readers to her home for a dinner party with herself and

Morrison (Hall, 2003). The dinner party was taped for television and viewers were shown the highlights on a subsequent Book Club discussion show.

Although Morrison had established herself as a prolific writer before being involved with Oprah's Book Club, Winfrey's influence could possibly have made her even better known and more influential. If Winfrey can exert this type of influence and make a difference in sales and promotion of an author as well known as Toni Morrison, this helps to solidify the notion that both Winfrey and the Oprah Winfrey brand are well received among consumers.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The previous information about Oprah's Book Club, the agenda-setting theory of communication, and brand strategy, assessment, and identification offers some insight and also raises new questions about just how influential Oprah's Book Club is on media exposure and overall media impressions of an author after their inclusion in Oprah's book Club. A study was formulated based on this information and included the following research questions and hypotheses:

RQ1: Will Toni Morrison gain more media coverage after her selection for Oprah's Book Club?

H1: Toni Morrison will experience more media coverage after being selected for Oprah's Book Club than she experienced before being selected for Oprah's Book Club.

RQ2: Will the media choose to focus more on the fact that Winfrey selected Toni Morrison's novel for her Book Club than on other topics related to Morrison (her other novels, sales, etc.)?

H2: Media coverage of Toni Morrison after her selection for Oprah's Book Club will focus significantly more on Oprah's Book Club itself than on any other topic.

H3: The amount of media coverage of Toni Morrison's Book Club novels and her other (non Book-Club) novels will be significantly higher after her Book club selection than it was before her Book Club selection.

RQ3: Will media mentions of the selected author be more positive or negative after their inclusion in Oprah's Book Club?

H4: Mentions of Toni Morrison will generally be more positive after her Book Club selection than before her Book Club selection.

RQ4: Even though she was already an established author before being affiliated with Oprah's Book Club, will mentions of Toni Morrison appear more on the front page or section front of U.S. newspapers?

H5: Post-Book Club, mentions of Toni Morrison will appear more on the front page and section front of the newspaper than on inside pages.

RQ5: Will mentions of Toni Morrison appear more in headlines and leads of a story or article after her novel became an Oprah's Book Club selection?

H6: Post-Book Club, mentions of Toni Morrison will appear more in headlines and leads of the story than in the body of the story or paired with a graphic.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

One Oprah's Book Club author was chosen, and a content analysis of mentions of the author's name in U.S. newspapers (the mentions being the unit of analysis) in both the year prior to their Oprah's Book Club selection and the year following was performed. A search of the LexisNexis database yielded a total of 1,259 articles that mentioned the author between the dates of Oct. 18, 1995, and Oct. 17, 1997, that were published in U.S. newspapers (the date after which media coverage was expected to change was Oct. 18, 1996, which was the day that Winfrey announced *Song of Solomon* as a Book Club selection). Four hundred of those articles comprised the simple random sample for this study. These 400 articles were chosen by the use of Research Randomizer (randomizer.org), and the articles corresponding to those numbers were located in LexisNexis and the mentions of the selected author were analyzed.

Seven variables were included in the content analysis. The independent variables were the date (pre-Book Club, post-Book Club), the type of story (news or editorial), and the name of the publication. The dependent variables were the topic of the mention (seven different topics were used including Oprah Winfrey, Oprah's Book Club, and Toni Morrison's Book Club selections), page placement (front page, an inside page of a publication, section-front; these will indicate whether or not Morrison gained better placement in a publication post Book Club), story placement (headline, lead, or body of the story, paired with picture or graphic; these will indicate whether or not Morrison gained better placement in the story itself post-

Book Club), and the tone of the mention (negative, neutral, positive; these will indicate if mentions of Toni Morrison became more positive, more negative, or remained neutral post-Book Club). An example of a neutral tone would be Feder's article in which he wrote, "It was playing the character of Sethe, created by author Toni Morrison, that brought clarity to Winfrey's decision" (§ 12). A positive mention would have resembled Malone's article in which she quoted an individual as saying "Our problem is, if it's a popular book, like Toni Morrison's..." (§ 18). An example of a negative mention would be represented by article titles like one found in an online blog that read "Toni Morrison endorses Obama; millions scratch their heads" (Salmon, 2008, § 1). The researcher and one other experienced individual coded the data. Two training sessions were needed to reach an intercoder reliability of 90 percent after the coding of 15 articles (ones that were not a part of the random sample), as well as a probability level of .05 once the data were analyzed using a Pearson Chi Square test. The researcher and the coder experienced similar levels of agreement throughout the coding process. Initially, there was 100% agreement with the date and name of the publication. There was an agreement of 86%, 80%, 83%, 82%, 79% with the variables News or Editorial, Tone, Page, Story, and Topic, respectively. After making minor changes to each of the variables (most notably, Topic, in which two more categories were added), the researcher and coder reached at least 90% agreement within each variable (100% for News or Editorial, 93% for Tone, 100% for Page, 100% for Story, and 93% for Topic). The percentages were calculated by dividing the number of variables that were agreed upon in each mention by the total number of mentions that were coded, and multiplying by 100.

Toni Morrison was the Oprah's Book Club author selected as the unit of analysis in this study. Reasons behind this included the fact that Morrison's novel *Song of Solomon* was the second pick for Oprah's Book Club, as well as the fact that Morrison was already an established, highly regarded author before she became an Oprah's Book Club author. Jacquelyn Mitchard was the first author chosen, but in choosing Morrison as the unit of analysis in this study, the attempt is made to establish whether an established author like Morrison can still benefit from having Oprah Winfrey's "seal of approval" on her novel.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

As seen in Table 1, there were 451 total valid mentions of Toni Morrison in U.S. Newspaper and Wire articles between October 18, 1995 and October 17, 1997. One hundred forty of those mentions (31%) occurred before Morrison's inclusion in Oprah's Book Club, and 311 (69%) of those mentions occurred after Morrison's inclusion in the Book Club. There is an obvious increase in mentions of Toni Morrison in U.S. newspapers after her selection for Oprah's Book Club.

Table 1

Date of Story Frequency Table

	Frequency	Percent
Pre-Book Club	140	31.0
Post-Book Club	311	69.0
Total	451	100.0

As seen in Table 2, 401 (88.9%) of the 451 valid mentions of Toni Morrison in U.S. newspapers between October 18, 1995 and October 17, 1997, were news and 50 (11.1%) were editorial. This indicates that mentions of Toni Morrison were treated mostly as news; she was likely not the subject of very many book reviews or overall reviews of her work that could have been treated as an editorial piece.

Table 2

News or Editorial Frequency Table

	Frequency	Percent
Editorial	50	11.1
News	401	88.9
Total	451	100.0

As seen in Table 3, 7 (1.6%) of the 451 mentions of Toni Morrison in U.S. newspapers between October 18, 1995, and October 17, 1997, were negative, 338 (74.9%) were neutral, and 106 (23.5%) were positive. This indicates that news coverage of Toni Morrison at this time was mostly neutral and positive.

Table 3

Tone Frequency Table

	Frequency	Percent
Negative	7	1.6
Positive	106	23.5
Neutral	338	74.9
Total	451	100.0

As seen in Table 4, 13 (2.9%) of the 451 mentions of Toni Morrison in U.S. newspapers between October 18, 1995, and October 17, 1997, were on the front page of the publication, 365 (80.9%) were on an inside page of the publication, and 73 (16.2%) were on a section front. This information would indicate that coverage of Toni Morrison did not warrant prominent page placement.

Table 4

Page Frequency Table

	Frequency	Percent
Front Page	13	2.9
Section Front	73	16.2
Inside Page	365	80.9
Total	451	100.0

As seen in Table 5, 7 (1.6%) of the 451 mentions of Toni Morrison in U.S. newspapers between October 18, 1995, and October 17, 1997, were in the headline of the story, 25 (5.5%) were in the lead (first full sentence or first paragraph) of the

story, 405 (89.8%) were in the body of the story, and 14 (3.1%) were paired with a picture or graphic. This provides information that is somewhat similar to the information regarding the page variable. There were obviously quite a few mentions of Toni Morrison, but they were used mostly in the body of the story, which could be an indication of the perceived importance of Toni Morrison at that time.

Table 5

Story Frequency Table

	Frequency	Percent
Headline	7	1.6
Lead	25	5.5
W/Graphic	14	3.1
Body	405	89.8
Total	451	100.0

As seen in Table 6, 16 (3.5%) of the 451 mentions of Toni Morrison in U.S. newspapers between October 18, 1995, and October 17, 1997, had the topic of Oprah’s Book Club, 23 (5.1%) had the topic of Oprah Winfrey herself, 108 (23.9%) had the topic of Morrison’s other books or projects besides her Book Club selections, 3 (.7%) had the topic of sales of the Book Club selection, 1 (.2%) had the topic of international sales or impact, 195 (43.2%) had the topic of Toni Morrison herself (her career, etc.), and 105 (23.3%) had the topic of Morrison’s Book Club selections. This information shows that the topic of Toni Morrison herself (her life, career, etc.) was the most mentioned topic during the time period in question, with the topic of her other books or projects besides her Oprah’s Book Club Selections as the next most mentioned topic, and Morrison’s Book Club selections coming after that.

Table 6

Topic Frequency Table

	Frequency	Percentage
International	1	.2
Sales	3	.7
Book Club	16	3.5
Winfrey	23	5.1
BC Selections	105	23.3
Other Projects	108	23.9
Morrison	195	43.2
Total	451	100.0

Hypotheses

H1: The chosen author will experience more media coverage after being selected for the Book Club than they experienced before being selected for the Book Club.

The overall results of the study support this hypothesis as seen in Table 7. From Oct. 18, 1995, to Oct. 17, 1996, there were 140 mentions of Toni Morrison in U.S. newspapers. From Oct. 18, 1996 (the day Winfrey announced *Song of Solomon* as her latest Book Club selection) to Oct. 17, 1997, there were 311 mentions of Toni Morrison in U.S. newspapers. This is an increase of 122.14 percent post-Book Club.

Table 7

Number of Mentions of Toni Morrison pre- and post-Book Club

Date	Number of Mentions
Pre-Book Club	140
Post-Book Club	311
Percent change	122.1%

H2: Media coverage of the author after the Book Club selection will focus significantly more on Oprah’s Book Club than on any other topic.

H3: Media coverage of the author's Book Club selection and the author's other works will be significantly higher after the Book Club selection than before the Book Club selection.

Five point one percent of the mentions of Toni Morrison post Book Club actually had the topic of Oprah's Book Club, while 43.2% percent of the mentions had the topic of Toni Morrison herself. The Chi Square analysis indicated that these results had a high level of significance ($<.01$), but five or more cells have expected counts of less than five. These results were recalculated after combining like topics (the topics Oprah's Book Club, Oprah Winfrey, and Morrison's Book Club selections were combined in one category, and Morrison's other projects, Sales, and International Impact were combined into another category) and finding a new Chi Square value. The recalculated results indicated that topics having to do with Oprah (her Book Club, general references to Oprah, and Morrison's Book Club selections) were the most highly written about topic, with 42.4% of the mentions having this topic. Table 8 shows the original calculations, while Table 9 shows the calculations after collapsing the Topic variable.

Table 8

*Date * Topic of the Mention*

		Topic						
		Book Club	Oprah	Other	Sales	Int'l	Toni Morrison	Book Club Books
Date	Pre-Book Club	0 0.0%	6 4.3%	47 33.6%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	81 57.9%	6 4.3%
	Post-Book Club	16 5.1%	17 5.5%	61 19.6%	3 1.0%	1 0.2%	114 43.2%	99 23.3%
Total		16 3.5%	23 5.1%	108 23.9%	3 0.7%	1 0.2%	195 43.2%	105 23.3%

Table 9

*Date * Collapsed Topic*

		Collapsed Topic		
		Toni Morrison	Book Club, Oprah Winfrey, Morrison's Book Club Selections	Morrison's Other Projects, Sales, International Impact
Date	Pre-Book Club	81 57.9%	12 8.6%	47 33.6%
	Post-Book Club	114 36.7%	132 42.4%	65 20.9%
Total		195 43.2%	144 31.9%	112 24.8%

$\chi^2=50.97$ $df=2$ $n=451$ significance level $<.01$

H4: Mentions of the selected author will generally be more positive after the Book Club selection than before the Book Club Selection.

Table 10 shows extreme changes in the actual number of negative, neutral, and positive mentions of Toni Morrison before and after she was included in Oprah's Book Club. Very few of the mentions were negative: there was only one

negative mention pre-Book Club, and six post-Book Club. There were 122 neutral mentions pre-Book Club and 216 post-Book Club. Finally, there were 17 positive mentions pre-Book Club and 89 post-Book Club. Overall, 74.9% of the mentions of Toni Morrison were neutral, 23.5% were positive, and 1.6% were negative.

Although the total amount of mentions of Toni Morrison post-Book Club increased dramatically, the majority of the mentions in each time period were neutral.

However, the number of positive mentions post-Book Club were more than five times the number of mentions pre-Book Club (the percentage within the category more than doubled), whereas the number of neutral mentions increased approximately 1.7 times the original amount. Because the number of positive mentions increased so dramatically, the percentage of neutral mentions actually decreased to account for this. Based on this information, H4 is supported.

Table 10

*Date * Tone of the Mention*

		Tone of the Mention		
		Negative	Neutral	Positive
Date	Pre-Book Club	1 0.7%	122 87.1%	17 12.1%
	Post-Book Club	6 1.9%	216 69.5%	89 28.6%
Total		7 1.6%	338 74.9%	106 23.5%

$\chi^2=16.10$ $df=2$ $n=451$ significance level= $<.01$

H5: Post-Book Club, mentions of Toni Morrison will appear more on the front page and section front than any other location in U.S. newspapers.

Table 11 shows that most of the mentions of Toni Morrison pre-and post-Book Club were found on an inside page of the publication. Pre-Book Club, there

were 125 inside page mentions and 240 inside page mentions post-Book Club. There was only one front-page mention pre-Book Club and 12 post-Book Club. Finally, there were 14 section front mentions pre-Book Club and 59 section front mentions post-Book Club.

Both pre-and post-Book Club, the majority of the mentions of Toni Morrison were found on an inside page of the publication (89.3% pre-Book Club and 77.2% post-Book Club). Section front was the next highest category in both time periods (10.0% pre-Book Club and 19% post-Book Club), and the fewest number of mentions pre-and post-Book Club were found on the front page of the publication (0.7% and 3.9%, respectively).

Finally, these results (as they stand here) indicate that being affiliated with Oprah's Book Club did warrant some special coverage (i.e. front page) in U.S. newspapers. Again, there was obviously more media coverage after *Song of Solomon* was selected, but it could be said that the "Oprah" factor did give Morrison more prominent coverage. The number of front-page mentions went from one to 12 post-Book Club, and the number of section front mentions more than quadrupled post Book Club. However, these results also show one cell with an expected count of less than five, so these results were also collapsed in order to find more stable results. The Chi-Square value increased, and the results were still significant. The collapsed results indicate that most mentions of Toni Morrison in both time periods were on inside pages. However, the percentage of mentions on section fronts and front pages more than doubled post-Book Club compared to pre-Book Club. Strictly speaking H5 was not supported since the majority of mentions in both time periods

fell on inside pages. However, it is clear that after being selected for Oprah’s Book Club, Morrison enjoyed increased prominent page placement.

Table 11

*Date * Page Placement*

		Page		
		Front Page	Inside Page	Section Front
Date	Pre Book Club	1 0.7%	125 89.3%	14 10.0%
	Post Book Club	12 3.9%	240 77.2%	59 19.0%
Total		13 2.9%	365 80.9%	73 16.2%

Table 12

*Date * Collapsed Page Placement*

		Collapsed Page	
		Inside Page	Front Page, Section Front
Date	Pre Book Club	125 89.3%	15 10.7%
	Post Book Club	240 77.2%	71 22.8%
Total		365 80.9%	86 19.1%

$\chi^2=9.18$ $df=1$ $n=451$ significance level= $<.01$

H6: Post-Book Club, mentions of Toni Morrison will appear more in headlines and leads of the story than in the body of the story or paired with a graphic.

Table 13 shows that the majority of the mentions of Toni Morrison in each time period were found in the body of the story. There were three mentions of Toni Morrison in headlines pre-Book Club and four post-Book Club. There were seven mentions of Toni Morrison in the lead of the story pre-Book Club and 18 post-Book

Club. There were 126 mentions in the body of the story pre Book Club and 279 post-Book Club. Finally, there were four mentions that were paired with a picture or graphic pre-Book Club and 10 post-Book Club.

Mentions of Toni Morrison were found mostly in the body and leads of the story throughout the time period that comprised this study (Oct. 18, 1995-Oct. 17, 1997). Five percent of the pre-Book Club mentions were found in the lead and 90% were found in the body of the story. Almost 6% of the post-Book Club mentions were found in the lead and 89.7% were found in the body of the story. Although the counts in both of these categories more than doubled pre-to post-Book Club, they remained the two categories with the highest number of mentions; the fewest number of mentions in both time periods were found in headlines. Again, there were cells with expected counts less than five in the initial results. The results were collapsed, and Headline, Lead, and Paired with picture or graphic were combined into one category. The results again became more stable but still indicate that the majority of the mentions were found in the body of the story. Based on this information, H₆ is rejected.

Table 13

*Date * Story Placement*

		Story			
		Headline	Lead	Body of the Story	Paired w/picture or graphic
Date	Pre-Book Club	3 2.1%	7 5.0%	126 90.0%	4 2.9%
	Post-Book Club	4 1.3%	18 5.8%	279 89.7%	10 3.2%
Total		7 1.6%	25 5.5%	405 89.8%	14 3.1%

Table 14

*Date * Collapsed Story Placement*

		Collapsed Story	
		Body of the story	Headline, Lead, Paired w/picture or graphic
Date	Pre-Book Club	126 90.0%	14 10.0%
	Post-Book Club	279 89.7%	32 10.3%
Total		405 89.8%	46 10.2%

$\chi^2=.01$ $df=1$ $n=451$ significance level=n.s.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The previous results indicate that in this case the largest effect that being an Oprah's Book Club author had on media coverage of Toni Morrison was in the sheer amount of coverage that she received. The number of mentions of Toni Morrison in U.S. newspapers more than doubled in the year following the selection of *Song of Solomon* as an Oprah's Book Club novel. The category within each variable (even topic, which had to be collapsed) that had the most mentions pre Book Club still had the most mentions post Book Club, so in some instances, it is hard to say whether or not being affiliated with one of Oprah Winfrey's projects garners better, more favorable news coverage. The one variable that showed the most telling results was page placement (H5) because front-page mentions and section front mentions increased dramatically.

For example, in the comparison of the date of the mention and story placement, the majority of the mentions were found in the body of the story in each time period. The next highest was the lead, followed by paired with picture or graphic, and the fewest number of mentions were found in the headlines. Because of results like these, we cannot definitively say that Winfrey changed the way that the media portrays the author she selected for Oprah's Book Club. The results of this study indicated that mentions of Toni Morrison became more positive after she became an Oprah's Book Club author. According to Table 10, the percentage of positive mentions of Toni Morrison post-Book Club was 28.6%, which is more than double the percentage of positive mentions pre-Book Club (12.1%). Although most

of the mentions remained neutral post Book Club, this indicates a large increase in positive mentions. The results also indicated that the mentions of Toni Morrison had better page placement. Front page and section front mentions experienced a similar increase in that the percentage of these mentions more than doubled as well.

Overall, the results show some indication that Winfrey's influence can change the way even an established author like Morrison is portrayed in the media. Even though the categories with the most mentions (throughout the results) did not change, the increases in categories such as positive tone and front page and section front placement indicate that something that Morrison was doing at the time (whether it was Oprah's Book Club or not) warranted more favorable media coverage. The major factor in the time period that was studied was Oprah Winfrey and Oprah's Book Club, so we can make some connection here to the more favorable coverage that Morrison experienced.

These results could possibly have been different if the study were not limited to only the year prior and year following Morrison's selection as an Oprah's Book Club author. If a larger time period had been included in the study, more significant changes in all variables could have been observed. Also, the main topic of the mentions could have shifted from general mentions about Toni Morrison and her life and career to topics that had more to do with Oprah Winfrey or Oprah's Book Club. Future research could expand a study of this nature to cover a longer time period and also include more variables that could offer more information about Winfrey's effect on the media coverage of Oprah's Book Club authors.

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