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Dieting, Discrimination, and Bullying: A Contextual Case Study of Framing in the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance

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Dieting, Discrimination, And Bullying:
A Contextual Case Study Of Framing In The National
Association To Advance Fat Acceptance

by

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of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

The National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA), the largest size acceptance organization (Kwan 2009), recognizes and frames fat as an identity in need of protective policies. This framing is not without complication. Both the framing techniques utilized by this organization and the political context in which this organization exists are extremely complex. As a way to uncover this dynamic relationship, I analyze NAAFA's framing techniques (Snow and Benford 1988). Employing this social movement organization (SMO) as a case study (Snow and Trom 2002), I analyze the way this organization's framing and reframing (Benford and Hunt 2003) shifts across time in the face of opposition. In particular, the First Lady's initiative, Let's Move!, is in direct contradiction of NAAFA's goals. While numerous themes, techniques and processes can be observed through the framing and reframing tools implemented by NAAFA over the years, I explore the three most pronounced primary framing tasks in relation to Let's Move!. These three themes include: (1) the dieting myth; (2) discriminatory policy; and (3) children as collateral damage. NAAFA reframes their message directly against the Let's Move! campaign, which makes their framing clearer and more relevant to public discussion. This research helps social movement scholars understand the importance of context in framing and reframing techniques.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Fat, a word laden with prejudice and controversy, is one with which the size acceptance movement has historically been concerned (Saguy 2013). Beginning in 1969, the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA), the largest size acceptance organization¹(Kwan 2009), recognizes and frames fat as an identity in need of protective policies. This framing is not without complication. Both the framing techniques utilized by this organization and the political context in which this organization exists are extremely complex. As a way to uncover this dynamic relationship, I analyze NAAFA's framing techniques (Snow and Benford 1988). Employing this social movement organization (SMO) as a case study (Snow and Trom 2002), I analyze the way this organization's framing and reframing (Benford and Hunt 2003) shifts across time in the face of opposition.

How does context and opposition affect the framing and subsequent reframing of SMOs? When addressing the context of NAAFA, I turn to the national Let's Move! campaign introduced in 2010 by the First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama. Using her political platform, Obama's campaign aims to address the claimed problem of childhood obesity currently facing the U.S. This campaign is a focal point for the fight on childhood obesity. Having the First Lady with "a huge microphone and a spotlight is really helpful," Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius says. 'It's a big health crisis. We need to involve not only the kids

¹ I chose to focus on NAAFA because it is the largest SMO of the Size Acceptance Movement. Because they are the largest, they are also the most well organized SMO. Some other organizations are the Association for Size Diversity and Health and the International Size Acceptance Association.

but the families’” (Hall and Hellmich 2010). By using her platform to start a national campaign, she has highlighted research on childhood obesity for the push towards the campaign.

In analyzing this, I address how context, such as political environment, affects framing within social movement organizations. The context in which NAAFA exists, such as the political environment created by the Let’s Move! campaign, alters activists’ strategic choices regarding framing processes. Previous to Let’s Move!, there hasn’t been a specific campaign that NAAFA has directly challenged. Because of that, Let’s Move! is interesting to study. Utilizing NAAFA as a case study, I focus on the importance of context in the framing and reframing techniques utilized by SMOs thereby seeking to contribute to the social movement literature.

After surveying the recent literature, I begin this study by examining the ways obesity has been conceptualized and theoretically constructed by NAAFA. Next I discuss NAAFA’s explanation regarding the affects created by the dichotomy of healthy/thin and unhealthy/fat. Following their construction, I show how NAAFA has attempted to reframe the discussion of health to include the obese, or fat, body. In order to illuminate how shifts in social context and public policy affect framing strategies in social movements, I analyze NAAFA’s framing the years before, during, and after the introduction of the Let’s Move! Campaign. Choosing three temporal points (before 2005-2008, during 2010, and after 2011-2012) allows me to capture a comprehensive view of the techniques utilized by NAAFA to reframe the claims made by Let’s Move! Finally, I conclude with implications concerning framing and context for future research in social movements.

While there has been previous research on framing in NAAFA, it has been focused on the organization’s frame bridging (Saguy and Riley 2005, Saguy 2013), claims making (Kirkland 2008) and participation motives (Strumer, Simon, Loewy, and Jorger 2003). These scholars have

incorporated social movement research, critical fat studies, and feminist theories. Their studies, however, did not analyze the internal framing as affected by an external opposition. An issue important to social movement research, and the crux of this project, is the context in which NAAFA exists and its subsequent framing and reframing. Investigating the effects of the context is important in understanding the way movements reframe central issues. This reframing is what I intend to explore. I argue NAAFA's framing alters with the introduction of the Let's Move! campaign, causing a reframing focused on the surrounding claims about childhood obesity.

Fat In Context

For decades sociologists have explored the importance of bodies and weight in society. Body weight in the West has carried a variety of meanings throughout time. Archival research has been utilized to enhance the understanding of shifting meanings of fatness throughout history (Maurer and Sobal 1995). Other scholars have used newspaper data to understand the shift in the framing of the obesity epidemic (Boero 2007). For instance, fatness was once revered as a sign of wealth and beauty, but eventually shifted to a stigmatized identity (Orbach 1978, Maurer and Sobal 1995, Sobal 1995, Gilman 2008). Over time, this stigmatized identity (or body) soon became constructed as a social problem: the social problem of fat (Saguy 2013, Saguy and Almeling 2008, Saguy and Riley 2005, Levy-Navarro 2009, Boero 2007). Using a contextual social constructionist perspective, Maurer and Sobal (1995) analyze the formation of the problem of obesity by looking at claims and claimsmakers. Stearns (1999) suggests that the socialization of children breeds a fear of obesity and that this fear itself is the major social problem, and not

childhood obesity. This argument locates the societal expectations placed on bodies as faulty and not the nonnormative bodies themselves.

Fat Liberation and NAAFA

The 1960's in North America were rife with social movements (SMs). These movements converge and overlap in many respects, especially in their initiatives to challenge the status quo. Among these movements are the nuclear disarmament movement (Benford 1993), peace movement (Edwards and Marullo 1995), feminist movement (Taylor and Whittier 1992), lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender movement (Berstein 1997) and civil rights movement (Robnett 1996). Often overlooked in this myriad of SMs is the size acceptance movement. This movement was established in order to challenge the thin/fat and healthy/unhealthy dichotomies perpetuated throughout society (Boero 2007, Saguy and Almeling 2008). Furthermore, it was established to discredit classifying obesity as a social problem.

Since 1969, the social movement organization NAAFA (2012) has been involved in the size acceptance movement. Their objective is to promote a society where “people of every size are accepted with dignity and equality in all aspects of life” (NAAFA 2012). For over 40 years, this organization has worked towards reaching its goal through advocating for size acceptance, promoting public education on issues regarding weight, and providing support networks for those within the movement.

The current make up of NAAFA's board of directors includes four full-time officials. NAAFA also has a board of advisors comprised of thirteen academics and professionals, ranging from nurses, PhDs, lawyers, and the director of the Association of Airline Passenger Rights. This

board allows for larger and more extensive claimsmaking for NAAFA, which in turn aids in their framing activities.

Using the language of civil rights, NAAFA advocates for “Health at Every Size” (HAES) policies to be implemented to combat healthcare, workplace, and education discrimination. Since 2005, NAAFA has hosted yearly HAES summits to discuss current issues regarding obesity and healthcare, offering and announcing the HAES education scholarship for graduate and undergraduate students who are contributing academic, empirical, and theoretical research for the NAAFA cause. They also offer information, guides and toolkits for those interested in furthering the NAAFA agenda (NAAFA 2012).

While the size acceptance movement has similarities to other contemporary movements, this movement has encountered a unique opposition that many others have not: a medical debate (Saguy and Riley 2005). With organizations such as the American Psychological Association supporting claims regarding the health risks of obesity, this medical opposition is used to challenge size acceptance arguments furthered by NAAFA (Saguy and Riley 2005).

The Emergence Of The Let’s Move! Campaign

Framing the problem of the “obesity epidemic,” Michele Obama launched the Let’s Move! Campaign in February of 2010. As explained on the Let’s Move! website, it “is about putting children on the path to a healthy future during their earliest months and years” (Let’s Move! 2014). The program does this by “giving parents helpful information and fostering environments that support healthy choices. Providing healthier foods in our schools. Ensuring that every family has access to healthy, affordable food. And, helping kids become more physically active.” (Let’s Move! 2014). The tenants of the campaign are described as

“combining comprehensive strategies with common sense” knowledge (Let’s Move! 2014). The program received so much attention, however, because the First Lady headed it. She is—by far—not the only First Lady to capitalize on her political position.

‘First Ladies have taken on issues in the past, but this is different because childhood obesity is such a pressing public health concern,’ says Margo Wootan, director of nutrition policy for the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a consumer advocacy group. ‘Interest in nutrition is at an all-time high, and there is a lot of concern about the health and financial effects of obesity.’ (Hall and Hellmich 2010)

Using her position to publicly promote her chosen social problem, she skillfully incorporates public knowledge and scholarly research. When describing her campaign she cites those who characterize obesity as a social problem, Obama claims that, “over the past three decades, childhood obesity rates in America have tripled,” and “nearly one in three children in America are overweight or obese” (Let’s Move! 2012). This initiative’s goals are positioned to address the “problem of obesity facing children today” (Let’s Move! 2012). According to Obama, “the physical and emotional health of an entire generation and the economic health and security of our nation is at stake” (Let’s Move! 2012). These declarations are just some of the many that draw on national ideologies of obesity as a social problem in need of a fix. Additionally, they construct children as the victims of the social problem of obesity. This construction has important implications for the NAAFA SMO.

Following those very constructions, at the launch of the Let’s Move! campaign, President Barack Obama signed a Presidential Memorandum creating the first-ever Task Force on Childhood Obesity (Let’s Move! 2012). This task force was created to review all programs and policies relating to child nutrition and physical activity. The task force was needed to develop a national action plan to maximize resources to fight against childhood obesity. With this

memorandum in place, the Let's Move! campaign became more influential and well-known, entering into the public discourse in which NAAFA participates.

Previous SM research has explored the effect political entities have on the success of SMs (Noakes and Johnson 2005). Noakes and Johnson (2005: 18) argue that “the state has always been recognized as a significant player in shaping social movement dynamics through its decisions about which groups to tolerate and which to repress (McAdam 1982, McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001).” With presidential backing, NAAFA faced politically induced concerns involving the Let's Move! campaign.

The Context: NAAFA Meets Let's Move!

In discussing NAAFA and Let's Move!, I address the emergence of social problems by examining how NAAFA's framing and reframing seems to respond to the Let's Move! campaign (Benford and Hunt 2003). For the sake of empirical investigation, NAAFA is treated as the protagonist and the Let's Move! campaign as the antagonist (Benford and Hunt 2003). These categorizations are grounded by NAAFA's definition of Let's Move! as an antagonist to the size acceptance movement. In August 2011, NAAFA held a national press conference covered by several media groups including C-SPAN. At this press release, they directly critiqued the Let's Move! campaign while discussing their reconceptualization of their previous frames and offering new directions for their organization. Peggy Howell, NAAFA's Public Relations Director introduces the problems of

the well-intentioned but somewhat misdirected Let's Move Campaign, led by our own first Lady Michelle Obama. What I mean by misdirected is that rather than educating and encouraging our nation to create healthy practices for all children, focusing on the health of all our children, children of higher body weight have been singled out and the focus on the campaign is on weight reduction and not on improving children's health. (C-SPAN 2011)

Utilizing Benford and Hunt's (2003) research on the reframing of social problems, I analyze the framing exemplified by NAAFA before, during, and after the launching of Let's Move! to illustrate how the introduction shifted their framing strategies.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODS

Literature Review

Social Construction of Fat

Introduced by Berger and Luckmann in 1966, the paradigm of social constructionism has a rich history within sociological thought. They radically argue social reality itself is constructed by the creation and reification of knowledge claims (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Norms are produced through the creation of knowledge; ergo, so are problems. One problem that has been gaining media attention over the past twenty years is the social construction of fat (Boreo 2007).

When embarking on this project it is necessary to consider arguments by NAAFA concerning the construction of weight categories, such as fat and thin. These categorizations, as NAAFA argues, are utilized to create a dualistic method of thinking with regards to healthy and unhealthy. As maintained by the size acceptance movement, the medical term “obese” has limited our notion of the various shapes and sizes of healthy bodies. Marilyn Wann, a researcher and self-proclaimed active member of NAAFA, states, “calling fat people ‘obese’ medicalizes [and I propose denies] human diversity” (Wann 2009:xiii). According to the size acceptance movement, this medicalization and social construction of weight has promoted a dichotomy in which bodies of infinite possibilities are expected to fit in a thin/fat and healthy/unhealthy set of binaries. Following NAAFA and Levy-Navarro (2009), I use the term “fat”. While in most

contexts this label has negative connotations, it has been reclaimed and reframed by the size acceptance community as an empowering self-identification (Levy-Navarro 2009). People involved in NAAFA or the size acceptance movement use the descriptor fat as an empowering term that allows the movement to co-opt a previously negative term. Because of that, I use the term with no moral evaluation.

Sobal (1995) describes how the arguments for size acceptance come in three main waves of understanding obesity: moralization, medicalization, and demedicalization. In the first stage, moralization, obesity was viewed as evidence of moral shortcomings. For Sobal (1995), moralization was concerned with the moral obligation to be thin and that people who were not, were bad. In the second stage, which he argues, lasted from the 1950's to the 1970's, obesity was institutionally medicalized (Sobal 1995). I argue, however that the medicalization of obesity has not stopped. For instance, since the mid to late 1990s, obesity has been understood as a public health epidemic. Furthermore, in 2004, Medicare classified obesity as an official disease (Gilman 2008). The third stage has yet to fully arise, but it aligns with NAAFA's goal of fatness demedicalized and understood as normal rather than abnormal. While NAAFA does not cite Sobal (1995) directly, Sobal clearly articulates its role in the third stage.

These arguments are perpetuated by popular media headlines regarding the impending obesity epidemic that have increasingly saturated U.S. popular news and academic media (Boero 2007). By the late 1990's, news coverage following weight trends among Americans drastically increased (Saguy and Almeling 2008, Sobal 1995). However, the "obesity epidemic" is a highly debated topic in both social and scientific realms (Kolata 2014, Brody 2011, Ives 2002, Saguy and Riley 2005, Sobal 1995). This rhetoric is an example of the social construction of fat NAAFA attempts to reframe.

Social Movement Scholarship

Within this qualitative research endeavor, I adopt an interpretative paradigm that holds that reality is a social construct (Berger and Luckmann 1966, LeCompte and Schensul 2010). What people will come to believe to be true about the world around them has been created and reinforced through social interaction (LeCompte and Schensul 2010). Within the various epistemologies of social movements scholarship, I employ a social constructionist perspective. This perspective highlights the methods individuals use in order to make meaning of the world around them (Goffman 1974). Furthermore, “social movement organizations and their participants actively interpret, define, negotiate, and manage themselves to advance their interests as they engage with contextual challenges and opportunities” (Sobal 1999: 231). By understanding how constructionism occurs in social movements, there can be a more in-depth understanding of SMs (Gamson 1995, Benford and Snow 2000).

Similarly, a social constructionist framework allows for a thorough analysis of how movements organize and explain issues to the public. Movements employ frames in order to explain their organization’s motives and organize their rationale for challenging the status quo (Snow, Rochford, Worden, Benford 1986). In SM theory on framing (Snow, et al. 1986), the three aspects of framing include diagnostic, motivational, and prognostic framing (Snow and Benford 1988).

Diagnostic framing, in particular, “involves identification of a problem and the attribution of blame or causality” (1988:200). Motivational framing, on the other hand, is a call to action in which “[p]articipation is thus contingent upon the development of motivational frames that function as prods to action” (Snow and Benford 1988:202). This call to action is used

to inspire people to participate in NAAFA activities and campaigns. Finally, prognostic framing involves articulating solutions to the problem defined by the SMO as well as identifying “strategies, tactics, and targets” (Snow and Benford 1988:201). Often, a relationship develops between the diagnostic and prognostic framing proffered by a SMO (Snow and Benford 1988). In other words, factors labeled as problematic in a particular SMO’s diagnosis are also addressed in that SMO’s solutions (Snow and Benford 1988). These forms of framing are reflected in the newsletters distributed by NAAFA as they address the Let’s Move! campaign as an area of tension. More importantly, these framing techniques help to explain the complex relationship between NAAFA and the Let’s Move! campaign.

The ways we understand social problems and movements change over time and settings. Sometimes those changes are orchestrated by SMOs using keying techniques. Following a Goffmanian tradition, keying is “the set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by participants as something else” (Goffman 1974:44). Furthermore, keying happens when one “performs a crucial role in determining what it is we think is really going on” (Goffman 1974:45). When applied to social movements, this kind of meaning making within SMOs is significant. It defines how and what resonates with potential movement participants. It also dictates the strategies that will be beneficial for the SMO.

SMOs are constructed, restructured, and maintained by a collective of individuals. The collective works together to shape the rhetoric, arguments, and if they’re successful, the social problems they are publicizing. This notion of frames and framing is further conceptualized as the way that organizers, participants, and organizations present themselves. By focusing on framing,

I explore how NAAFA functions across time in their dealings with the opposition of the Let's Move! campaign.

Methods

This study is an investigation of the framing and reframing processes exemplified by NAAFA in response to the recent Let's Move! campaign. This approach was adopted in order to gather data from three temporal points to provide a glimpse of the shift in framing across time. Utilizing NAAFA as a case study (Snow and Trom 2002), I conducted a social movement framing analysis of newsletters distributed online by this organization. This analysis involved closely examining text materials distributed by NAAFA in order to reveal a connection between movement framing and the broader context discussed by the Let's Move! campaign (Johnston 2002). Consistent with past research on social movements, this research endeavor relied upon qualitative coding techniques to highlight common threads observed throughout the analysis (Johnson 2002). This involved organizing raw data into consistent categories and thereby creating themes (Nueman 2011).

In determining which virtual newsletters to select, context was critical when considering dates. As Nueman (2011) describes, “[i]n qualitative research, we usually emphasize the social context because the meaning of a social action, event, or statement greatly depends on the context in which it appears” (2011:175). With this in mind, I chose to divide and select newsletters published before (2005-2008), during (2010), and after (2011-2012) the launching of the Let's Move! campaign to illuminate the resulting framing and reframing techniques employed by NAAFA.

All newsletters were accessed through the NAAFA website. Their archives reach as far back as 2005 and are as current as February 2013. There are approximately 61 newsletters available for review, 55 of which were included in my analysis. These newsletters are distributed online to the members of NAAFA. Membership is free and only requires an email address. These documents are also available online without a membership at the NAAFA website. Unfortunately I was unable to obtain circulation numbers, but due to their online presence these newsletters are widely available. As for the content of these online newsletters, each one is approximately 3,500 words in length with several links that lead to external websites, which provide further information on NAAFA's size acceptance initiatives.

In order to best capture the framing and reframing shift that coincides with the Let's Move! campaign, I was strategic in my selection. I examined all newsletters distributed between January 2005 and December 2012. I chose 2005-2010 to capture NAAFA's framing before the launch of Let's Move! campaign. I then focused on 2010 to see if the Let's Move! campaign was beginning to get attention in the NAAFA newsletters yet, or if it took longer for NAAFA to see this campaign as something they needed to deal with. I finally selected 2011-2012 in order to analyze the reframing techniques utilized by NAAFA in the wake of Let's Move!. In order to understand the context, I used official NAAFA press conferences as a way to examine the protagonist/antagonist relationship.

While numerous themes, techniques, and processes can be observed through the framing and reframing tools implemented by NAAFA over the years, I explore the theme that was the most pronounced during each period. Ultimately three themes emerged. These three themes include: (1) the dieting myth; (2) discriminatory policy; and (3) children as collateral damage. I used structured observation to code my data through "four characteristics of text content:

frequency, direction, intensity, and space” (Nueman 2011:364). This process drew heavily on latent coding in order to examine “the underlying, implicit meaning in the content of a text” (Nueman 2011:365). While conducting thematic coding, it became clear these were the most prevalent themes during each time period (Reinharz 1992, Johnson 2002, Nueman 2011). I utilized this coding technique in order to detect patterns in the framing technique used by NAAFA embedded within their newsletters. First, the dieting myth, focuses on delegitimizing the medicalized acceptance of dieting. This framing took place prior to the introduction of the Let’s Move! campaign and therefore was directed towards popular dieting trends of the time. Second, discriminatory policy theme focuses on body size as a civil right. This theme emerged during the initial introduction of the Let’s Move! campaign. The third, and perhaps most important for this analysis, is the theme of children as collateral damage. This theme directly speaks to the growing popularity of the Let’s Move! campaign and the acceptance of the obesity epidemic in children. Together these themes provide a snap shot of the complicated relationship between context and framing.

CHAPTER THREE: BEFORE LET'S MOVE!

Prior to Let's Move! there is a rich history of the problem of obesity and obesity "fixes", such as medicalization and moralization. The anti-dieting discourse and the dieting myth, argue that diets are not healthy and do not work and that they operate within a discourse of moralization (Sobal 1995). Being obese is bad and makes you a bad person; therefore dieting is a way to become a "good" person again (Sobal 1995). In order to maintain an "appropriate" body, a thin one, you need discipline (Sobal 1995). In addition to looking at the ways bodies are understood, the SMO NAAFA organizes their own frames. In attempting to legitimate their claims, NAAFA critiques the link between morality and dieting.

The Dieting Myth

The Winter 2005 newsletter was the I first time observed NAAFA's dieting myth framing. This particular edition was published in the month of January, as NAAFA states, that time of year when we're "inundated with advertisements for quick weight loss schemes that don't work" (NAAFA 2005). One article showcased in this newsletter was written by the acting NAAFA treasurer and depicted her life-long struggle with dieting and health concerns. As she describes the lessons she learned, she states, "I learned that yo-yo dieting does more harm to a body than staying at a stable, larger weight" (NAAFA 2005). By incorporating personal testimonies of high-ranking officers, NAAFA legitimizes its framing techniques and makes a connection with potential participants. By including this, NAAFA urges their readers to

personally become invested in the movement in hopes of further mobilization (Snow and Benford 1988).

Within this newsletter, NAAFA continuously reaffirms their position against dieting. As they claim, “[w]eight-loss diets have long been promoted as a permanent cure for ‘obesity’, although they rarely produce long-lasting or permanent results” (NAAFA 2005). To support their argument, they cite a published scholarly medical article by Tsai and Wadden in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* “which only confirm[s] what NAAFA has asserted for so long” (NAAFA 2005), that dieting is detrimental to health outcomes. The study NAAFA cites looked at previously published medical articles on commercial weight-loss programs and concluded there is little evidence of these programs helping people to effectively keep off excess weight. NAAFA includes these results in their newsletter to substantiate and further maintain their perspective on dieting.

Consistent with maintaining their dieting myth frame, the Late Spring 2005 newsletter examines the case of Terri Schiavo and addresses how dieting and eating disorders played a role in her tragic medical emergency. The Schiavo case was an emotional story of a woman on life support that received a plethora of media coverage during 2005. After collapsing due to “the chemical imbalance brought on by her bulimia” (NAAFA 2005), her heart stopped (which caused permanent brain damage), and forced Schiavo to be kept alive via life support. As the article describes, “[Terri] spent much of her childhood and adolescence dieting in an effort to deal with having the ‘wrong’ kind of body” (NAAFA 2005). After being unable to maintain her goal weight, Terri resorted to forcing herself to vomit after meals (NAAFA 2005). NAAFA utilized this story line to reveal how failed dieting played a role in Schiavo’s tragic life story and again to maintain a personal and heartfelt connection with potential SM actors.

During the Summer newsletter of 2005, NAAFA highlighted three scholarly articles that “[s]how dangers of dieting” (NAAFA 2005). The medical articles are summarized while NAAFA offers a closing statement summing up the results. The newsletter states, “[d]ieting doesn’t work, and can harm your self-esteem and cause premature death, damaging your immune system in the process. Maybe now, the media and general public can finally receive the wisdom of acceptance and health at any size” (NAAFA 2005). One of the headlines highlighted in NAAFA’s Fall 2005 edition is: “starving to live longer is futile” (NAAFA 2005). In this particular article, the organization further utilizes scholarly research to support their framing of the dieting myth. It aims to debunk previous work that suggests low caloric intake could prolong human life. It connects back to NAAFA’s strategy of bringing the falsehood of the dieting myth to the forefront.

In their Winter 2006 newsletter, editor Bill Weitze describes what he calls “the fat paradox” (NAAFA 2006), which is the notion that unhealthy practices can make some people fatter, but that healthy practices do not make fat people thin. By directly naming dieting as an unhealthy practice, Weitze states “there is plenty of evidence that you can be fit and fat, and that diets don't work” (NAAFA 2006). The main point from Weitze’s discussion of the “paradox” is that fat does not equate to unhealthy. This emphasizes NAAFA’s argument concerning the negative impacts of dieting for health factors. In addition to NAAFA’s goal of the dieting myth they are urging for people to self identify as fat instead of obese (Levy-Navarro 2009).

Furthermore, this newsletter continues to highlight the dieting myth with its incorporation of scholarly articles. Under the heading “fat and healthy” (NAAFA 2006) NAAFA introduces an article written by Jerome Timothy Gronniger of the Congressional Budget Office. He concludes body mass index (BMI) is a poor predictor of a person's risk of death. In tandem with these

articles, NAAFA incorporates a “dieting dangers” (NAAFA 2006) section that presents an article published in Public Library of Science's Medicine Journal. The article argues the risk of mortality is greater for those who have successfully lost weight while dieting. Finally, found within this list of articles is the statement “US News says ‘stop dieting’” (NAAFA 2006). In this segment, NAAFA cites an article featured in the US News and World Report that questions the U.S.’s dieting craze. The author, Amanda Spake, interviews several experts on the HAES initiative that further legitimizes their argument that thin does not equate health. Again we see a connect to NAAFA’s framing technique of the time, a focus on the dieting myth.

In their Spring 2006 newsletter, NAAFA declares that the “biggest study ever on low fat diets fails to show benefits” (NAAFA 2006). Citing a \$415 million study involving 49,000 participants over the course of 8 years (yielding three papers published in the Journal of the American Medical Association), NAAFA attempts to further support its stance on dieting. Quoting NAAFA Advisory Board Member, Paul Campos, the organization concludes, "if you spend \$400 million and can't get people to reduce fat intake to 20%, what does that say about making this a realistic public health recommendation, even if we assume it would be beneficial?" (NAAFA 2006). NAAFA relies on this kind of research to further legitimate their frame dieting as a myth.

“Resisting the pressure to diet” (NAAFA 2006), authored by Marilyn Wann (a NAAFA Board of Directors member), is featured in the NAAFA Summer 2006 issue. She writes a personal response to an individual submission about her temptation to start dieting and describes them as “hate rituals” (NAAFA 2006). By describing dieting practices as “devastatingly harmful to the psychological, physical and political wellbeing of people of all sizes” (NAAFA 2006), Wann urges her advice seeker to break the cycle of dieting and work towards body liberation

while dismissing the allure of dieting altogether. She reminds the reader of scholarly articles NAAFA has previously cited that argue diets never show the “after results” (NAAFA 2006), with pictures illustrating the dieter’s regaining their weight. Consistent with their framing of this time, yet again I notice a thematic trend in the dieting myth being used as a topic of this time.

Similarly, in the Year End newsletter of 2007, Bec Eakett responds to a confession by a young woman who desperately does not want to be fat in her “Letter to a Fat Woman” (NAAFA 2007). This article evokes the organization’s stance on loving your body. Eakett notes how she once considered herself “scared” (NAAFA 2007) of food. Instead of arguing that it was her size that made it uncomfortable for her to eat, Eakett equates the pain of eating with the shame, guilt, and cruelty associated with the social understanding of being fat. Eakett attempts to persuade her reader that it is not her size that has made her unhappy, but it is societal secondary factors of normative beauty and the fashion industry’s lack of appropriate dress sizes for all consumers. By arguing the social norms are responsible for the culture of body dissatisfaction, she dislocates shame from individual bodies.

The emphases on dieting and normative bodies (non-obese) is a major theme in this time period of NAAFA. Susan Conklin’s article, “Rising Above Prejudice” (NAAFA 2008) in the Summer 2008 newsletter discusses how our culture creates shame and guilt around natural behaviors such as eating. She discusses her struggle with loving her body “as is” (NAAFA 2008). Conklin describes the ongoing pressure and urge to change her appearance, but relives the triumph of being a size acceptance activist and the positive feelings she has for herself and her body.

Looking at the NAAFA newsletters published before the Let’s Move Campaign, I find an emphasis on the hazards of dieting. However, there is little attention given to children as a

particular worry or concern. There is also little attention to combatting the medicalization of fat and the rhetoric of discrimination. The framing of dieting is prevalent because of the particular time period and context of the newsletters. As the context changes, so does the framing of NAAFA.

NAAFA incorporates medical and public health research as a way to legitimize their claims about the negatives of dieting. Yet, within this same theme of dieting, they incorporate personal narratives of members struggling with their own bodies and societal pressures. The incorporation of both legitimized medical knowledge and emotive personal stories work together to create a resonant frame for NAAFA. However, it is imperative to note the timing of these frames. This time period predated the introduction of Let's Move! and overwhelmingly focused on adults. As we see in the next chapter, the focus moves from mythologies of the body to driving policy change.

CHAPTER FOUR: DURING THE INTRODUCTION OF LET'S MOVE!

Discriminatory Policy

With the introduction of “Let’s Move!” there is a noticeable shift in the framing exemplified in newsletters published by NAAFA. Within their diagnostic framing, keying (Goffman 1974) begins to emerge. As “Let’s Move!” initiates their counterclaims, NAAFA begins to reframe. During the February 2010 newsletter, we find a shift in the framing from the dieting myth to discriminatory policy. Tied to the frame of discrimination is foregrounding the importance of inclusiveness and dismantling policy embedded stereotypes and misnomers. While they don’t always use the language of discrimination, they are positioning themselves in opposition against the government’s war on obesity. Therefore, they begin discussing the importance of policy.

Instead of indirectly challenging the normative ideologies about body size, NAAFA challenges the person in charge of one of the largest attacks on the fundamental aspects of size acceptance, the First Lady Michelle Obama, and her Let’s Move! campaign. In addressing Michelle Obama, NAAFA “encourages the First Lady to consider all the research before supporting any program that may do more harm than good” (NAAFA 2010). NAAFA further provides several bullet points listing scholarly research on the stigmatization of fat and its negative impact on youth. The party perceived as detrimental to their movement has shifted from the diet industry to the government, as indicated in the title “Our Government is Funding the War Against Fat” (NAAFA 2010), featured in the April 2010 issue. In both of these

instances, there is a stark shift in the conception of NAAFA because of the contextual current events. Due to the drastic shift from targeting the practice of frequent dieting to targeting the government itself, NAAFA attempts to strategize how they can bolster their own objectives without negatively impacting their SMO. This is the first instance of NAAFA targeting governmental policies in their newsletters.

When the new laws of the Affordable Health Act were introduced to the public in 2010, NAAFA took the opportunity to explain what the new laws meant for “fat US citizens” (NAFFA 2010). While not directly connected to Let’s Move!, the discussion of government in these 2010 issues does indicate that government is not seen as an ally with NAAFA, and in fact, is a potential barrier to optimal policy and their SMO goals. In April 2010, NAAFA released a set of guidelines for healthcare providers dealing with fat patients. These guidelines were designed to mitigate any discrimination with inclusive practices. In it, they offered some explicit advice for doctors and staff. They present a number of factors that are general issues when treating fat patients, such as: weighing patients for a non-specific reason as an unnecessary practice, supporting fat people and equalizing their needs with others, having different size needles or urine cups for fat patients, acknowledging that weight does not always necessitate recovery or predict health, and having appropriate accommodations in the waiting rooms and examination rooms for fat patients to feel comfortable (NAAFA 2010). In addition to this guide, NAAFA introduced a new brochure for health care providers that outlines the necessities of education, advocacy, and support due to the special needs of fat patients.

In 2010, President Obama appointed new Surgeon General, Dr. Regina Benjamin. In June 2010, Dr. Benjamin met with NAAFA Board Member Lisa M. Tealer. NAAFA praises Dr. Benjamin in their newsletter by calling her “large and now in charge of America’s health!”

(NAAFA 2010). While incorporating her body size into her professional position, NAAFA celebrates her appointment. Five months later in November, NAAFA wrote a letter of support for Dr. Benjamin who publicly supports NAAFA's Health at Every Size initiatives. After including a few studies, they remind NAAFA members that gaining her support represented a huge success for the fat acceptance movement.

Clearly the framing of issues around fatness and body size have become less moralistic and more policy oriented in 2010. This could partly be in connection with the initial introduction of Let's Move! and partly in connection to other significant governmental events, such as the initiation of what would come to be called Obamacare and the appointment of a new Surgeon General. However, it is clear the newsletters still focus on issues of fat discrimination. In the September 2010 newsletter, they applauded a Michigan judge who decided to uphold the weight anti-discrimination law. The court case was a result of two waitresses being fired from Hooters because of "minimal weight gain" (NAAFA 2010). NAAFA celebrated this as a success to only encounter a failure in December 2010. An Arizona school policy initiated the mailing of letters to specific children and families letting them know their children were overweight or at risk of becoming overweight. NAAFA argued that this policy further stigmatizes the children and asserted that practices of this nature have been found to be harmful for childhood development (NAAFA 2010).

Through the newsletters, NAAFA released a new educational strategy including eight steps for training members to train others in fat advocacy. These trainings are designed for the seamless maintenance and sustainment of NAAFA framing. The eight steps are detailed by the NAAFA trainings' parallel social movement theories. They are the following: know your opposition, know your facts, have a message, have a target and mobilize, have a strategy, keep in

mind a target, keep in mind other outside pressures, and, finally, find allies. By clearly instructing the organizers and participants, NAAFA leaders skillfully maintain their organization's goals and objectives.

It is also important to note the current prevalence of anti-dieting rhetoric. The past frames do not fade out of existence; instead they are simply cut back. In March 2010, they introduced a video "Don't diet" (NAAFA 2010) as their video of the month and even included anti-dieting personal testimony. The message of reconsideration and denial of dieting was still in place in May 2010. In September 2010, NAAFA discussed a new book called *Fat!So?*, which dismissed ideas of dieting and the medicalization and moralization of obesity. And, predictably so, in January 2011 NAAFA implemented a call to end weight-related New Year's resolutions. While the tendency during this time period was to focus on policies, NAAFA minimally continued their focus on dieting via narratives and medical critiques.

Consistent with their framing prior to the introduction of Let's Move!, NAAFA focused primarily on adults. The subsequent switch from the focus on adults to children is vital to the sustainment and reframing techniques of NAAFA. Because they viewed Let's Move! as an antagonist organization, which directly harms their goals and position, NAAFA went on the offensive, and in doing so, positioned themselves as the protagonist SMO. This is the first time in the newsletters that NAAFA takes on the governmental policies directly. By doing this, they highlight the importance of talking about discrimination on a personal and systematic level. In the next section I will illustrate this shift from discrimination to children.

CHAPTER FIVE: AFTER THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LET'S MOVE!: CHILDREN AS COLLATERAL DAMAGE

In attempts to hold their ground as a positive advocacy and acceptance organization, NAAFA yet again begins actively keying (Benford and Hunt 2003) their frames, this time directly engaging claims made by Let's Move!. The years of 2011 and 2012 also saw increasing general public attention to the idea of bullying; therefore it is clear why NAAFA begin to depict fat people as victims of bullying. It was not just the emphasis on weight and fitness that was growing in 2010 and 2011; the anti-bullying movement was growing too. Nearly one year after the launching of the Let's Move! campaign another shift in the organization's framing emerged from the data. NAAFA moved from a generalized focus on policy, to a stronger depiction of children as collateral damage in the war on obesity. In doing so, they introduced the Child Advocacy Toolkits (covering bullying, body image, body satisfaction, school and social risk scenarios, and health at ever size) in May 2011 to help "shift the focus from the war on childhood obesity to a health-centered focus embracing children of all sizes" (NAAFA 2011). By directly questioning the government's move towards implementing a program geared at childhood obesity, NAAFA seized this as an opportunity to talk about and advocate for those who deal with size discrimination and bullying of young people when such initiatives are launched.

Focusing on children, NAAFA's May 2011 issue reported on the stories of two teenage girls who committed suicide as a result of weight related bullying. The story "Death by Discrimination: Two Teenage Girls Take Own Lives" (NAAFA 2011), perpetuates NAAFA's

keying and reframing to illustrate children as collateral damage. While Let's Move! utilized a rhetoric of children's physical health, NAAFA used this opportunity to point out the importance of emotional health rather than just physical health.

During their annual convention, NAAFA held a "Child Advocacy Super Workshop" (NAAFA 2011) in order to emphasize the implications and direct consequences of size discrimination. Still using the policy-driven rhetoric of discrimination, they shift from adults as consumers or workers, to childhood discrimination. Childhood bullying continued to be a central theme in August of 2011. During this month's newsletter they revealed their "END BULLYING NOW!" (NAAFA 2011) contest winners. These winning contestants were children and adolescents between the age of 6 and 18 who created a 30 to 60 second PSA on how they personally feel about bullying and its consequences. Again, we see the introduction of personal narrative that has been integral to NAAFA's framing.

On par with all previous years in the newsletters, NAAFA utilized another scholarly work in order to gain legitimacy and subsequently bolster their agenda in September 2011. The academic article, "Ethical Family Interventions for Childhood Obesity" by Dr. Mandy Perryman discussed the ethical and harmful implications of "intervening" (NAAFA 2011) with childhood obesity. NAAFA used this research as a talking point to reiterate a powerful and legitimized critique of the Let's Move! campaign.

In February of 2012, NAAFA promoted what they refer to as a "STANDARD" (NAAFA 2012). In this call to action, NAAFA is asking members to submit photos of themselves sternly staring back at the camera with a message depicting what they "stand against" (NAAFA 2012). The example they provide states "I stand against harming fat children. Hate ≠ Health" (NAAFA 2012). This initiative by NAAFA has been implemented to combat the "damaging" (NAAFA

2012) billboards of children deemed as overweight being displayed in Georgia by the Georgia Children's Health Alliance. The same framing pattern occurs in the March 2012 newsletter. Beginning the newsletter with “Hi Ho! Hi Ho! A-Stigmatizing Fat Kids We Go” (NAAFA 2012), NAAFA discusses Disney’s *Habit Heroes* exhibit that is featured at their Epcot amusement park. In discussing the *Habit Heroes* NAAFA states “Disney took the side of the bullies” (NAAFA 2012). Villains that the *Habit Heroes* must combat include "The Glutton, Overeating, and eating too fast"; "Snacker, Too much fatty, processed food"; "Lead Bottom, Not enough exercise"; "Stinkbomb, Bad hygiene"; "The Fungus, Eating rotten or expired food"; "Stress Case, Stressing Out"; "The Prescripitor, Ignoring doctor's advice" and "Cereal Killer, No time for breakfast" (NAAFA 2012). NAAFA finds these characters to be particularly problematic due to their usage in bullying overweight children. NAAFA warns that the exhibit and its overarching message will “reinforce and strengthen a cycle of bullying, depression, disease, eating disorders and even suicidal thoughts” (NAAFA 2012). While the Disney exhibit focuses on young children, NAAFA also realizes the importance of imposing additional stress on the bodies of teenagers.

Members of the NAAFA-LA chapter attended the 2nd Annual “Stop the Pain Teen Summit” (NAAFA 2012), which focused its attention on dating violence and bully prevention. In the May 2012 newsletter, they discuss how NAAFA members distributed “NAAFA’s Fact Sheet on Bullying” (NAAFA 2012) that included a link to an online version of their Child Advocacy Toolkit. NAAFA-LA also distributed wristbands inscribed with body positive messages and encouraged everyone to step on the “Yay! Scale” (NAAFA 2012) that also provided positive body-related feedback instead of a numerical measurement. In working to end bullying towards fat children, NAAFA-LA also discussed the connections they made with local teachers who

requested their help with classroom lectures and activities regarding size acceptance views. They state "...in addition to working to end bullying, this awesome event was about acceptance, education, communities working with youth, and most importantly, personal acceptance and empowerment" (NAAFA 2012). Again, NAAFA incorporated legitimate medical research with emotional personal narratives.

In September 2012, NAAFA published an update on their Child Advocacy Toolkit, which was first introduced in May 2011. In it, they described a few highlights about the thousands of toolkit copies that have been distributed since its introduction. This toolkit was distributed at the Biennial Childhood Obesity Conference in San Diego. It was also featured at the 2011 Annual Convention, as well as at several other conferences, including the National Press Club in Washington, DC. NAAFA spoke directly about the bullying of fat children, and revealed statistics from their online version of the Child Advocacy Toolkit exemplifying over 5,700 views through the end of June 2012. *Darliene Howell*, author of the article and NAAFA board member, also shared several emails she had received after distributing the toolkit, such as a message from the Bureau of Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion and the Florida Department of Health which asserts, "we will add the NAAFA Childhood Obesity Toolkit to our resource list and share the information with other staff within the Department who work with children. We certainly understand the importance of dealing with health, environmental, and policy issues at all age levels" (NAAFA 2012). Viewing this as a success, NAAFA's protagonist reframing accomplished more recognition than it had in the past.

As NAAFA concluded 2012 with their newsletters, the December issue followed with an article arguing children are collateral damage of the war on fat. In this article titled "APA: Stop Mocking the Fat Kids" NAAFA scolds the *American Psychological Association* for their cover

image and story on the December 2012 issue of the *APA Monitor* regarding the prevention of obesity. The article by the APA, titled, “Big Kids”, includes pictures of fat children looking ashamed and downtrodden. NAAFA claims that the APA should focus on health and not body size. They boldly state “the APA needs to stop contributing to weight bias, stigma, and discrimination” (NAAFA 2012). NAAFA concluded by describing their Child Advocacy Toolkit as a reference for parents or individuals who work in the care of children “of large body size” (NAAFA 2012). They claim their toolkit “addresses bullying, building positive self-esteem, and eliminating the stigmatization of large children” (NAAFA 2012) and asserts that the APA needs to reexamine their stance on body size.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Using newsletters from 2005-2012, we see a noticeable shift in the way NAAFA frames itself and its objectives. While it would be unwise to assume that Let's Move prompted all of this redefinition, Let's Move! is part of the story. It is the most prominent, public initiative to call attention to the hazards of overweight in children that has ever existed in the US. My analysis shows a reworking of NAAFA's strategy that coincides with the launch of the Let's Move! Campaign. More interesting than understanding the causes of this shift is understanding the substantive change that took place. First, since the introduction of the Let's Move! campaign, NAAFA has mirrored their rhetoric. This is because the Let's Move! campaign has been influential and successful in their endeavors, therefore pushing NAAFA to highlight the issues of problematizing childhood obesity. They did this because it was important for their SMO to maintain presence and SM participants. It was this drive for legitimacy that pushed NAAFA to keying and reframing claims made by Let's Move!. Within this paper, the focus was predominately on context and time frame that allowed for the production of these results. It is necessary for social movement theory to be receptive to and aware of aspects regarding context, as context shapes the way framing and reframing are implemented.

Second, because NAAFA had a clear antagonist organization to reorganize their frames, they were able to gain notoriety. While SM scholars disagree on the definition of "success" for SMs, many do agree that response and acceptance of goals by high-ranking government officials counts as a "success." After the introduction of Let's Move! and the reframing of NAAFA, the Florida Health Department accepted their Toolkit and HAES initiative.

NAAFA didn't completely disregard the dieting frame once they began the discriminatory policy frame. Similarly, they didn't completely disregard the discriminatory policy frame once they began the children as collateral damage frame. In the case of NAAFA no frame is tossed out. Instead, frames grow on and from each other. They are fluid throughout the framing process through the variety of social contexts that take place. What NAAFA did alter drastically was *how* exactly they explored these frames. The victims changed from dieters, to citizens, and finally to children. While the victims changed, the stories and framing altered. They did so because of the political context and the present opposition.

Especially in the case of NAAFA, the rhetoric of "fat" can be abstract. Before Let's Move! NAAFA did not have a clear frame of the issue of arguing obesity is a problem. By pinpointing Let's Move! as an antagonist organization, NAAFA is able to clearly articulate their message to childhood discrimination and bullying. Previous to this, they were working against the dieting industry as a whole, and not one solidified organization. By positioning themselves against Let's Move! NAAFA is able to present clear and stable message about who they are and whom they are fighting against. As I have shown, NAAFA streamlined their message by choosing an opponent. In this case, Let's Move! became a great organizing opponent. This wasn't always the case for NAAFA, the lack of singular framing is clearly exemplified with the dieting myth. They had a clear message, but no visible opponent. With the Let's Move! campaign being tangible and nation-wide they clearly defined themselves by opposing them. This created a strong message of what NAAFA stands for and against.

This research helps social movement scholars understand the importance of context in framing and reframing techniques. This case study provides a snap shot of how NAAFA has addressed opposition, specifically the Let's Move! campaign, over the course of time. Utilizing

qualitative thematic coding of newsletters distributed by NAAFA, patterns began to emerge. These patterns were by no means random, but instead seemed to speak back to the Let's Move! campaign.

It is important to be attentive to the effects of this framing, as well as understanding the nuanced differences in repertoires of SMs. The “future work on this topic is critical, not only for advancing sociological understanding of framing contests, but also for evaluating the social impact of current approaches to the obesity epidemic” (Saguy and Riley 2005). It is also important for social movement scholars to implement a triangulation approach in an attempt “...to enhance understanding both by adding layers of information and by using one type of data to validate or refine another” (Reinharz 1992, 201). One way to do this in conjunction with the discourse analysis provided, would be to conduct ethnography at the NAAFA convention, specifically the plenary sessions to accurately address how keying occurs.

While this is a case study, what I have found adds to the literature regarding a SM's reframing in the face of opposition. Although we have to be careful not to overgeneralize, more case studies need to be conducted to understand the mechanisms by which SMs alter their message to remain relevant given a specific context (Sobal 1999, 19995, Bernstein 1997, Robnett 1996, Taylor and Whittier 1992). It would even be useful to follow NAAFA's framing to see what happens after the Obamas are out of office. Do they maintain their most recent framing about bullying? Or do they name a new antagonist to help guide their reframing? This research is helpful for future SM studies because it helps scholars better understand how SMOs determine who their antagonist is and how to better engage in framing techniques.

Although much of this is conjecture, NAAFA did succeed in refining their message and, subsequently, by adding to the discussion about the effects of the underlying message of the

Let's Move! campaign on children. By arguing against Let's Move! NAAFA made themselves more relevant to current discussions about obesity and fat issues.

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