

EXTRA! EXTRA! THIS JUST THIN: IDENTIFYING AND EVALUATING
FRAMING OF OBESITY-RELATED NEWS COVERAGE IN MAINE

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Abstract

Obesity is an important health issue, and understanding both its origins and its remedies is critical. More than 78 million people in the United States — more than one-third the nation's population — are obese, making obesity one of the most newsworthy health concerns of the time. The first step in addressing public health issues is to inform the public, for which news media act as the primary source. However, news media overwhelmingly frame obesity reports through a lens of individual responsibility, which blames people for their eating habits while ignoring systemic factors of obesity such as food industry pressures, food insecurity, and low incomes. Maine has the highest rate of obesity in New England, with nearly 29 percent of adults in the state considered obese. News sources attribute individuals' weight to their behaviors and largely ignore social constraints of individuals or other systemic responsibilities for addressing obesity. Frame analysis of articles from Maine's four most prominent newspapers, the *Portland Press Herald*, *Bangor Daily News*, *Morning Sentinel*, and *Sun Journal* reveals the five dominant frames through which obesity is discussed. These frames include public health and a medicalized obesity "epidemic," a stern or nurturing parental government, national identity and the "Ideal American" citizen, the toxic environment of an overabundant industrial food system, "fun" versus fear and sadness, and normative education. Taken together, these frames underscore a neoliberal discourse that works to support culturally-held values of national identity, masked by an illusion of choice.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my depression, anxiety, and eating disorder.

I've won.

Acknowledgments

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Literature Review: Defining, Framing, and Blaming Obesity

Introduction

Obesity is a prevalent health concern, and one that now affects more people than ever before. More than one-third of adults in the United States (U.S.) are considered obese, with 34.9% of adults over age 20 qualifying as having a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30 or greater (Ogden, Carroll, Kit, & Flegal, 2014). This equates to 78.6 million people (CDC, 2015). As of September 2015, no state in the United States had an obesity rate below 20%, with Arkansas (35.9%) possessing the highest obesity rate in the country (“Adult obesity in the United States,” 2015). As rates of obesity continue to increase, the topic has proliferated in news media. Previous research has identified the ways in which news media discuss obesity as a result of personal choice, a matter of personal responsibility and also as a matter of structural concern (Lawrence, 2004; Kim & Willis, 2007; Saguy & Almeling, 2008). However, these studies have focused on discussions on the national scale, utilizing the most-read U.S. newspapers (and some television news). It is important to examine obesity at the state level, as each state possesses an identity unique only to that specific region. Maine’s obesity rate is currently 28.2%, making it the “heaviest” state in New England (“Maine,” 2015). Identity becomes crucial when discussing obesity, as our societal attitudes toward the obese are rooted in values of national identity and citizenship, a notion strongly echoed in the news media. Through a neoliberal framework, this thesis will examine the framing of obesity through Maine print news media to uncover the current discourse surrounding obesity in the state, and where blame and responsibility are placed for the condition.

Defining Obesity

A person is declared obese if he or she has a BMI of 30 or higher. BMI is the measure of one's weight in relation to his or her height, and is calculated using one's weight in kilograms divided by the square of his or her height in meters (Centers for Disease Control, 2012). By contrast, a BMI between 18.5 and 24.9 indicates a person is of average weight, and a BMI between 25 and 29.9 indicates a person is overweight, but not obese.

Weight is gained when a person consumes more calories than he or she expends through either calorie restriction or physical exercise. Although there are more complex factors regarding weight gain than this simple equation, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lists two primary causes of obesity: behavior and community environment. The CDC describes healthy behaviors with reference to the calorie balance previously discussed, stating, "energy balance of the number of calories consumed from foods and beverages with the number of calories the body uses for activity plays a role in preventing excess weight gain" (CDC, 2015). The CDC lists healthy foods as whole grains, fruits and vegetables, lean proteins and dairy, and also prescribes adequate exercise. While not directly attributing obesity to behavior, the CDC emphasizes weight management, and indirectly states that a failure to balance calories consumed with calories expended will result in weight gain and, eventually, obesity.

Obesity can be the result of environmental factors such as inadequate sidewalks or safe bike trails for transportation — leading people to drive as opposed to take more physically demanding transportation — as well as schools and workplace environments

(CDC, 2015). According to the CDC (2015), “people and families may make decisions based on their environment or community,” and so an inadequate food and wellness environment may lead to obesity. It is important to consider both individual and environmental factors in determining someone’s obesity status, although obesity is often thought of individually. As I explore in subsequent sections, the language surrounding individual and environmental blame and responsibility for obesity — the ways in which it is framed in news media — has implications that go beyond the literal scale.

Framing Theory

Framing theory has a long and complicated history, but some of its strongest roots can be found in the work of Goffman (1974). Goffman wrote in his *Framing Analysis* that individuals rely on a set of interpretive schema known as primary frameworks, or inherently-held natural and social beliefs that people use to attribute meaning to otherwise meaningless pieces of information (p. 22). These frameworks act as “relatively stable and socially shared category systems that human beings use to classify new information” (Tewksbury, Scheufele, Bryant, & Oliver, 2009, p. 18).

Since Goffman, the notion of frame analysis has undergone constant reshaping and restructuring, with the definition of what frame analysis should be often varying from one research study to another. As Entman (1993) states, “nowhere is there a general statement of framing theory that shows exactly how frames become embedded within and make themselves manifest in a text, or how framing influences thinking” (p. 51).

Frames in news act to bring attention to the important aspects of a topic in order to both identify key issues in society and propose solutions to those problems, shaping

thinking, behavior, and culture. As Entman (1993) states, “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p. 52). Increasing the salience of a piece of information — making it more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable — “enhances the probability that receivers will perceive the information, discern meaning and thus process it, and store it in memory” (Entman, 1993, p. 53).

Because frames work to identify problems and provide interpretations, news media employ frames in reporting in order to both convey the relative importance of topics and to “diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe” solutions to those problems (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Tewksbury, Scheufele, Bryant, and Oliver (2009) argue that, “journalists [...] choose images and words that have the power to influence how audiences interpret and evaluate issues and policies” (p. 17). Hansen (2010) claims that, “frames, in other words, draw attention—like a frame around a painting or photograph—to particular dimensions or perspectives, and they set the boundaries for how we should interpret or perceive what is presented” (p. 31). As a result, news frames can play a significant role in shaping an audience’s thoughts and behaviors.

In order to illustrate the effect news frames have on shaping beliefs and attitudes, Tewksbury et al. (2009) cite a study conducted by Simon and Jerit (2007) in which one group of news readers was given articles about abortion using the word “fetus” and another group given the same articles using the word “baby.” In all other respects the content of the articles was identical. Readers in the group which read “baby” as opposed

to “fetus” more strongly supported regulating abortion procedures following the exercise (Tewksbury et al., 2009, p. 19; Simon & Jerit, 2007). A third group was given the same articles but with an equal distribution of the words “baby” and “fetus” in the articles but still overwhelmingly supported abortion regulation following the exercise. Simon and Jerit conclude that, by framing the topic of abortion using the word “baby,” readers interpreted the article in a pro-life context, whereas the fetal frame might have resonated less emotionally with readers (Tewksbury et al., 2009, p. 20; Simon & Jerit, 2007). Because frames play an important role in shaping audience thinking, they are carefully constructed by journalists to bring forward the most important aspects of a piece of news. Motivations for doing this will be discussed in subsequent sections.

Framing, with its inherent importance to journalism, is closely tied to agenda-setting theory, the notion that increased coverage of specific topics by the media tells the audience not what to think, but what to think about with regard to those topics (Cox & Pezzullo, 2015, p. 26). In this light, media agenda-setting does not prescribe solutions or causal interpretations for its covered topics. Instead, agenda-setting raises the accessibility of topics to the general public, while frames act to influence understanding of those topics (Tewksbury et al., 2009, p. 21). Because both agenda-setting and framing theories focus on the importance of highlighting key topics to the public, the distinction between the two has often come into question, with many scholars failing to acknowledge a differentiation between agenda-setting and framing theories. Some scholars have gone as far as to demote framing theory as just an extension of agenda-setting, labeling it second-level agenda-setting (Scheufele, 1999, p. 103).

While it is true that both theories focus on making certain issues more salient in the eyes of the public — and so a lack of consensus surrounding their distinction is understandable — framing goes beyond the basic notion of agenda-setting: while agendas make what are perceivably the most important issues in the news more accessible, frames utilize packages of information and socially-constructed schemata to influence a reader’s thinking on those issues. Framing thus goes beyond agenda-setting in rendering broader cultural information and ideas more applicable to topics (Tewksbury et al., 2009, p. 21). Frames do not act as pieces of information; rather, they work contextually to influence understanding of information. Entman (1993) argues that, “analysis of frames illuminates the precise way in which influence over a human consciousness is exerted by the transfer (or communication) of information from one location [...] to that consciousness” (p. 51-52). Therefore, while agendas tell the audience what to think *about*, frames on the other hand tell the audience more specifically *what* to think.

Framing in Journalism

Journalists utilize frames when writing the news in order to develop the lens through which readers see a story, influencing an audience’s thinking and behaviors. What is important to understand is the motivation behind this activity: why do journalists frame stories in certain ways?

News writing is crafted on the basic principles of newsworthiness: prominence, timeliness, proximity, impact, magnitude, conflict, oddity, emotional impact (Cox & Pezzullo, 2015, p. 98). While several sources differ on the exact number or types of news elements (often times omitting some while including others), the basic news elements are

used by journalists to judge a story's newsworthiness. These news elements often work to develop the media framework of a news story, as they work to determine the content of a piece, including its headline and visual content in addition to the story as a whole. Cox and Pezzullo (2015) discuss these media frames as the central organizing themes of a news story that tie together its constituent parts, such as headlines and quotes (p. 101). By providing this coherence, media frames help readers make sense of new experiences or events, relating them to familiar assumptions about the way the world works.

The basic news elements determine the types of quotes and methods of storytelling used, which in turn work to frame a piece. For example, a news story about a natural disaster might utilize the news elements of impact and magnitude, but may be framed in either an emotional, economic, or environmental context. The elements of a news story are selected by journalists in order to convey intended meanings through framing those stories in specific ways. Working from an environmental communication standpoint, Hansen (2010) argues, “news about the environment, environmental disasters, and environmental issues or problems does not happen by itself, but is rather ‘produced,’ ‘manufactured,’ or ‘constructed’” (p. 72). Cox and Pezzullo (2015) describe this practice as narrative framing, which works to define the narrative through which the story is told. Journalists and news organizations arrange the information and narrative elements of a news story through many traditional story elements — who, what, where, and when — but, more importantly, the “why” element, the understanding of an environmental issue and the subsequent human relationship to it, which is crucial to the narrative structure (Cox & Pezzullo, 2015).

Journalistic selection of content, and therefore news narratives and ultimately frames, is the result of several factors. These include socially and culturally-held values, professional practices and norms, as well as pressures from the news organization itself or from lobbyists and policy makers. A journalist's ideological or political orientations may also factor into frame selection (Tewksbury et al., 2009, p. 23).

Journalists consciously or unconsciously focus their stories based on what Tewksbury et al. (2009) call "cultural resonance," or a broader cultural or societal belief or norm (p. 23). According to the authors, "journalists, by definition, are working within the culture of their society and will therefore rely unconsciously on commonly shared frames" (p. 24). This argument relates back to Goffman's (1974) notion of primary frameworks, or socially shared categories through which people understand an issue (Tewksbury et al., 2009, p. 18). Entman (1993) argues that a communicator's framing of a news topic — consciously or unconsciously — functions on a cultural level, defining culture as "the stock of commonly invoked frames," or "the empirically demonstrable set of common frames exhibited in the discourse and thinking of most people in a social grouping," (p. 53). Culture then functions as context for communication, consciously or unconsciously influencing the journalist, resonating with already-held cultural beliefs. Culture thus has a direct impact on journalism, just as journalism does on culture.

Framing Obesity

Kim and Willis (2007) state that, "a person's health status is a function of physiological, structural, and environmental factors as well as his or her own actions" (p. 360). However, either a majority or a consistently high number of news stories frame

obesity in such a way that attributes blame for obesity to the individual rather than societal, systemic, or environmental factors, a practice Iyengar (1990) classifies as episodic framing. Episodic framing seeks to assign responsibility for an issue through individualized, personal accounts. This directly contrasts with thematic framing, in which a journalist focuses the frame in a broader context, such as policy, environment, or sociostructural conditions (Iyengar, 1990). Thematic framing does not seek to blame individuals, but rather identify solutions through societal examination. If framing's role is to foster understanding of social issues, then it also posits possible courses of action for remedy (Saguy & Almeling, 2008, p. 57). With regard to obesity, episodic framing not only blames individuals for their condition, but also assumes individuals are to be held accountable for their actions; that personal cause means personal solution (Kim & Willis, 2007, p. 373).

As a prevailing national health concern, obesity is therefore situated as a social problem, but one in which blame is attributed primarily to individual failures rather than to social or environmental factors. Such episodic frames fall in line with neoliberal values that individuals are and should be responsible for their own well-being without government intervention. In her critique of Michael Pollan and other food policy writers, Guthman (2007) writes, "food politics has become a progenitor of a neoliberal anti-politics that devolves regulatory responsibility to consumers via their dietary choices" (p. 4). Beyond policy, journalists also invoke these neoliberal values by expressing that individuals exert the freedom of choice and therefore are better served by private interests rather than public regulation (Ungerleider, 2006).

The neoliberal framework ignores the underlying social structures surrounding personal choice and freedom. In the context of obesity, the neoliberal framework asserts that individuals choose what they eat and are therefore the product of their own consumption — whether that product is fat or thin. Such an assertion dismisses the context for how choice is constituted, such as one’s socioeconomic status, food environment, or culture.

Neoliberal values are easy to market because they appeal to U.S. values of individualism, which in turn lend themselves to beliefs of personal responsibility for one’s actions (Kim & Willis, 2007, p. 360). Because these neoliberal values are part of broader culture, journalists consciously or unconsciously act on them in reporting. According to Goldstein et al. (2011), “the media archive control through recruitment and retention practices. Those who own and manage commercial media employ and promote persons with values similar to their own” (p. 114).

Such neoliberal framing has been a predominant method of reporting on obesity in the news media, especially as a result of the increased obesity in the United States. In a systematic sampling of nationwide newspaper and television news data, Kim and Willis (2007) found thematic frames (environmental and structural) were far less prevalent in news coverage of obesity. In an analysis of 500 news articles and television news reports discussing obesity between the years 1995 to 2004, fewer than half (119) mentioned societal and environmental causes of obesity, such as the food industry, schools and education, and socioeconomic factors. More than double that amount (291) mentioned personal causes (p. 373).

In addition to a focus on personal responsibility, the authors also found a stronger focus on personal solutions to obesity, a total of 504 mentions related to healthy eating, physical activity, and medical treatment such as surgery. Solutions on part of the food industry were only mentioned 37 times, schools 54 times, and socioeconomic changes only three times (Kim & Willis, 2007, p. 367). The authors also noted that personal solutions for obesity are mentioned more often in news media than the causes of obesity.

Individualized framing of obesity not only holds the obese accountable for their condition, but also portrays them in a negative light. Often times, news articles demonize the obese as deviant or self-destructive or, if focusing on parents to obese children, even abusive (Saguy & Almeling, 2008, p. 57). Many articles frame obesity as a “war” or “epidemic,” something to be feared or fought, as a way to both dramatize and medicalize the discussion (Saguy and Almeling, 2008). By medicalizing obesity, an “epidemic” fought with drugs, diet, or surgery, the solution to the perceived problem of obesity becomes the individualized solution of behavior modification (Saguy & Almeling, 2008, p. 71). Kim and Willis (2007) state that a focus on behavior modification does little to uncover the root causes of obesity. Rather than address the causes of obesity, news media often emphasize the ways individuals can “regain control” of their bodies, therefore fixing themselves (p. 373).

Chaos, or a lack of control, is often used to frame obesity. The frame of chaos presents peoples’ bodies as out of control and unable to show dietary restraint; because all humans must eat, all humans are at risk for obesity (Boero, 2006, p. 46-47). According to Saguy and Almeling (2007), this frame positions people as gluttons who “gobble

down” their food, as opposed to merely eating it (p. 67). Success stories of weight loss represent containment, the desirable goal of having one’s body in control over nature (Boero, 2006, p. 48). Obesity is often framed as having a common sense solution: burn more calories through diet and exercise than are consumed through food. This frame intrinsically assumes people are eating too much, and it also assumes that people do not already have knowledge and are in need of the news to make them aware. A doctor or expert is often quoted as reiterating the common sense solution, in what Boero (2006) calls the “professionalization of common sense” (p. 51). Not only does the professionalization of common sense blame people for their condition, it also assumes they are unintelligent in that they lack common sense.

Although episodic frames are consistently used to frame obesity in the news media, thematic frames (environmental, systemic, sociocultural or otherwise) have become more prevalent in obesity reporting in recent years. A study conducted by Lawrence (2004) categorizes obesity frames of 82 New York Times articles as relating to three dominant frames: biological causal claims, behavioral causal claims, and systemic causal claims. In years 1985, 1990, and 1996, more frames attributed causes of obesity to individuals than the food environment (4:1, 10:2, and 6:1, respectively). Beginning in the 2000s, however, Lawrence found more articles which frame obesity as a systemic issue rather than solely an individual issue, with 42 articles in 2003 making environmental causal claims and 36 making behavioral claims (Lawrence, 2004, p. 67). This finding, however, contrasts with the research performed by Kim and Willis (2007). It is important to also recognize Lawrence (2004) analyzes articles from only one source, whereas Kim

and Willis (2007) draw from a range of sources. Despite an increase in environmental claims, news reports consistently attribute blame for obesity to individuals, even when they include environmental and societal frames.

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze how news articles frame obesity in Maine, the most-obese state in New England, with 28 percent of its residents qualifying as obese (“Maine,” 2015). Through analysis of news articles from the *Bangor Daily News*, *Portland Press Herald*, *Morning Sentinel*, and *Sun Journal*, the state’s newspapers with the largest circulation, this study will explore the current discourse surrounding obesity in Maine through a news frame analysis. The analysis describes how Maine news articles frame obesity and where responsibility is to be placed. The implications of this research will also be discussed, with specific relevance to neoliberal U.S. ideals and cultural constructions surrounding obesity and choice.

Method

Working from a descriptive, narrative framework (Cox & Pezzullo, 2015), I analyze dominant ways in which Maine newspapers frame obesity, with specific attention to where blame is placed for obesity and who is responsible for addressing the condition. Previous research has identified how obesity is framed as a medicalized battle or “war” in which one must fight his or her insatiable hunger (chaos, or lack of control), or as a common-sense condition in which the obese are assumed to be unintelligent and in need of professional advice for treatment (Saguy & Almeling, 2008; Boero, 2006). I examine Maine newspaper articles for these frames, but will also work to identify additional frames.

My analysis draws upon articles from four Maine newspapers — *The Portland Press Herald*, *Bangor Daily News*, *Morning Sentinel*, and the *Sun Journal* — published between January 1, 2015 and December 31, 2015, in order to identify the current discussion around obesity in Maine as it is framed through news media. I selected these newspapers because they have the largest circulation in the state. MaineToday Media news products alone (including the *Press Herald* and *Morning Sentinel*) reach more than 100,000 individuals in print and 1.2 million digitally each month (MaineToday Media, 2016). While there are many smaller-circulation newspapers within the state, the selected newspapers represent the most-read news.

Using the ProQuest MaineNewsstand database, I searched for news articles from the year 2015 using the keywords “obesity” and “overweight.” I then filtered the corpus to include only articles categorized as “news,” because of the assumption these articles would uphold the value of journalistic objectivity. As such, these articles should remain without a stance toward one side of the debate or the other, where as editorial or op-Ed pieces make no attempt to hide their stances. The goal of this first step was to identify the discussion within seemingly objective articles, and I took into account use of judgmental phrases, assumptions and generalizations, as well as general information presented (or left out) and the sources of that information in the process of frame identification.

In a second step, I eliminated articles present in keyword searches that did not directly pertain to obesity. I also eliminated duplicate articles. This thesis examines framing from 35 news articles related to obesity and overweight from *The Portland Press*

Herald (n=6), the *Bangor Daily News* (n=15), the *Morning Sentinel* (n=8), and the *Sun Journal* (n=6) — published between January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2015,

For the initial analysis, I differentiated between articles with predominately episodic (individual) or thematic (environmental/systemic) attribution for obesity, and those that possessed examples of both modes. In a second examination into the discourse of each article, I identified how responsibility for obesity was assigned. Based on this examination, I developed distinct frames for both blame and responsibility and grouped them together for discussion by examining all of the articles for their meanings and implications. An analysis of these frames identified is described in the next section.

Analysis: Framing Obesity in Maine News

Following the method outlined above, I analyzed the corpus and identified six dominant frames used by Maine newspapers to frame obesity. These frames include: 1) the public health-oriented frame of prevention, in which obesity is medicalized as an epidemic; 2) the government as both a stern and nurturing parent who facilitates and advocates for behavior modification in light of socioeconomic hardships; 3) the portrayal of the “Ideal American” citizen in reinforcing norms of “proper” citizenship; 4) the food system as a toxic environment that reinforces an illusion of choice among consumers; 5) the notion of “fun” versus “fear” and “sadness” as a means to encourage people to become active citizens and reinforce self-motivation; and 6) education as a means of reinforcing U.S. ideologies of hard work and self-determination. In each of the following sections I describe the frames in detail with brief implications as to their meanings and give examples of the frames in action.

Prevention: The Public Health Frame

Because obesity is a social issue, it is therefore an issue of public health. Public health as a frame is inherently person-centered because, as its name suggests, it is often used to place responsibility on the public as a collection of individuals rather than underlying social structures. This frame limits the responsibility to address health issues on behalf of the government (Lawrence, 2004, p. 57). According to Lawrence (2004), public health “has long contended with competing theories that focus on personal behavior or ‘lifestyle.’ [...] the default starting place for the social construction of most health problems in the United States thus lies close to the ‘individualized’ pole, and it can be difficult for public understanding of health problems to move toward the systemic pole” (p. 58). It is the work of public health practitioners, then, to promote prevent disease by promoting healthy behaviors on the part of individuals, which will in turn keep society healthy as a whole. In the context of obesity, having been medicalized as an epidemic whereby behavior modification is the solution (Saguy & Almeling, 2008, p. 71), the public health frame asserts that people must eat less or exercise more in order to avoid the spread of epidemic. Discussing the public health model, Kim and Willis (2007) argue, “the best way to promote public health, therefore, is to prevent such unhealthy behaviors as [...] excessive eating” (p. 360). In Maine news articles, this frame identifies the obese as lazy individuals who, lacking self-control, are in need of initiative to take preventative measures against obesity. However, as the analysis describes, the frame does not address poverty or class issues, and instead reinforces notions of hard work and personal responsibility.

An example of the public health frame comes in an article citing Maine childhood obesity statistics and quoting the director of community wellness program Let's Go! Franklin County. The director is quoted as saying, "What precipitated was the obesity epidemic [...] We realized that prevention from an early age was the only way to create healthy habits among children" (Abbate, 2015, p. 1). Within this frame, children are to be instructed what healthy behaviors are, and informed that they should take them home to their parents. The burden falls on the children for instructing their families, and then on families to reinforce these learned behaviors. Another article discusses a FoodPlay program targeted at teaching children what are healthy "Go" foods versus unhealthy "Woe" foods (Adams, 2015, p. 1). The program, which is being "presented at dozens of schools throughout the Northeast in response to a growing childhood obesity epidemic" places responsibility on children for "eating at least five fruits and/or vegetables a day, reading food labels, eating three meals a day and telling yourself you can succeed at what you attempt" (p. 1-2). Rather than focus public health efforts on changing an unhealthy food environment, people are told to alter their behaviors, to take "preventative" measures against an alleged communicable "epidemic" as a way to achieve success.

Other articles address failures in the Maine public health system, such as inadequate access to resources due to income, county of residence, or education because Maine's public health system is managed by the state, except for Portland, as opposed to regionally (Lawlor, 2015, p. 2). "The Fight Starts Early," one subhead reads, which suggests a discourse of war against obesity and other health conditions, but does not address the systemic causes of ill-health previously acknowledged; rather, methods of

prevention are focused at the individual level, with the news article describing public health initiatives to “target obesity, childhood immunizations, prescription drug abuse, smoking and preventable hospitalizations” (Lawlor, 2015, p. 2). Within the public health frame there is an absence of societal responsibility. Failure to discuss methods to fix socioeconomic issues only heightens the responsibility of the individual to participate in public health programs. This frame systematically reinforces the notions of ideal citizenship: hard work, self-control, and behavior modification to fall in line with the norm (Julier, 2008, p. 557). Julier (2008) writes that this frame, “is particularly noticeable when it becomes a means a means of talking indirectly about poverty, race, and immigration without appearing to be racist or classist. [...] New versions of racism and sexism are played out through national discourses and programs aimed at reducing fat rather than poverty (p 557). In the public health frame, it does not matter if one cannot afford healthy food. If one does not take any initiative in healthy eating and exercise, or does not participate in public health programs, then he or she is lazy and therefore not a “good” person.

Government as Parent

As the public health frame works to divert responsibility onto individuals rather than the government, government as a frame also works further limit responsibility by how it defines its role. Government limits its responsibility by assuming the role of parent, of one who can provide loving guidance or harsh punishment, depending on the circumstance. Iyengar (2005) describes this dichotomy as the “strict” versus “nurturing” role of the parent. The “strict parent” is associated with individual responsibility, in

which an individual is weak and in need of discipline through laws or legislation that act as punishment (p. 1). The “nurturing parent,” on the other hand, asserts that people are capable of being productive members of society, “with appropriate parental care and nurturance” (Iyengar, 2005, p. 2). This frame does not seek to limit government as the strict parent identity does, rather implying that government has a greater responsibility to its citizens than merely acting as a protector from external threats. In Maine, news articles employing the governmental parent frame also utilize sub-frames of common sense and lack of control to describe the obese as children in need of either discipline or guidance in decision-making.

These parental identities were originally used in reference to political parties, but can also be applied to public health issues. Obesity may be attributed, for example, to government subsidization of corn production and, in turn, the unhealthy use of high-fructose corn syrup that has proliferated in the American diet (societal responsibility/nurturing parent identity), or one’s indifferent attitude toward exercise or balanced diet (individual responsibility/strict parent identity). In 2015, the Maine legislature and the Governor’s office announced their support of a bill to limit the purchase of candy, snack foods and soda with Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), or food stamp, benefits. The administration further requested a waiver from the federal government to enact such a law. With respect to the strict parent frame, limiting junk is framed as “doing a favor” to the poor and obese by forcing them to use their food stamps for healthier foods. While adopting the guise of a nurturing parent, in reality people are still responsible for their own purchases. Therefore, if people purchase

“junk” food with out-of-pocket cash, then they are labeled as lacking self-control and in need of parental discipline.

News articles that employ the government as parent frame often quote Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Director, Mary Mayhew. For example, Mayhew is quoted as saying, “Our current food stamp policy lets water in one end of the boat while bailing out the other [...] If we’re going to spend millions on nutrition education for food stamp recipients, we should stop giving them money to buy candy and soda” (Mistler, 2015, p. 2). Mayhew’s statement is akin to a stern parent withholding an allowance in order to promote self-discipline and self-sufficiency, a notion echoed by Iyengar (2005), who writes, “If people are poor, it is because they lack initiative; people who are unemployed could find work if they tried harder. [...] By this logic, social welfare programs are counterproductive because they breed dependence instead of self-reliance” (p. 1). This strict parent model is individualistic: it seeks to limit government by transferring responsibility onto individuals and reinforces U.S. values of individualism.

News articles reinforce the government as parent frame in quoting members of the public who agree with the legislature’s views, but not the poor or obese. One such article quotes a mother who is not a recipient of food stamps, but who agrees with the bill to limit junk food purchases with SNAP benefits. The mother is quoted as saying, “I think it’s a good idea,” and “it’s not very nutritious” (Mistler, 2015, p. 3). In quoting a non-SNAP recipient, the news article frames the obese as irresponsible and lacking discipline

for purchasing unhealthy foods within the parental “allowance,” thereby increasing dependence instead of self-sufficiency.

Portrayed as lacking self-discipline, the poor and obese are left to suffer both physical ailment and social stigma as a result of their food purchases. Julier (2008) argues, “to blame the individual for lack of willpower is to ignore the ways in which work has increased, pay has decreased, and avenues for fulfillment are structurally constrained for women, people in poverty, and racial-ethnic groups” (p. 558) The obese are framed as irresponsible and in need of punishment from a parental figure, although they can remain irresponsible — and subject to further blame — despite the parents’ best efforts.

The government as parent frame also assumes citizens are unintelligent “children” and lack common sense when it comes to food purchases — that they are in need of guidance because they lack the ability to decide for themselves what is healthy. One news article from the *Bangor Daily News* quotes Mayhew saying, on the push to limit junk food purchases with SNAP benefits, “we’ve got to create pressure from the states on the federal government on Congress, to enact these common-sense reforms” (Shepherd, 2015, p. 1). The “common sense” discourse surrounding obesity assumes people are unintelligent and unable to decide for themselves what is healthy and what is not (Boero, 2006). In the government as parent frame, the discourse of common sense works to blame people for their condition while also limiting government responsibility. If people are not intelligent enough to realize what they do to their bodies, then they are failures and should be punished.

News articles also write about how legislation “helps” people gain access to healthy food. They use the word “help” as a way to limit governmental responsibility with regard to obesity. News articles describe how the government will provide access to healthy food for those on SNAP benefits. The government will help *those people* gain access to healthy food. However, it is still up to the individuals to purchase healthy food items; it is not the responsibility of the government to provide better wages or address other economic and social constraints, which would allow people to purchase healthier foods without federal assistance.

The nurturing parent’s role in this frame is to encourage people to be active citizens, reinforcing a traditional work ethic. Those who do not work are framed as children in need of help from the parental government and, by repealing their “allowance” (SNAP benefits), they will be forced to weigh their presumed food choices against their economic limitations. This contradicts the reality that most clients in the emergency food system are either working, disabled and/or barely surviving (Graham, 2015, p. 2). One article quotes the president of the Good Shepherd Food Bank as saying, “A liter of Coke is 79 cents, but a gallon of milk is \$4 [...] We’re seeing lower-income families having to buy less expensive food, which tends to be calorie dense but nutrient-void. Now you have this paradox of being hungry and being obese on the same side of the coin” (Graham, 2015, p. 2). The government as parent frame places responsibility on the individual to make healthy choices, thus legitimizing the role of government as a good parent who has provided for its children. The problem with this is that, although the government has taken the time to provide healthier food options while limiting unhealthy

options, simply taxing snack foods “neglects to take into account how these foods are distributed across the socioeconomic landscape” (Julier, 2008, p. 553). The government as parent frame does nothing to address the underlying socioeconomic issues surrounding food access. Individuals are then framed as requiring discipline from a parent for their lack of control.

The “Ideal American” Citizen

News frames resonate with culture and thus work to perpetuate norms of identity. The “Ideal American” identity frame works on both a national level to reinforce ideologies of what it means to be a U.S. citizen. U.S. values are frequently tied to notions of personal responsibility (Kim & Willis, 2007). These values hold that hard work and self-discipline are key to national patriotism and moral worth and that, in order to defend and further perpetuate these notions of patriotism, those who “offend” the norm must be called out (Julier, 2008, p. 553). “Hard work” is repeatedly emphasized as attributable to U.S. identity, and that a lack of hard work ethic is innately “un-American.” Julier (2008) writes:

Good citizenship means doing more to improve their own health, and presupposes that people have the capacity to do more. Indeed, the responsibility of citizens to lose weight coexists with encouragement to consume more as a form of patriotism, particularly post-9/11, where consumption was presented as a way of preserving ‘the American way of life’ (p. 557).

News media as an institution works to perpetuate these notions by framing such people as irresponsible citizens. By accusing people of being gluttonous and lazy, the ideological norms of hard work, discipline, and honesty are reinforced (Julier, 2008, p. 553). Obesity represents a failure to work hard enough to maintain self-discipline, and thus those who

are obese are un-American. According to Julier (2008), “the cornerstone of weight bias is the belief that it is a self-induced state from which a self-disciplined individual can escape by hard work or, failing that, the purchase of the right diet book, foods, exercise equipment, or medical interventions” (p. 553). Blaming the obese for their condition is one way to uphold the culturally-held norms of national identity; that is, that U.S. citizens are responsible for their own actions without government intervention.

The identify frame also works on a local level. Just as news articles work to inform readers of what it means to be a “good” U.S. citizen, they also reinforce notions of what it means to be a good, “healthy” Mainer. One news article quotes someone as saying Maine is, “a great state to be active, with a lot of outdoor activities” (Lawlor, 2015, p. 2) and as such no one has an excuse not to get outside. It is true that Maine has many opportunities for outdoor recreation, given its many state parks, expansive coastline, and vast forestland. Those who do not take advantage of these resources are portrayed as lazy because they do not represent Maine’s “outdoors” identity; therefore, they are not true “Mainers.” Thus, obesity is framed as a moral and civic failure.

A news article describing “5 ways Mainers are almost as optimistic as Vermonters” pits the two states against each other, in an effort to push Mainers to better assume their state-identities. For example, the article claims that Mainers eat a lot of produce, but not as much as Vermont. Mainers work out a lot, but also not as much as Vermont (Kennedy, 2015, p. 1). By emphasizing competition between the two states, the article reinforces notions of what it means to be a true Mainer. According to Kennedy (2015), “When asked if they exercised for at least 30 minutes three or more days per

week, 53.1 percent of Mainers answered yes. That's 1.2 percent above the national average (51.9 percent), but it's still not good enough to eclipse Vermont's 56.8 percent" (p. 1). Mainers, with their strong ethic of and values toward hard work, should be able to better utilize their resources and outdoor Vermont in order to uphold their identity as the most "outdoorsy."

Other articles attribute blame for obesity to socioeconomic factors in Maine, but transfer that blame onto individuals, who have a civic obligation to fix the problem. One article states that, "outdoor folks living in rural Maine have a grand opportunity to stay in good condition by fishing, hunting, hiking, backpacking, camping, bicycling, running and so forth" ("Country life's healthy," 2015, p. 1) and, as a result, it should be easy for one to maintain a healthy weight. Despite the opportunities presented to people, the author notes Somerset County residents have an obesity rate of 33.9%, compared with more urban Cumberland County at 21.5%. The author acknowledges this situation is largely due to socioeconomic factors such as low income and food insecurity, writing that, "in Somerset, 16.7 percent suffer from food insecurity, but that figure drops to 14.1 percent in Cumberland. [...] Statistics show that low-income families eat meals rich in carbohydrates, because protein choices often cost more" ("Country life's healthy," 2015, p. 1). Despite the recognition of socioeconomic factors, such news articles frame the individual as responsible for overcoming this dilemma. For example, the article continues:

Those obesity statistics in Cumberland vs. Somerset counties show that despite the plethora of undeveloped woods and water with limited posting, folks still may not take advantage of outdoor resources. Some outdoor sports just aren't that physical, either [...] In short, outdoor folks have the opportunity to walk long

distances, wade tough streams, paddle or row for miles, etc. If the outdoor crowd chooses from these options, their health will be the better for that decision. (“Country life's healthy,” 2015, p. 2)

News articles frame individuals as having the civic duty change their health status by choosing healthier behaviors, including outdoor recreation, regardless of income to afford such activities or the motivation to pursue them. Moreover, by stating that some activities “just aren’t that physical” assumes that people who make such choices are inherently lazy and lack the willpower to change their lives, a discursive tool to transfer not only blame, but responsibility for being good “outdoor folk.” Further, by stating people are responsible for their changing their unhealthy lifestyles in the face of socioeconomic hardships “ignore[s] the ways in which work has increased, pay has decreased, and avenues for fulfillment are structurally constrained for women, people in poverty, and racial-ethnic groups” (Julier, 2008, p. 558). This particular viewpoint frames responsibility as belonging to individual citizens and their work ethic by supporting the ideology of choice (Julier, 2008, p. 553). Citizens have the choice to take advantage of their natural environments, and it is up to them to use what has been given to them; to do otherwise is to be “un-American” and not “a true Mainer.”

Toxic Environment: The Illusion of Choice in a System of Overabundance

The food encompasses all facets of the food system: agriculture, policy, diet and the consumption of foods themselves. News articles criticizing the food system typically employ a “toxic environment” frame, which “contends that the industry has flooded highways, shopping malls, and school cafeterias with healthy ‘fast’ foods while flooding the media marketplace with endless enticing ads, promotions, product placements, and

other forms of ‘stealth advertising’” (Lawrence, 2004, p. 61). As such, news articles that employ the toxic environment frame, or the frame of overabundance, place blame for obesity on the food system at large.

Because blame is attributed through emphasis of an overabundance of unhealthy food, news articles locate responsibility in the food system. However, the same articles also locate responsibility in individuals for overcoming the toxic environment through more “responsible” food purchases, despite being presented with “illusion of choice” in the market (Isenhour, 2011). In this frame, consumers are described as choosing from a multitude of food products of varying nutritional quality, and can become lost among the grocery store aisles. Isenhour writes there is an “impossibility of making informed choices in a world glutted with information and difficult contradictions between different kinds of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ products” (Isenhour, 2011, p. 15; Wilk, 2010, p. 8). The food system is blamed for being too large and too confusing. However, the obese are also blamed because they have the agency to purchase healthier food in this environment of overabundance but fail to do so. This illusion of choice has been discussed within the government as parent frame, which seeks to limit the foods purchased through SNAP benefits. The obese are presented as given more choice in purchasing healthy foods, despite socioeconomic barriers.

Articles employing this frame describe the U.S. industrial food system as having caused an overabundance of the “wrong” foods, foods that are unhealthy and heavily processed, which has led to an increase in obesity. These articles also suggest that the burden of addressing obesity is also on institutions, such as the government, schools or

the corporate food industry. News articles employing the frame of overabundance criticize the U.S. industrial food system by comparing it to the food systems of other nations and geographic regions, primarily Europe and Russia, to illustrate the proliferation of processed foods into the U.S. diet.

One such article from the *Portland Press Herald* utilizes a comparison between the U.S. and Europe to highlight both systemic and individual blame and responsibility. The article, a question-and-answer with Alison Pray and Matt James, owners of Standard Bakery in Portland, Maine, discusses how the overabundance of processed food is the root cause of obesity. In the article, Peggy Grodinsky asks the bakers their thoughts on new grains being introduced into baking, to which Pray responds: “In Europe [...] well they are small countries. The farms – the grain farmers – are not very far away. The United States being so large and the industrial food system being what it is, to get a raw ingredient like wheat flour from any closer than Kansas, it wasn’t even a pipe dream” (Grodinsky, 2015, p. 3). Pray’s response describes the U.S. food system as too industrial to be healthy. Grodinsky (2015) also addresses the health concerns associated with the sugar in baked goods:

Q: Not to end on a downer, but I read this morning that the World Health Organization wants us to cut back drastically on sugar.

JAMES: Drink less Coca Cola!

PRAY: That is the chronic problem: Sodas, breakfast cereal, processed foods that have sugar in them where there is no need to have sugar in them [...] I honestly feel that what we make is health food. I don’t think artisanal neighborhood bakeries are the cause of chronic obesity in this country. It’s processed food. It’s cheap overly processed food in quantities that will kill you.” (p. 4)

The question-and-answer format leaves the interviewees’ answers whole and, without a follow-up question, ends the article and forms the border of the frame. This illustrates

both episodic and thematic attribution for obesity. Pray's statement that the proliferation of industrial foods is the root of obesity portrays the problem as inherently systemic. Although James' statement acts as an instance of individual blame, the news article highlights the illusion of choice in which individuals are told to make healthy choices in an environment of systemic gluttony. It is, as Julier (2008) writes, "the motivation for more cannot be separated from a capitalist system that fetishizes the market as an entity requiring endless development and promotion of new products, despite any discernable consumer demand" (p. 557).

In another example, a delegate from the city of Kotlas, Russia (sister city to Waterville, Maine) visited Waterville, and the differences and similarities between the two countries were discussed. This article discusses the topics of health and nutrition between the U.S. and Russia. The article cites Martha Coury Patterson, a retired laboratory chemist from MaineGeneral Medical Center. The article states, "Patterson said Kotlas schools provide much better food to students than those in the U.S. do. Vegetable soups, mashed potato, chicken and vegetables are typical offerings, she said. 'There's not a lot of obesity at all,' she said. 'They don't eat fried foods, chips and junk food'" (Calder, 2015, p. 2). The news article frames the U.S. food system, and also schools, as responsible for providing people with unhealthy options when compared to the food system of Russia, where healthy foods are consistently provided to residents. This comparison frames obesity as a systemic issue in which responsibility is also systemic — students are not given a choice as to their food options; rather, the schools choose which foods to provide.

“Fun” vs. Fear and Sadness: The Emotional Frames

News frames play a role in shaping an audience’s thinking and behaviors (Entman, 1993; Tewksbury et al., 2009). Therefore, it can be said frames can also play to peoples’ emotions in eliciting response, if a frame’s purpose is to identify problem topics and prescribe solutions for them (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Promoting exercise as “fun,” Maine news articles do, then serves as an inducement for people to change their current lifestyles in adoption of one considered healthier, as long as the change is portrayed as positive for the individual. From this perspective, if news articles promote exercise as fun, then people will likely be more motivated to exercise on their own without changes forced to occur at the systemic level. On the contrary, news articles can also play to peoples’ fears, specifically a “fear” of becoming obese, in order to motivate people to also make behavioral changes considered “healthier.” Maine news articles utilize the “fun” frame in order to both community and individual responsibility for preventing or treating obesity. News articles also use the fear frame to motivate people to lose weight for fear of a negative quality of life, which is seen as a moral failure.

News articles using the “fun” frame attempt to motivate individuals to participate in public health initiatives and community events targeted at reducing weight or increasing physical activity. “Jumping over hay hurdles and rolling potato barrels are just two of the fun obstacles local youth will get to tackle during the 2015 Redy Youth Adventure Challenge” reads the lede of one news article (“Calling all kids,” 2015, p. 1). The news article develops this frame by quoting the president of The Aroostook Medical Center is quoted as saying, “Being fit and active shouldn’t be a chore” and “adults may

be inspired to get more active as well, when they see what a great time is had by all the participants,” (“Calling all kids,” 2015, p. 2). Within this frame, the assumption is that people will want to participate if they see others having fun.

The “fun” frame assumes a connection between community and individual responsibility: communities have the duty to make participation in events worth peoples’ time and leisure, but individuals still have to get up and move. Often, community responsibility comes in wake of public concern over the “obesity epidemic.” One after-school program in Rangeley, which features “Mix it up Monday” and “Work it Wednesdays” allows children to have a “fun-filled” day in which they “play games, stay active and make healthy treats they can take home to their parents [...] keeping the message of healthy living exciting and youthful in order to subtly effect lifestyle change” (Abbate, 2015, p. 1-2). The “fun” frame emphasizes community responsibility and healthy education for youth, which in turn fosters a healthier community in subsequent generations.

On the reverse, fear is also used as a tool to motivate people to exercise and eat healthy. Such articles invoke the correlation between obesity and sadness. One such article discusses Maine’s obesity rate as improving compared to national statistics but also discusses the perceived drawbacks of being obese. “The report also indicates, unsurprisingly, that unhappy people are more likely to be obese. [...] The report showed a strong link between obesity and people who reported a poor sense of well-being” (Farwell, 2015, p. 1). If being obese leads to this negative sense of well-being, it is up to

the individual to either lose weight or not become obese at all. The use of judgmental language (“unsurprisingly”) locates the blame for obesity in a poor sense of well-being.

Describing the correlation between obesity and sadness as a causal relationship implies that obesity leads to sadness and that obesity must be fixed in order to restore a sense of well-being. This same kind of framing is utilized in an article listing Maine as the tenth worst state for heart attacks, “[T]hose who have had a heart attack also have higher rates of obesity [...] are more likely to smoke, and are less likely to exercise,’ according to the report,” and that, “People with a history of heart attack are also less likely to like what they do each day, less active productive every day, and twice as likely to have at least two days each month where poor health prevents normal activities” (MacLeod, 2015, p. 1). The invocation of voluntary behavior is crucial in attributing blame. While obesity is a risk factor for heart attack, drawing comparisons between heart attack, obesity, and smoking implies that, like smoking, obesity is voluntary. People who choose to be fat may not just have heart attacks, but they will also be sad, and it is up to them to exercise and prevent this from happening.

Other articles prescribe certain foods to avoid. One article quotes a FoodPlay official telling children, “Some foods build us up. They are the go-to foods. Some let us down. They are the woe [sic] foods,’ Tardif said. ‘You kids are getting bombarded with 10,000 ads a year to buy woe foods.’” Tardif continues by saying, “You need to feed your body a healthy message” (Adams, 2015, p. 1-2). Fear is invoked in this article to draw attention to the unhealthy food environment in which people live, where “woe”

foods are overabundant. Fear is used to motivate individuals to take control of their bodies and conquer their unhealthy environments.

Education: Teaching Norms

The “fun” frame can be used in combination with arguments for the importance of education, which is a frame in of itself. The education frame uses the physical school building to situate societal and systemic factors as the causes of obesity, but also locates personal responsibility for prevention of obesity within an institutional context. The education frame also portrays people as lacking basic knowledge about exercise and healthy eating and makes the case that people should seek education on healthy behaviors.

One article discusses a “walking bus” program, whereby students can walk to school as a group one day each month. The article assigns institutional blame to the schools by stating:

The Walking School Bus movement is part of an effort to include movement throughout the day, as many schools are cutting back on recess and physical education classroom time [...] The American Heart Association and the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention both recommend that children get at least one hour of physical activity each day [...] The elementary school students have just 15 minutes of recess after lunch. They do get some recess time before and after school starts, but it rarely adds up to more than 30 minutes per day (Ohm, 2015, p 2).

Institutions are unable to adequately provide physical activities for children. Children are then encouraged to voluntarily take part in other forms of physical activity so as to align with self-reliant U.S. norms. The education frame asserts that taking part in the voluntary “walking bus” reinforces this notion. In the article, one parent is quoted is saying, “it’s a fun opportunity to get outside,” while a child states, “it’s fun because you get to talk to

your friends [...] and it's good exercise before school starts" (Ohm, 2015, p. 2). Using a combination of the "fun" frame with the education frame, the news article reinforces values of self-sufficiency.

These values are also upheld in news reporting on the events schools choose to bring to their campuses, as already represented by the FoodPlay event described within the fear frame. One *Sun Journal* news article highlights the work of John Burnstein, also known as "Slim Goodbody" for his role as a health educator in a skin-tight body suit. The title is an indication of what a "good body" is: slim. Burnstein's teaches what it means to be a healthy citizen, and the article's focus on the suit reinforces this notion: "What people do notice: the fact that Burstein still fits into a skin-tight bodysuit. So many people ask about it -- How do you do that? -- that he's posted the answer on his website. (Hint: It involves working out and eating right)" ("All hale slim goodbody," 2015, p. 2). Within the school setting, the responsibility for preventing obesity falls on the students and not the institution.

A second implication of the education frame concerns the responsibility for parents to make changes within the educational system, suggesting concerns school reform as a way to fight the systemic influence of obesity. An article on concussions from contact sports reads, "Researchers, doctors and athletic trainers are always searching for ways to prevent concussions. Part of that requires having a better idea of the risks athletes face. But parents can put greater athletes at risk for other health problems by taking drastic actions to protect their children" (Whitehouse, 2015, p. 1). The same article quotes Dr. Paul Berker, director of Maine Concussion Management Initiative at Colby

College, as saying, “We’re terrifying our parents and they’re making decisions about activities, and that’s the worst thing we can do [...] Our obesity rate in children in Maine is terrible. If we start having people not participating, I think the long-term risks from obesity are probably higher than the long-term risks from concussions” (Whitehouse, 2015, p. 1). Despite giving no statistics about the actual number of traumatic head injuries faced by students, or the number of obese children in Maine, parents are made responsible for initiating school reform in order to prevent obesity. While the primary topic of the article is concussions, obesity is situated as the chief concern. In this case, the fear of obesity is used to defend dangerous school sports. News articles suggest parents should work to prevent concussions, and therefore obesity, through education reform.

The education frame encourages parents to work with schools to change the institutional environment. For example, “Try to get your child’s school to stock healthy choices such as fresh fruit, low-fat dairy products, water and 100 percent fruit juice in the vending machines,” and “Restrict your child’s soft drink consumption” (“Back to school safety page copy,” 2015, p. 3), and to work with schools on new initiatives. The education frame can be found in articles about setting later school start times, which were in hot debate in 2015. According to Lawlor (2015), “Research shows that later start times for schools can fend off depression, obesity and diabetes” (p. 1). Lawlor quotes Lloyd Crocker, superintendent of RSU 23, as saying, “Public education is still stuck in the old model of doing things,” and that ‘we get stuck into continuing what’s convenient rather than what’s best” (p. 2). The education frame links school responsibility to parental responsibility, in which parents must seek reform on their own. Because, “this is the

biggest public health issue that we actually have the power to do something about,” as one parent with the coalition Start School Later is quoted as saying, parents must take the initiative where schools fall behind (Lawlor, 2015, p. 2).

Distribution

The following chart depicts the distribution of frames across articles in the corpus:

Table 1. Obesity News Frames by Article, Jan. 1, 2015 – Dec. 31, 2015

NEWS ARTICLE	EPISODIC			THEMATIC		
	Public Health	Govern-ment as Parent	The “Ideal” American Citizen	Toxic Environ-ment	“Fun” vs. Fear and sadness	Edu-cation
Bangor Daily News						
<i>Back to school safety page copy</i>						X
<i>Calling all kids: Redy youth adventure challenge is coming</i>	X				X	
<i>Cousins, Maine lawmakers endorse new bid ...</i>	X	X	X	X		
<i>Farwell, Gallup: Maine 14th for obesity ...</i>					X	
<i>Fishell, Report: Cost of doing business...</i>	X					
<i>Health briefs for Friday, March 6</i>	X					
<i>Kennedy, M. 5 ways Mainers ...</i>			X			
<i>Let's go! awards sites for keeping kids healthy</i>	X					X
<i>MacLeod, Maybe this is why ...</i>			X			
<i>MacLeod, Maine is among the top-10 worst...</i>	X				X	

NEWS ARTICLE	EPISODIC			THEMATIC		
	Public Health	Govern-ment as Parent	The “Ideal” American Citizen	Toxic Environ-ment	“Fun” vs. Fear and sadness	Edu-cation
<i>Pierce, Farm to food bank ...</i>				X		
<i>PRYMCA receives second round ...</i>	X	X				
<i>Rhoda, It starts with one...</i>	X	X				X
<i>Rhoda, Maine's sleep-deprived counties ...</i>					X	
<i>Shepherd, LePage, Mayhew renew push for SNAP junk food ban.</i>	X	X	X	X		
Sun Journal						
<i>Adams, Rumford students feast on FoodPlay</i>	X		X	X	X	X
<i>All hale slim goodbody!</i>			X			X
<i>Buying junk with food stamps? Maybe not for long in Maine</i>	X	X	X	X		
<i>Program recognizes healthy habits</i>	X	X				X
<i>Report: Androscoggin county losing lives to health gaps</i>	X					
<i>Strong elementary fourth-graders participate in healthy snack day</i>	X	X			X	X

NEWS ARTICLE	EPISODIC			THEMATIC		
	Public Health	Govern-ment as Parent	The “Ideal” American Citizen	Toxic Environ-ment	“Fun” vs. Fear and sadness	Edu-cation
Portland Press Herald						
Grodinsky, <i>All the ingredients were there</i>	X	X				X
Lawlor, <i>Maine gets a clean bill ...</i>				X		
Lawlor, <i>LESSON FROM A LATER START</i>	X					X
Lawlor, <i>Later start times</i>	X					X
Bouchard, K. <i>Development, middle ...</i>	X					X
Mistler, S. <i>State tries again to halt food ...</i>	X	X	X	X		
Morning Sentinel						
Abbate, <i>After-school group ...</i>	X		X		X	X
Calder, <i>Inland hospital's</i>	X		X		X	
Calder, <i>Russian delegation ...</i>				X		X
<i>Country life's healthy, if I only takes advantage</i>			X	X		
Graham, <i>Hunger's fresh foe</i>	X			X		
Lawlor, J. <i>Maine's health ranking...</i>			X			
Ohm, <i>'Walking bus' jump-starts ...</i>	X				X	X
Whitehouse, <i>Training tied ...</i>			X		X	X
Total mentions	22	9	13	10	10	15

The summary of Maine news articles in Table 1 suggests the ways in which frames interact across multiple narratives. For example, the government as parent frame is coupled with the public health frame, as the government works to decide what public health initiatives should be undertaken. The frame of ideal citizenship is also commonly found in articles employing both the parental government and public health frames as both act to influence behavior to correlate with national, culturally-held norms of self-reliance. Articles that frame obesity episodically also frame the toxic environment as something individuals are able to overcome through diet and exercise, which incorporates notions of ideal citizenship through hard work and individual choice. Thematic frames such as education and “fun” are often combined, which suggests that children are more easily motivated by entertainment. However, “fun” is also used to motivate adults in hopes of obtaining nutritional or physical education. In the next section, I consider the implications of these frames and this research.

Discussion

Analysis of how news frames obesity in Maine newspapers reveals the dominant discourses surrounding the condition in the state. Taking a descriptive, narrative approach to frame analysis, these frames — public health and prevention, government as parent, toxic environment and illusion of choice, fun versus fear and sadness, and education — work in tandem to support culturally and nationally-held ideologies of hard work and self-determination. In essence, the discourse surrounding obesity in Maine promotes neoliberal ideologies of personal responsibility, which simultaneously work to hold people accountable for their actions given choice in the free market (Goldstein et al.,

2011, p. 114). This research has several implications, such that the promotion of hard work ethic maintains current power structures while enforcing notions of national identity, and that extraditing the obese as “others” reinforces one’s own peace of mind that he or she falls in line with cultural norms. I will discuss these implications further in the following sections.

Framing Obesity in Maine News Articles

This analysis highlights the ways in which Maine news articles utilize overlapping frames when discussing obesity. For example, 13 out of 35 news articles employ episodic frames of public health, government parental identity, and ideal citizenship within one news story. Because the government has direct influence over public health initiatives, and as a parent the government instills social norms and expectations, all three frames work to reinforce what it means to be a “good” citizen. Even within a thematic or environmental context, articles hold the obese responsible for losing weight or making healthier food choices, seen in the frames of toxic environment and “Ideal American” (7 out of 35 articles). I describe in the analysis section above how articles using the education frame also utilize the frames of “fun” or “fear” to motivate children to take part in school nutrition programs. Framing activities as “fun” will make people want to participate. If people do not participate, news articles caution, then they are at risk of either staying or becoming obese, and will become sad as a result. Articles that employ use of the toxic environment frame maintain that the obese, although surrounded by an overabundance of unhealthy foods, still have the ability to purchase the “correct” foods; this, despite the reality that many obese do not have the money to do so.

Notions such as these are also echoed as frames are combined across thematic and episodic discourses, whereby the thematic frame of overabundance is used by parental government to support the ideology of food choice among those on food assistance programs (4 out of 35 articles). Other combinations of frames suggest the thematic frames of education and “fun” are inextricably linked to ideas of what it means to be a “good” citizen (4 out of 35 articles). News articles using the “fun” frame are likely to invoke notions of choice — get up and move, or don’t — to reinforce culturally-held beliefs that ideal American citizens are hard-working and self-reliant. Six “fun-framed” articles from the sample also combine with the public health frame, which asserts people are to take preventative behavior against the obesity “epidemic” (6 out of 35 articles pertain to “fun” and public health). Within the education frame (15 articles out of 35), it is the responsibility of children or parents to encourage healthy eating or participate in youth fitness programs, despite schools’ unhealthy food provisions or lack of physical education or recess time. These examples demonstrate that even when news articles are thematically-framed, blame and shame can still be situated episodically. News articles frame individuals as responsible for “fixing” their condition even when blame for the condition is placed on external factors.

This neoliberal discourse has two functions: by reinforcing ideologies of hard work and control, the discourse surrounding obesity maintains the integrity of the system as it is while assigning responsibility to individuals, and it assures peace of mind for those who are not obese that they are within the norm. If the obese are responsible for their condition, they should be the ones to rectify in order to assume their roles as ideal

citizens. LeBesco (2010) argues that the implications surrounding the phrase “obesity epidemic” protects those of average weight while allowing them the authority to monitor the obese, therefore distancing them from those within the norm (p. 160).

Choice and Culture Within the Context of “Epidemic”

This analysis of news frames illustrates the implications of culture within a neoliberal discourse. If culture functions as context for communication, as Entman (1993, p. 53) argues, communication resonates with already-held cultural beliefs. Cultural beliefs surrounding obesity have long invoked notions of what Boero (2006) describes as the “cultural black box of fatness,” in which the media operate under pre-existing understandings of obesity to scientific debate in lieu of hard evidence (p. 51). When differences in opinion as to the cause and responsibility for obesity occur, “Differences, which in other cases might be presented as major scientific cleavages [...] are made irrelevant by the notion of individual will. Thus, even the most scientifically committed researchers will still be quoted saying that obesity is ‘a condition that will yield to good old-fashioned willpower’” (Boero, 2006, p. 51).

Neoliberal promotion of free market ideals supports the ideology of choice. This work further highlights the ways in which the illusion of choice is perpetuated in news media with regard to obesity. In 1971, Margaret Mead wrote that “we have contrived to construct a world in which food in great variety is present everywhere at all times of the year” (Mead, 1971, p. 1). In news media, the obese are simultaneously invited to participate in the very environment for which they are being punished for taking part in participating. As news media label the obese as ignorant and unethical for indulging in

the industrial food system, they are also given the burden of “fixing” their problem (Isenhour, 2011, p. 14). The obese are shamed for consuming too much, yet they are expected to seek help for their condition by contributing to the overabundant environment through the continued purchase of food or diet products.

The medicalization of obesity as an “epidemic” allows this cycle to continue. Julier (2008) writes, “Labeling obesity an epidemic creates jobs for a number of occupations and professions that serve or ‘service’ the diet, exercise, and health industries—and perhaps, ‘protect’ the rest of society from the obese” (p. 551). Consumption becomes a manifestation of choice. Touting obesity as an “epidemic” forces the obese to choose — the foods they eat, the exercises they perform, or the diet books they buy. Such alternative methods to “combat” obesity inadvertently legitimize the toxic environment, in which consumer risk is personalized (Isenhour, 2011, p. 19).

This neoliberal discourse becomes crucial to understanding how news articles perpetuate ideas of national identity. According to Mead (1971), “Americans are extremely intolerant of people who, as we see it, ‘let themselves go.’ This applies to anyone who neglects to “fix’ anything physical that can be remedied. [...] There are handicaps, clearly, that cannot be overcome. But everyone can try. To make the most of oneself, we say, is good. To give up is wrong” (p. 2). Because there is so much choice in the market, the obese have all capacity to change their condition, therefore “improving” themselves to fall in line with U.S. ideologies of citizenship (Julier, 2008). If the obese do not take initiative, it is their own moral failing and they are held responsible.

LeBesco (2010) argues that the implications surrounding the phrase “obesity epidemic” protect those of average weight while allowing them the authority to monitor the obese, therefore distancing them from those within the norm (p. 160). LeBesco writes: “With phrases like ‘medical neglect’ and ‘fugitive’ looming large, we immediately recognize these people [...] as Other. We can set ourselves up, then, in contrast: as healthy, appropriate, moderate consumers, not voracious, out-of-control, unhealthy gluttons (LeBesco, 2010, p. 156-157). News articles support LeBesco’s ideal of the “healthy, appropriate, moderate consumer” as the ideal U.S. citizen, who exercises both agency in the free market and the willpower to not consume too much; those who do consume too much are to be feared, for they do not fall in line with our national identity and thus cannot be trusted. Maine news articles serve the same purpose, often utilizing neoliberal discourses to frame the ideology of the “true Mainer,” who is fit and active in a natural environment rich with opportunity. Those who do not choose to go outside go against the norm.

Conclusion: Beyond the ‘Black Box:’ A New Discourse?

In Maine, where 28 percent of citizens are obese, news articles act on the same principles to support ideologies of what it means to be a “true” Mainer: one who takes advantage of the natural environment, who participates in the public health services provided to them (regardless of socioeconomic barriers), and one who can personally make change in the food system. This work has further implications for not only the understanding of obesity as it is seen through the news media, it has implications for news media itself. This research raises questions into the responsibility of reporting in a

media landscape that reinforces individual choice. If “a person’s health status is a function of physiological, structural, and environmental factors as well as his or her own actions” (Kim & Willis, 2007, p. 360), then why do news articles focus primarily on the latter?

Journalists act within the dominant culture of society and therefore write according to this cultural resonance (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009, p. 23). Because journalists work within these social categories, news stories are framed to fall in line with the understanding underlying these prevailing socially shared categories (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1993). As a result, cultural norms and social schemata are perpetuated and are often accepted as true. Because U.S. society favors neoliberal discourse, news media consciously or unconsciously work to uphold neoliberal standards of citizenship and journalistic practices. Most news frames in this analysis work to support notions of what it means to be an ideal citizen, and in Maine these neoliberal ideologies are continually reinforced through framing obesity as an individual issue even when described in an environmental context. If society operates within the “cultural black box of fatness,” so too, will journalists (Boero, 2006, p. 51).

The cultural resonance within which journalists operate has several implications. First, it presents a skewed lens through which the public sees the topic of obesity. Such individual-episodic framing (or attribution within thematic framing) masks broader social and structural issues, such as inadequate government policy, corporate greed, or class inequality. Isenhour (2011) argues that, “the current neoliberal emphasis on consumer choice can be seen, in many ways, as a defense of contemporary global structures of

inequality. The world's most privileged defend their ability to choose, but unfortunately they often choose products or practices that are extremely harmful for the world's most vulnerable communities (p. 19). What falls outside a news frame is equally important in determining the frame's meaning as what is placed within its confines. By ignoring systemic causes of and responsibility for obesity, culturally-held attitudes toward the obese are reinforced as are normative ideologies of U.S. citizenship such as hard work, in practicing self-control and self-reliance, in making "correct" choices.

It is important to acknowledge that the framework through which I have identified these frames and their implications may also fall in line with the neoliberal framing observed in the corpus. That is, in suggesting journalists need additional training on reporting scientific evidence, I can be taken as assuming that journalists are personally responsible for the current discourse surrounding obesity, thereby blaming them as individuals who must "fix" the "problem." I can be seen as assuming the role of parent within an academic context. As an academic critic, I can be seen as framing journalists as lacking the knowledge to accurately report obesity. Because journalists are then situated as unknowing "children," it is my duty to tell them how to report (much as the parental frame I have identified tells the obese how to eat). Ultimately, I may frame journalists as having the choice on how to report their findings, thus ignoring other factors at play in news content selection, such as pressures from lobbyists, governmental influences, and professional practices (Tewksbury et al., 2009, p. 23).

Therefore, it is imperative that this research be used to address media as an institution of systemic influence and not to demonize individuals. This research

highlights the importance of evaluating journalistic practices on a cultural and systemic level if we are to move past individual blame, either by journalists in their news reports or on the journalists themselves. Media provide coherence that relates news to familiar assumptions about how the world functions. Therefore, because journalists are limited by cultural resonance in their own selection of news reporting, the individual framing of obesity then becomes a systemic issue of journalistic influence. Further research can thus identify the ways in which cultural influence over the media impacts news framing at one level of analysis, and further on framing of obesity at another level.

Further framing research on obesity can address the ways in which the discourse can go beyond the “black box” and frame obesity in better-rounded context that addresses all aspects of the condition. If the black box is culturally-held, how has it been perpetuated throughout culture and where along the line can we shift understanding of obesity? The current discourse does a disservice to the obese and further to journalists. Because frames tell people what to think about a topic, framing obesity through this ideological lens ultimately tells people that obesity is abnormal and that, through “othering,” the obese are something to be feared. This notion not only demonizes the obese, but it has the potential to demonize the journalists who frame news in this way, all the while perpetuating culturally-held neoliberal values among the general public. Obesity is treated as a moral failure in the news media and, if allowed to happen, directly contradicts the ideological norm. It is, as Mead (1971, p. 3) writes, “The obese, whom we treat as sinners, are scapegoats for all of us, made to suffer as examples of what many of us fear we might become—if we let ourselves go.”

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Appendix A

Example of an Episodically-Framed News Article

Kennedy, M. (2015, June 14). 5 ways Mainers are almost as optimistic as Vermonters.

Bangor Daily News. Retrieved from <http://bangordailynews.com/>

Gallup recently published an interactive map titled State of the States that provides statistical data on people's views of politics, the economy, religion and overall well-being. Mainers appear to have fairly positive attitudes about their circumstances, but they aren't as optimistic and healthy as people from Vermont.

Here's what the data says:

1. Mainers -- more than most -- feel appreciated by their state.

When asked whether state residents felt recognized for helping to improve their city or area in the past 12 months, 21.8 percent of Mainers reported positively. That's second in New England to Vermont's 24.4 percent and good enough to be tied for ninth (with Colorado) in the nation. It's also 2.7 percent higher than the national average (19.1 percent).

2. Mainers aren't very religious.

More than half of the population -- 51.1 percent of Mainers -- answered that religion wasn't an important aspect of their lives and that they seldom or never attended religious services. In New England -- and the nation -- that's just trailing Vermont (56.3 percent). The national average of nonreligious citizens, according to the study, is 30.3 percent.

3. We eat a lot of produce.

In Maine, 63.1 percent of residents answered that they eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables at least four -- or more -- days per week. Care to guess which state, barely, inches us out nationally? Vermont leads the charge for healthy eating with 64.5 percent of their residents reporting that they, too, eat a lot of veggies. The national average, comparatively, was 57.6 percent.

4. We all have to exercise more, though (if we want to beat Vermont).

Maine appears to do pretty well in the exercise department. When asked if they exercised for at least 30 minutes three or more days per week, 53.1 percent of Mainers answered yes. That's 1.2 percent above the national average (51.9 percent), but it's still not good enough to eclipse Vermont's 56.8 percent. It also doesn't completely jive with our actual obesity rate; Maine has the 27th highest rate of adult obesity, according to "The State of Obesity: Better Policies for a Healthier America."

5. We definitely have a solid claim to "the way life should be."

In quantifying "overall well-being," Gallup takes into consideration five elements that are integral to a healthy, "good" life: community involvement, consistent physical activity, financial security, a satisfying social life and a feeling of purpose. So how did Maine do? Compared with the rest of New England, pretty well. More than half of all Mainers -- 62.4 percent -- are reportedly experiencing a positive overall well-being, compared with the national average of 61.6 percent. The only state to score higher in New England? Vermont (62.7 percent).

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Example of a Thematically-Framed News Article

Farwell, J. (2015, May 28). Gallup: Maine 14th for obesity as nation grows fatter. *Bangor Daily News*. Retrieved from <http://bangordailynews.com/>

Maine ranks 14th in the nation for obesity, steadily improving compared to other states as the country grows fatter, according to a new Gallup report.

Still, more than a quarter of Mainers are obese. Nearly 26 percent of Maine adults who reported their height and weight to Gallup in phone interviews during 2014 qualified as obese, with a body mass index of 30 or higher.

That measure of body fat varies from person to person. But an individual who's 5 feet, 6 inches tall and weighs 190 pounds, for example, qualifies as obese, according to the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute's BMI calculator.

Nationally, the obesity rate rose to 27.7 percent in 2014, based on Gallup's interviews with nearly 177,000 U.S. adults. Americans are at their most obese since the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index began tracking the rate in 2008.

Maine held steady in the rankings from 2013, when the state also placed 14th in the country for obesity. That's a much better showing than prior years, including in 2010 and 2012, when Maine ranked 31st.

But while Maine improved in relation to other states, data from another source show Maine's not immune to the widening of America. The percentage of overweight or obese residents steadily has inched up over time, much like in the rest of the country.

Hawaii had the lowest obesity rate in the nation at 19 percent, followed by California, Colorado, Connecticut and Massachusetts, which have ranked among the 10 states with the best rates every year since 2008.

At the other end of the scale, Mississippi was the fattest U.S. state for the second year in a row. There, 35.2 percent of residents are obese, according to the report.

Mississippi is among five states placing among the fattest 10 states every year since 2008, along with Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana and West Virginia.

The list of health consequences from carrying too much weight is long. Being overweight or obese raises the risk of heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, some cancers, high blood pressure and stroke, among other ailments, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The report also indicates, unsurprisingly, that unhappy people are more likely to be obese.

The Well-Being Index, based on 2.2 million surveys, captures how Americans feel about their daily lives based on five measures: a sense of purpose, social relationships, financial security, community and physical health. The report showed a strong link between obesity and people who reported a poor sense of well-being.

"People who are not obese are more likely to reach their goals, use their strengths at what they do best, make time for regular trips or vacations with friends and family, be satisfied with their standard of living, and feel safe and secure in their community," the report stated.

Maine ranked 15th in the nation for well-being, slightly besting the national average.

Previous Gallup and Healthways research showed high well-being closely relates to key indicators, such as lower workplace absenteeism, better performance on the job and less use of health care services. Helping employees feel engaged in their jobs can lead to a healthier, happier workforce that costs employers less, according to a January Gallup report.

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Example of a Thematic-Episodically-Framed News Article

Adams, E. (2015, February 10). Rumford students feast on FoodPlay. Sun Journal

Retrieved from <http://www.sunjournal.com/>

RUMFORD -- Nearly 300 students at Rumford Elementary School clapped and cheered during an anti-obesity program focused on healthy eating and exercise Tuesday afternoon.

FoodPlay is a national, award-winning school assembly program that brings the power of live theater, feats of juggling, captivating characters, motivating messages, music, magic and audience participation to turn children on to healthy eating and active lifestyles, according to its website.

The program is being presented at dozens of schools throughout the Northeast in response to a growing childhood obesity epidemic.

Linda Tardif and Jordon Phillips of Massachusetts described and demonstrated the benefits of eating lots of vegetables and fruits, and avoiding sugar-laden sodas and processed foods.

"How many of you eat?" Tardif asked.

The students laughed and raised their hands.

"There are over 300,000 different food products now, and lots of them are made in factories," Tardif said. Eating an apple is so much better than eating an apple pie that is full of sugar and fat, she said.

"Eating sugars and salts tires you out," Tardif said.

"Some foods build us up. They are the go-to foods. Some let us down. They are the woe foods," Tardif said. "You kids are getting bombarded with 10,000 ads a year to buy woe foods."

She said students consume an average of 600 cans of soda a year, each containing 10 teaspoons of sugar. Maybe the ingredients in sports drinks and other processed foods aren't listed as sugar, she said, but they are high in fructose corn syrup, which is the same thing.

Tardif said people can make their own sodas with seltzer water and flavorings.

"The body's favorite is water, low-fat milk and fruit juice," she said.

Tardif and Phillips encouraged students to exercise more and the students joined with them in doing jumping jacks.

"You can also take a walk with your family after dinner, play sports, jump rope, do yoga, and have fun at recess," Tardif said.

Other messages included eating at least five fruits and/or vegetables a day, reading food labels, eating three meals a day and telling yourself you can succeed at what you attempt.

"You need to feed your body a healthy message," she said.

The 45-minute presentation at Rumford Elementary School was sponsored by the local Hannaford supermarket.

FoodPlay will be presented in 10 Maine schools this spring.

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Author's Biography

Alan Bennett graduated from the University of Maine in 2016 with bachelor of arts in journalism with a minor in anthropology. He has served numerous roles across the campus during his time at the university, including as a peer facilitator for Honors 170: *Currents and Contexts*; as the Culture Editor for university's newspaper, *The Maine Campus*; as a student photographer for the Division of Marketing and Communications; as a 2015 Sustainable Food Systems Research Fellow; and as the President of Lambda Pi Eta Communication and Journalism Honor Society. His interest in studying obesity stems from his own experience with the condition. Since losing 70 pounds between 2010 and 2012, he has worked to improve the discussion around obesity and eating disorders — which he believes shame those who experience them firsthand — through op-Ed pieces for *The Maine Campus*, in addition to presenting on his initial thesis research at the National Collegiate Honors Council Conference in Chicago, Illinois in November 2015.

Alan accepted an offer to work for the York County daily newspaper, the *Journal Tribune*, as the City of Biddeford reporter following graduation, a job for which he believes he is grossly underqualified, but has accepted the challenge. He plans to attend graduate school for health communication and public health after gaining experience reporting in the field, and one day hopes to work alongside Michelle Obama, who was and always will be his primary source of inspiration. Stay tuned, and “Let's Move!”