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**The Thesis Committee for Janice Pam Jeang
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**The Blind Leading the Blind: Frame Alignment and Membership
Meetness**

**APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

Supervisor:

Michael Young

Andres Villarreal

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Meetness**

by

Janice Pam Jeang, BS

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Abstract

The Blind Leading the Blind: Frame Alignment and Membership Meetness

Janice Pam Jeang, MA

The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

Supervisor: Michael Young

Membership in a social movement organization (SMO) and membership discourse provide space for participants to name and reconstitute their experiences, bodies, and self-images through an embodiment of organizational frames. This reconstitution is especially affirmed in the interaction of marginalized groups, such as individuals with disabilities, whom make up disability focused organizations and social movements. As a group with multiple intersectionalities, as well as an even smaller subsection of various marginalized populations, individuals with blindness face unique barriers when consideration of participants' identities and self-understandings is central in understanding entry as well as ongoing participation in organizations. Disability based organizations, represented by the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), must carefully frame the organizational membership of certain individuals whom could threaten cohesion through differing understanding of identities, not revolving around disability. This thesis is an examination of the organizational discourse and the "membership meetness" of participating persons in the NFB. Goffman's notion of "breaking frame"

theoretically informs this analysis of organizational discourse produced by the 'collective blind' in one of the oldest American disability social movement organizations to date. The NFB's attempt to mitigate the "broken frame" introduced by the incorporation of members whom are not seemingly suitable and do not self identify as blind, into an overwhelmingly blindness based enterprise is to strategically mend existing frames to reinterpret extant social norms. The purpose of this thesis is to use a grounded theory approach, to tease out how membership is *framed*. *In the NFB, frame alignment is accomplished by:* framing blindness through allies transformed as friends, framing blindness as a characteristic, framing blindness as respectability, and framing blindness through rhetorical humor in narrative. The above four frames to disability based social movements offers researchers the opportunity to understand how groups attempt to integrate into their activities members who lack "membership meetness" while simultaneously garnering support and advancing interests within the larger movement.

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INTRODUCTION

In the United States, the second half of the last century has been a time of dramatic social change. As a result of the social movements of ethnic and racial minorities, as well as feminist and gay rights, a multitude of civil rights movements have altered the ways in which society perceive and understand populations labeled as marginalized. These social movements raised consciousness, leading to the troubling of social dichotomies in American society.

The coordination of social movements or phenomena resembling them do not happen randomly. Said movements formulate and create organizations. Just as the representation of social movements are studied when occurring in nation states to provide more scholarship on the cause and effect of societal change happening outside institutionalized channels; so the social movement phenomena in organizations needs to be examined because they may be the cause and effect of emerging organizational and social change (Zald and Berger, 1978). Perhaps, no where is said social and organizational change more blatant than in the examination of rights of minority groups and populations considered to have multiple intersections of marginalization. It can be assumed that without the collectivity of social activists, minority views and voices can often be left without a space for collective action and mobilization.

Traditional paradigms for studying organizations—including population ecology (McKelvey and Aldrich 1983; McPherson 1984), network analysis (Galaskiewicz and Wasserman 1993; White 1992), organizational dramaturgy (Meyer and Rowan 1977), and "new institutionalism" (Powell and DiMaggio 1991)—commonly all adhere to a general and shared definition of organizations as "boundary maintaining, goal- directed, activity systems" where society and culture are socially reproduced (Perrow 1986). This

conception of formal organizations treats them as unitary actors rather than bundles of practices and routines negotiated and contested through the daily interaction of their members and leaders.

This paper will attempt to challenge the reification of the above generalizations, and suggest an alternative conceptual framework by focusing on the narratives, meanings, and discourse through which disability based organizations and SMO's are framed and socially constructed. An elaboration of the paper will depict the NFB's understanding of the ramifications of incorporating individuals with varying level of visual acuities into activities of a blindness focused SMO. I suggest that the organizational elite of the NFB attend to the ways in which participants mobilize symbols, identities, and resources in creating organizational structures and power (Burawoy 1979). Close examinations of rough framing contradictions in "membership meetness" and the creation of mechanisms of monitoring/ maintaining an examination of organizationally produced discourse, is an attempt to rekey how group members with different interpretations of the organizational "philosophy", serve as a case by which to address the complexity of the incorporation of differently abled individual's into a disability SMO.

Firstly, through the paper, I contend that the incorporation of individuals with varying abilities (varying visual acuities) conditions a situation in which existing frames of the 'collective Blind' become no longer tenable and a "broken frame" ensues. I refer to this problematic situation as creating a "frame bind" for organizations. Broken frames must be reassembled and "re-keyed" before the membership at large, a process that consists of developing and re-working extant frames about "sighted" members to accommodate said membership. Secondly, I argue that this case study illustrates the ways in which the actions of movement participants who would otherwise be considered

deviant or problematic are managed before the public, a feature of social movements less often addressed by scholars. I suggest that “membership meetness,” a term I use to refer to the extent to which a participant in a SMO articulates the *propriety of their involvement*, a key feature of social movement dynamics. Membership meetness is especially relevant to those SMOs dealing with small and marginalized populations. The success at framing efforts in attracting diverse participants, some of whom may be incorporated into the organizational fold with greater ease than others, is especially important for these organization's sustainability.

In order to provide adequate context, a review of the literature on disability studies discourse and terminology is presented in appendix A of this paper, but will not be part of the actual literature review. An overview of the creation of the National Federation of the Blind, organizational goals, and a historical highlight on then collective movement of various individuals with blindness, to form the 'collective Blind is also provided in Appendix B.

BACKGROUND/LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the more recent social movements, which help to blur existing understandings of intersections of marginality, has been the disability rights movement recorded, in the literature, as beginning in the 1970s with the independent living movement. It is this movement, which is credited with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990.

Some noted works that document this movement include Barnartt and Scotch (2001), Scotch (2001). However, as contested by some other authors (Fleischer & Zames, 2001; Jernigan, 1999; Matson, 1990), this literature documenting the American disability rights movement often underemphasizes the fact that the movement of the organized blind started at the national level much earlier, around the 1940s. Authors like Shapiro (1993) and even to some extent Barnartt and Scotch (2001) as well as Scotch (2001) have focused primarily on the disability rights movement in the context of efforts directed toward passage of the ADA, but they fail to fully acknowledge the accomplishments of the movement of the organized blind. While theorizing the Minority Model, in which disabled people are considered as a minority group in the United States, Scotch (2001) made a slight reference to the movement of the organized blind. But his focus was primarily on the independent living movement led by the physically disabled in the 1960s and 1970s. Hence, by and large, there has been a lack of sufficient acknowledgement of the contribution of the movement of the organized blind dating back to the 1940s in the United States with the exception of the aforementioned small body of published literature on disability rights movement (Fleischer & Zames, 2001) and the literature published by the National Federation of the Blind (Jernigan, 1999; Matson, 1990; tenBroek & Matson, 1959).

It is worth noting that the above SMO lays the philosophical foundation for the social model of disability theory, before its birth in disability studies. The social model of disability does not look to the body of an individual with a disability as responsible for all of society's prejudices, stereotypes, and other understandings of "brokenness or helplessness" revolving around disability. According to the social model of disability, the true problem lies in external factors, such as the barriers constructed by the society in which individuals with disabilities live. This is synonymous to the model of disability as illustrated by the NFB's mission statement since the first national meeting in 1940: "...to achieve widespread emotional acceptance and intellectual understanding that the real problem of blindness is not the loss of eyesight but the misconceptions and lack of information which exist... support each other in times of failure, and to create imaginative solutions" (Mission Statement).

The emphasis upon self-advocacy, autonomy and self-actualization, demonstrated above builds the foundation on which the independent living movement was spawned, yet it reemphasizes the lack of sufficient acknowledgement of the contribution of the movement of the organized blind, not just chronologically, in the literature on the disability movement, but on a conceptual level as well. The activists of the SMO took matters into their own hands and launched several of their own newsletters and magazines to address this oversight, as well as a published history and other books on organizational "philosophy" through the National Federation of the Blind Press (Jernigan, 1999; Matson, 1990).

The organizational discourse of the NFB parallels that of much of the feminist theoretical literature on social movement organizations, wherein the textual analyses of relations provide insights into how the formal blueprints of organizations embody the majority experience, revealing how these relations are constructed, contested, or

renegotiated among members. By focusing on discursive practices, feminist scholars have advanced studies of organizational power by concentrating on revealing the masculinist assumptions that guide their operations. Dorothy Smith (1993) and Joan Acker (1991; Acker and Van Houten 1992), for example, examined how gender subtexts underpin the formal structures of organizations, leading to the social reproduction of patriarchy. Research within these various disciplines has assessed a variety of discursive forms used within organizations, including stories (Martin 1982; Rudy 1986), and professional discourse (Conrad and Schneider 1980; Emerson 1972).

Concerns with organizational language in the construction of identity and self-image have received significantly more attention among social movement theorists, culminating in the growth of frame analysis (Benford and Snow 2000; Noakes 2000; Snow et al. 1986). Frame analyses of recruitment and commitment have sought to ascertain the ways in which collective action frames enable mobilization (Gamson, Fireman, and Rytina 1982). More recent contributions to the frame analysis paradigm have been made by feminist scholars investigating the importance of marginalized individual characteristics, such as disability and gender, in collective action frames (Ashley and Olson 1998; Ferree and Merrill 2000; Noonan 1997). Frame analysis has been underused in the analysis of complex organizations, where consideration of participants identities and self-understandings is central in comprehending entry as well as ongoing participation in organizations.

The present thesis attends to this lacuna in SMO studies exploring the rhetorical practices and organizational frames that are used in one of the oldest disability based social movement organizations, the NFB. The analysis aims to demystify the ways in which disability advocacy organizations like the NFB attempt to reconcile any perceived inconsistencies (broken frames) between the doctrines/ beliefs of the SMO elite's and the

internalization of said organizational beliefs in the membership. Through the mechanism of organizational messages, the leaders of the NFB frame the various "ideals" of organizational values and beliefs into the framework of membership attainment and sustainability. The various frames are also interconnected to create a myriad of arenas to promote continuous growth of membership identity in both the SMO and in self-image.

This work investigates two interrelated questions: (1) What definitions and vocabularies of motivational frames are constructed by the organizational elite about member participation and individuals' "membership 'meetness" (i.e. the fitness and suitability/ legitimacy of membership as compared to an ideal) when reaching to recruit from the larger (total) population?

(2) How do organizational elites and members reconcile their own organizational 'membership meetness', taking into account the varying visual acuities and stigmas associated with a self identification and label of being considered "Blind"?

In 'real world' social settings, impairments, impairment effects and disablism are thoroughly intermeshed with the social conditions that bring them into being and give them meaning. The organizational frames of the NFB can be understood to be more crucial than that of other SMO's because it not only has to counter innate social prejudices and barriers against persons whom are blind, but to also 'broaden' the qualifications/ requirements in joining the membership. Frame analysis of the discourse of disability based SMO's offers researchers the opportunity to understand how groups attempt to integrate into their activities members who lack "membership meetness" while simultaneously garnering support and advancing interests within the larger population and movement.

FRAMING PROCESSES

Framing perspectives in social movement studies are especially well-suited to investigating the component dimensions of internal SMO policies and messages for incorporating individuals with disabilities into organizations: the challenges of crafting external policies regarding the participation of the disabled includes the methods in which organizations relay the membership of Blind persons to their respective publics and broader audiences. Developed in response to prevailing social movement theorization that focused on material resources acquired by and elusive to social movement actors, theories of framing sought to incorporate a much-neglected sense of culture, and its concomitant resources, into social movement analyses (Hart 1996). Erving Goffman's (1974) seminal study of how individuals come to comprehend their reality, and assess for themselves what constitutes meaning in a given situation, serves as the vehicle by which theorists endeavored to recognize the struggles of social movements to garner support and mobilize constituencies (Snow et al. 1986). Framing processes are invoked to unite social psychological factors operating at the individual level, as studied by collective behaviorists, with the bureaucratic and pragmatic factors operating at the organizational level of collective participation, issues raised by resource mobilization theorists. This process entails the articulation, through framing, of the connection between individual grievances and the actions of social movement organizations.

With the goal of effectively making connections that inspire individuals to join social movements and accord said movements with legitimacy, organizations must articulate collective action frames that accomplish three core framing tasks (Benford and Snow 2000). These tasks include identifying a problem in social life through diagnostic framing, 'locating a solution to the problem and requisite steps to facilitate its resolution through prognostic framing', and extending a call to arms to engage in the necessary

enumerated ameliorative actions through motivational framing (Hunt et al. 1994). For organizational leaders, the purpose of framing is to engage in maintenance of meaning for antagonists, constituents, and observers or bystanders (Snow & Benford 1988).

This theoretical tradition has helped spawn numerous empirical studies that conceptualize greater nuanced dimensions of collective action frames. Many social movement studies examine how organizations represent goals and activities to appeal to diverse prospective participants, referred to as frame alignment. The various types of frame alignment, specified by Snow et al. (1986) include frame bridging, amplification, extension, and transformation. Specific examples relevant to the topic of this study include Berbrier's (1998) examination of right-wing white supremacist organizations that engage in frame transformation by casting racist beliefs toward other groups within a cultural pluralist framework creating what Berbrier calls Bicultural-Pluralism. White supremacists argue that whites should have the right, as do many other groups, to express a love of their race and a desire to preserve it- a framing process designed to appeal to the more mainstream and moderate whites than generally serve as the loyal constituency of such groups (Berbrier 1998).

Researchers who seek to clarify the efficacy of frame alignment often examine how well a frame resonates within a given community. McCammon et al. (2001) find that SMOs most effectively advocated for women's suffrage by framing it as an opportunity for women, through voting, to protect their children and their home. Referred to as a 'separate spheres' frame, this argument situated women's suffrage in a traditional framework that simply re-appropriated widely held beliefs and resonated with the general public more effectively than did justice frames articulating equality between men and women.

Other social movement studies focus on the competitive environment, known as the social movement industry (SMI), within which organizations operate and the accompanying frame struggles that ensue (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Benford (1993) discusses what he dubs 'frame disputes' among factions within the Austin Peace Movement concerning nuclear disarmament. The discord engendered between radical and modest groups, which were most likely to engage in conflicts regarding interpretive issues, threatened the cohesiveness and efficacy of the general peace movement and indicated the serious stakes groups have in one another's representations of the movement.

The tendencies in social movement research, to examine framing processes between an organization and the public or between organizations in the same SMI, illuminate a gap in information, on another aspect of social framing: how organizations frame the actions of their own participants serving as organizational representatives for the movement, to the public. The components of effective frame alignment especially frame bridging; purportedly solicit the participation of assorted individuals who work on behalf of an organization. It might be regarded as inevitable that such broad-based recruitment would occasion instances in which some participants are regarded as more authentic, legitimate, or appropriate organizational members and representatives than others. I refer to member 'meetness' as the extent to which a social movement participant is deemed a legitimate organizational representative. In an extension of Goffman's (1979) notion of 'breaking frames', I argue that when organizations sponsor the participation of individuals regarded by the public as inappropriate members of the movement, organizations encounter an instance in which a prevailing frame cannot be applied, said organizations must consequently reassemble a new frame for their participation. The notion of 'breaking' implies that the applicability of a frame to the existing social

interaction is compromised and that frames have limits and must evolve to accommodate fluctuating social environments. To resolve a broken frame, 're-keying' of the situation must occur. This rekeying is the process of slightly altering the meaning of an activity. This delicate transformation utterly changes what it is a participant would say is 'going on' (Goffman 1974). Re-keying essentially articulates anew the meaning of a given activity such that an individual asks questions and creates meanings in a way that was not available in the context of another frame.

Broken frames are somewhat analogous to 'framing hazards,' which are risks associated with frame alignment that groups take to enhance their constituent body or reach distant groups to acquire adherents (Benford 1993b; Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 2000). Such risks might include over-extending a frame such that a SMO's goals are rendered too abstract and are trivialized. However, these hazards again refer to SMO framing of its activities to potential adherents and other SMOs in its organizational field. Membership meetness and broken frames refer to the very intimate interaction within the group itself. Katovich and Burns (2000) apply the notion of broken frames in their analysis of interactions between late night talk show hosts and invited guests who disrupt the customary interview style by cursing, making crude remarks, evading questions, or otherwise not being properly engaged in the conversation. The host manages the broken frame of the interaction before a studio audience (or an American society/ public) on behalf of his/her invited guest. The talk show host tweaks the framing of the situation, avoiding a frame hazard by reconstituting for the audience the improper interviewee by engaging in witty banter or matching the guest's crude behavior with his own. This alteration changes the expectations of the interaction and helps mitigate discord introduced by the broken frame (Katovich and Burns 2000). To explore the analytical

utility of understanding organizational challenges of low 'member meetness' as instances of a 'broken frame' ('frame trouble' or 'frame bind'), this research endeavor will examine the incorporation of individuals with a multitude of visual acuities into the nationwide disability movement of the organized Blind. Non-blind will be regarded as an instance of "the unmanageable" for organizations, which results in a broken frame. Goffman (1974) regards the human body, in particular, as that which "can fail to sustain the frame in which it finds itself." For example, when one finds something humorous and begins to uncontrollably laugh, we might say that the individual is "cracking up." In other words, his or her laughter has compromised our expectation of a emotionally controlled individual—he or she "breaks" the frame of individual self-composure. The inauguration of 'able' bodies into membership and advocacy roles in disability based social movement organizations thus can create a sense in which the body betrays the movement. The "original", once prevailing frames of blind members are no longer tenable to account for the participation of individuals with varying visual acuities, and some times no visual impairment at all. The frame for a purely blindness based membership is broken and, social movements must reassemble the pieces to furnish a new frame such that the activity of blindness and disability advocacy is re-keyed in ways that encourage the American public to embrace other understandings of participation in a self-labeled "organization *of* the Blind".

"Breaking frame" demands that drastic measures be taken to create a new, more suitable frame for a given activity, including an invocation of new values and/or the suppression or rejection of old meanings. According to Snow et al. (1986), organizations engage in drastic modifications to frame when "the programs, causes and values that some SMOs [social movement organizations] promote may not resonate with, and on

occasion may even appear *antithetical* to, conventional lifestyles or rituals and extant interpretive frames".

I argue that in order to portray an organizational identity which can be seen as counter to the (inherent bias in) primary framing of other movements on disabilities, and thus the majority perspective, the NFB elites must constantly monitor engendering frame troubles from the clash of members' acceptance of the organizational frame transformations. The annual discourse of the leadership is used to ensure that the disability SMO frames resonate, and is understood to fit the ideals of mainstream society, in order to reach a broader audience and potential membership, but also to provide more power to the general conceptualization of blindness/ disability. This in turn creates a constant frame bind for organizations of disabled individuals within an able-bodied society. I also contend that these various public declarations by organizational elites illustrate the ways in which the actions of movement participants who would otherwise be considered deviant or problematic are managed before the public, a feature of social movements less often addressed by scholars. I suggest that membership meetness', the term I use to refer to the extent to which a social movement participant is deemed a legitimate organizational representative, is a key feature of social movement dynamics. Membership meetness is especially relevant to those SMOs that have been successful at framing efforts by attracting diverse participants, some of whom may be incorporated into the organizational fold with greater ease than others.

This idea of 'membership meetness' is even more critical among organizations of individuals with blindness, being a marginalized population in multiple ways especially with additional frame-bind sensitivities between the multiethnic, multi-lingual and multi-capable make up of men and women with disabilities, as well as the incorporations of their sighted counterparts into a cohesive organization to society's perception. According

to Snow et al. (1986), organizations engage in drastic modifications to frame when the programs, causes and values that some SMO's [social movement organizations] promote may not resonate with, and on occasion may even appear antithetical to, conventional lifestyles or rituals and extant interpretive frames. As will be discussed, as the organization sponsors members whom are seen as lacking authentic membership meetness, the NFB leadership often allude to the importance and necessity of educational development and change as vital exalted and expected life stages, and reconstitute them in terms of organizational training and philosophy.

In order to understand why incorporating individuals with various visual acuities and varying viewpoints on Blindness and disablism may threaten to break a disability based social movement organization's prevailing frame, it is necessary to review the organizational environment in which the NFB operates and highlight their official, canonical stances regarding the varying membership incorporation into the movement of the 'organized Blind'. Greater detail is provided in Appendix B of this paper, to expand on this.

METHODOLOGY

As examined in the foregoing discussion of previous studies of frame analysis and SMO's, and the linkages between organizational language and identity, scholars have conceptualized the participation of blind individuals in society as a personal product of information management assessed by managing stigma, and playing up / enacting identities with certain salience versus that of others- such as that of avowed and ascribed characteristics (Goffman 1963). The disability studies perspective have looked at how structural barriers create models to analyze disabilities which sustain the biological vs. social dualism between the medical and social perspectives on disability. Neither approach has systematically studied how organizations, through their rhetoric, and materials, frame organizational disability based membership and participation in their advocacy and mobilization operations to the publics. Only occasionally are references made towards the role of the organized blind, led by the National Federation of the Blind, in the spawning of the disability rights movement.

The absence of studies that directly examine the disability rights movement and its social movement organizations, is primarily an issue of the newness/ fledgling status of the movement (Barnartt & Scotch, 2001; Scotch, 2001). Researchers studying the history and the mobilization of individuals with disabilities also focused primarily upon specific definitions of disability, of which some may be more recognizable and visible, such as individuals in wheelchairs, when compared to others. Thus resulting in the neglect of the contributions of the Blind.

This endeavor forthrightly acknowledges that not all blindness organizations, nor by any means all disability organizations, currently operating in American society are

addressed. The organization of the NFB was carefully chosen for being the original and oldest movement of the organized Blind. The current analysis seeks to outline the theoretical components to a more systematic inquiry into the framing strategies of the leadership operating in different political and social contexts and in contrasting Presidential periods, as well as over time. The coding of Presidential speeches from different leaders, operating through various periods of time, permits comparative analysis of framing strategies emanating from several types of leadership goals/ perspectives. Speeches from the NFB Presidents were transcribed from the original audio recordings, starting from 1940 to the beginning of the millennium. The translations were done in full by the researcher. The transcripts from the late nineties onwards were transcribed by the organization, with transcription checks performed with the audio recordings by the author. Please see Table 1 in the appendix for a summary of the various timelines of the different organizational presidents and any overlaps.

In order to outline the discourses propagated by the NFB, this paper utilizes a slightly modified version of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method of grounded theory (Merriam 2009). The use of qualitative research software created a scaffold on which the rest of the coding was performed.

Following detailed transcription, initial/ open, focused, axial, and selective/ theoretical coding were undertaken to elucidate connections between different discourses and frames (Saldana, 2012). Master categories were developed and constitute the findings that follow (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

The following analysis represents the framing techniques utilized by the three primary Presidents of the National Federation of the Blind, in their keynote addresses from 1940 to the present. Each speech took place as the final address during the concluding banquet of the national Convention of the National Federation of the Blind.

The sixty-three speeches span from the first national convention in the summer of 1940 to that of the summer of 2012. Please see Table 1 in the appendix for the authors and the timeline of the NFB leadership speeches.

FINDINGS: DRAWING FROM THE ‘WIDER POPULATION’ CREATES FRAME BINDS

As an organization of ‘Blind’ persons, the NFB deals with several frame binds, when recruiting members whom do not self identify as Blind. The way in which membership is framed amongst the organization’s membership whom are labeled as blind, or “totally” blind, must be rekeyed to accommodate both sighted advocates for the blind, and individuals whom self identify as high or low partials or as ‘visually impaired”, the labels applied to individuals with a visual acuity of 20/400 or less. These individuals are [considered] legally blind, but still have enough useable or residual vision, so as to not readily self identify as being blind.

The organizational 'philosophy', also known as the frame of the ideal membership of the NFB, will be addressed and, in turn, four non-blind frames will follow to illustrate how the broken frame is ameliorated. The strategic membership framing by the leadership of the NFB must be re-keyed to accommodate the sighted advocates into the movement of the ‘organized Blind’, as well as addressing the framing of organizational and membership unity, targeting those with partial vision whom are hesitant to identify with the Blind, to illustrate how the frame bind and resulting broken frame is mitigated. The amelioration of the NFB's framing of membership of individuals with disabilities and individuals whom are blind requires careful strategizing, as this population are highly stigmatized. Central to the framing of the organizational member, and to provide all members with this idea of “membership meetness”, is the notion of transformation, the implications of which will be addressed in detail in the discussion section.

FRAMING BLINDNESS TO ALLIES INCORPORATED AS FRIENDS

When navigating through a visually oriented world, the leadership of the NFB take extreme care to not exclude the membership of sighted allies, while still maintaining a boundary separating the "us" identity of the organization, from society. The tension also exists within the NFB itself, creating various overlapping frames. The acceptance of each additional rekeying is directly related to the closeness of a member, their "meetness", and to the elite of the Federation. All seven decades of Presidential speeches are generously sprinkled with references to the "basic assumption that sighted people generally have boundless good will toward the blind and an utterly false conception of the consequences of blindness. "It is their [the sighted individuals] misconception about its [blindness'] nature which creates the social and economic handicap of blindness" (1961).

Frame bridging is utilized to tap into networks of like-minded individuals, with an interest in social justice with leanings towards intellectual development and growth, to encourage and rally allies. The idea that it is not blatant discrimination, or prejudice that is most commonly the cause of the various barriers to Blind individuals, but the education, knowledge and philosophical/ ideological understanding of the members of the sighted community at large, is repeatedly addressed throughout the decades of speeches. The acknowledgement of social structures as the true barrier to equal access, as opposed to the physical barriers of blindness, or disability as described above and by Jernigan, create the differences between the social and medical models of disability.

To place responsibility for it [inequity] upon the sighted is not to speak in terms of blame or recrimination...overcoming the handicap [of blindness] is the function of rehabilitation...On the contrary, too often rehabilitation officers have themselves subscribed to the conviction of the incompetence of the blind...The

handicap consists mainly of the misconceptions of the sighted about the physical disability which result in social exclusion (1955)

Through the positioning of the general sighted member of the community as well-meaning, but perhaps ignorant of the many micro-nuances of blindness and disability, the NFB is able to bridge the gap, minimize, or even completely negate overt hostile discourse, name calling, or engaging in the blame game. As a result, the NFB leaders are not readily accused of being organizers of a radical fundamentalist organization, when the primary messages to the sighted community are the goals to enhance the “...education of the sighted—parents, teachers, employers, and the community...” (1951).

Those, whom are willing to educate themselves further into the truth and lived experiences of Blind individuals, continue to validate themselves as valuable members to the organizational cause.

...we have become aware of our needs, our potential, and our identity. An increasing number of the sighted have also become aware and now march with us, but the mass of the public, a majority of the media, and most of the social service agencies still think in pre-Federation terms. (1974).

The purpose-filled rekeying and subsequent lens of viewing society as inherently good, and compassionate, provides a space for individuals to think more kindly towards the Blind, as knowledge and information are necessary components of life for those individuals whom self identify as forward-thinkers” or as “social justice seekers”. As these individuals are constantly on the search for a greater understanding, the organization is thus capable of providing educated individuals with additional information and an elite feeling of sense of self. The identity and sense of group selection

bridges the gap for those sighted members “in the know” towards a “deeper look at the daily rounds ” and lived experience of the lives of the Blind (Goffman 1963).

What I have said so far will illustrate the widespread misconceptions about the nature of the physical handicap of blindness. If sighted people find it hard to get an accurate notion of what blindness is in its relatively obvious physical aspects, how much more must they misapprehend its subtler psychological, social, and economic ramifications? It may, therefore, be worthwhile to try to clear up some of these misconceptions...for us to tell the story of blindness as we live it daily...knowing full well that the sighted community bears towards us nothing but the best will in the world and the most generous impulses...” (1948).

The careful statements of the organizational elites, to portray the majority of society in terms of a well-meaning and open-minded community, ensure that the majority group does not feel alienated from the goals of the movement. It is also capable of providing those whom are willing to put more time and effort into the movement, a chance to self-select and remove themselves from the generalized “ignorance” of societal misconceptions, and become an “insider” when it comes to the lives and experiences of the blind. Thusly, through education, knowledge and experience, sighted individuals move from being understood as empathetic towards the movement of the organized Blind, to forming the first concentric circle of membership.

We know that with training and opportunity we can compete on terms of absolute equality with the sighted, and we also know that the sighted (with education and correct information) can come to accept us for what we are—ordinary human beings, neither especially blessed nor especially cursed--able to make our own way and pay our own tab. (1975).

The NFB’s usage of frame bridging represent the movement' of the organized blind’s effort to incorporate sighted participants by extending the boundaries of the frame

of membership meetness to encompass and/ or include the views, interests, and sentiments of the well-educated, open-minded sighted community. Stating that both the sighted and the blind populations “with education and knowledge” can build upon a foundation of mutual understanding. Thusly, providing an increased sense of humanity and unity to the members involved in the organization.

FRAMING: CREATING UNITY AMONG THE BLIND

Achieving unity and group cohesion among an organized movement of the Blind includes not only drawing membership from the sighted public at large, but also in attracting members whom might be labeled by society and various communities as “blind”, but do not self-identify with the stigmatized label, because they are only legally so. (*For a more in-depth description of the legal definitions of blindness and what it means to be "legally blind" or "visually impaired"- along with a description of the cleavage resulting from differences between the labels and those associated, please see Appendix 3*) The strategy of the leadership of the National federation of the Blind to the divide between individuals with "visual impairments" those with “low vision” and those whom are considered “blind”, can be understood as a philosophical rekeying of the way in which the word “blind” is fundamentally defined. The two-pronged process of the NFB’s framing of blindness will be described below, and in the subsequent section.

FRAMING: BLINDNESS AS A CHARACTERISTIC MINIMIZING STIGMA

In order to address the division problem born through reflections of the negative stereotypes and stigmas related to that of being blind, the many individuals with partial vision’ or a "visual impairment" refuse to be identified as being blind. These individuals would rather endeavor to pass as sighted, often working against the efforts of the

National Federation of the Blind, as an organization. The undermining of the NFB is accomplished through a framing of the Blind, including that of being regarded as incompetent, dependent, deviant and subhuman/ subnormal. Yet, the leaders of the NFB frame these negative portrayals as optimistic opportunities to raise ambitions. These are thusly rekeyed as points around which actions are rallied, errors corrected and the Blind united:

For all time blind people have been regarded as dependent, incompetent, and subnormal—some would even describe us as subhuman. However, we know better than to accept such a description of us, for it is false. We have decided to correct the error of the authors who tell us that we are base and inhuman, of those rehabilitation officials who write off 70 percent of us as fundamentally incompetent, of the newspaper reporters who tell us that our lives are empty and meaningless, and of the amusement park operators who believe that we can't even ride a roller coaster. We have made this decision because we know the strength which is within us, we share the spirit that is part of us, and we feel the determination to create the factors that will shape the future.

Who can tell us what our lives will become? Nobody can do this except us. There are those who would like to dismiss us, but we will be heard. There are those who would like to instruct us, but from our experience we have gained more information than they can hope to accumulate. There are those who would like to control us, but if they try, they will do so at their peril. Partners we seek from every aspect of public and private life, but those who would seek to dictate to us what our lives should be will be tolerated not at all.

As we face the struggles of the time to come, we know with absolute certainty that we will take whatever action is necessary to confront those who would stop our progress or belittle our ambitions. We will make whatever sacrifice is necessary; we will pay whatever price is required. We will demand the equality that must and will be ours, and we will never cease our efforts until we have it. We have the will, we have the strength, and we have the optimism. The future belongs to us; we will make it our own! (2008).

The subtle amplification and reinforcement of beliefs or to change beliefs through rekeying and education on what it means to be blind, by the blind. The assertion that only those whom have first hand experience with blindness can speak to what blindness is, or

is not, builds upon the previous premises that blindness and the rehabilitation of blindness are required to educate not only sighted friends and members, but the blind consumers about the social-structural barriers. This emphasis is in line with the social cultural model on disability espoused by the literature, and it can be hypothesized that the movement of the organized blind helped create a framework for said model. “The primary task of vocational rehabilitation, as I have said, is the overcoming of the social handicap--not the physical condition...” (1955).

The “physical condition of blindness” is tenuously balanced as a critical variable encapsulating “membership meetness” for the National Federation of the Blind--not only as an attribute that lends itself towards standpoint theory as a methodology of rekeying of power relations with that of the general public; and as educational knowledge transformation for sighted and blind members alike. Thusly, down playing the salience of blindness, from the stereotype of overwhelming tragedy to a physical characteristic is a form of persuasive communication. It is through this consensus mobilization, that blindness can be framed to a characteristic equated to a mere nuisance:

One prominent authority recently said, Loss of sight is a dying. When, in the full current of his sighted life, blindness comes on a man, it is the end, the death, of that sighted life... It is superficial, if not naive, to think of blindness as a blow to the eyes only, to sight only. It is a destructive blow to the self-image of a man... a blow almost to his being itself.

This is one view, a view held by a substantial number of people in the world today. But it is not the only view. In my opinion it is not the correct view. What is blindness? Is it a "dying"?

No one is likely to disagree with me if I say that blindness, first of all, is a characteristic. But a great many people will disagree when I go on to say that blindness is only a characteristic. It is nothing more or less than that. It is nothing more special, or more peculiar, or more terrible than that suggests. When we understand the nature of blindness as a characteristic—a normal characteristic like hundreds of others with which each of us must live—we shall better understand the real need to be met by services to the blind, as well

By definition a characteristic—any characteristic—is a limitation. A white house, for example, is a limited house; it cannot be green or blue or red; it is limited to being white (1963).

Various real-life examples of how blindness is over-emphasized in the public eye have been contextualized in comparisons to the generalized public perspective, and the physical attribute/ characteristic of blindness framed as one's own characteristic of empowerment and capability. "Sometimes people ask me how I approach blindness. It is as much a part of me as dozens or hundreds of other characteristics. I don't forget it, but I don't concentrate on it either..." (2009)

Yet, to the general sighted public (and to those with the disability of blindness) the characteristic of blindness is still entangled with bias. This is indicative of the above speech where much like individuals whom are too tall are bald or are left-handed etc... The various physical nuisances listed, are similar to that of blindness. Each President of the Federation reiterates the basic premises: "The real problem of blindness is not the loss of eyesight. The real problem is the misunderstanding and lack of information, which exist. If a blind person has proper training and...opportunity, blindness is only a physical nuisance." 1970.

The idea that with proper training and opportunity, blindness can be reduced to a mere physical nuisance is one that is repeated through time. Each leader of the organization personalized the foundational frame that blindness is a characteristic, much like any other:

If one has never learned effective alternative techniques and if one has always depended on vision, then vision—even very poor or painful vision--often seems the easier and certainly more obvious choice. Family and friends reinforce this

tendency every time they urge the person not to act blind I because, after all, he or she can still see something.

Recognizing these pressures, experienced members of the Federation understand the importance of encouraging those with vision problems to get to know able blind people who are comfortable using the alternative skills of blindness. It isn't that we prefer blindness; we just prefer efficiency, confidence, comfort, and success. For almost everyone with less than 100 percent of normal vision, this means using some combination of blindness skills and remaining, genuinely usable vision. Working out the combination is time-consuming and often emotionally demanding.

When members of the National Federation of the Blind say that we are changing what it means to be blind, we are in part dreaming of and working toward a time in which efficient blindness skills are not assumed to be inferior, when vision, and all that goes with it, is not held to be more virtuous, only more common. We are working toward a time when children with significantly compromised vision and adults losing sight will face life free of our millennia-long prejudice against tactile exploration and auditory learning and find it easier to embrace the learning of such skills. When all people accept the challenge of sharpening all their senses instead of concentrating on visual data only, the world will indeed be a richer and more interesting place for all of us, and those with partial vision will move more easily and naturally from visual to nonvisual ways of accomplishing the business of living. Then we will truly have changed what it means to be blind. (1975)

Each Presidential speech personalizes the frame to their own narrative. The various leaders of the NFB reiterate the philosophical principle that proper rehabilitation, and training in what is dubbed the "skills of blindness", is necessitated in order to live with said characteristic and not be debilitated by it.

I believe that blindness has no more importance than any of a hundred other characteristics and that the average blind person is able to perform the average job in the average career or calling, provided (and it is a large proviso) he is given training and opportunity (1963).

The discourse of the National Federation of the Blind uses the emphasis of the physical characteristics of blindness as a way to debunk the medicalization of disabilities.

Blind bodies are illuminated as counter discursive to the medical discourse and stereotypes that attempt to contain them. These bodies refine, complicate, or defy conventional bodies and preconceived, prejudicial and discriminatory bodies of thought. Blind bodies influence and trouble social languages just as ideologies. The amplification of beliefs and frame alignment created throughout is one of the most impactful in the toolkit of the NFB.

FRAMING BLINDNESS AS RESPECTABILITY: UNITY WITHOUT STIGMA

The second sequence in realigning/ rekeying of blindness through redefinition involves perceiving blindness as dignity instead of a stigma. This is an extension of the rekeying by organization elites, of blindness redefined as dignity. The organizational leaders utilize the pride many individuals feel as part of an organization and movement, and incorporates it into the greater understanding in a complementary context that it is respectable to be blind, and honed towards a call to action: “We never quit; we never give up; we never stop. We know it is respectable to be blind, and...insist that others recognize this. If...not, they will meet the force of the blind organized to take collective action...” (2001).

Membership meetness is thusly framed through willingness to become demonstrative about the reality of blindness. The educations about the truths of blindness are for the members of the NFB to illuminate to society. This is especially relevant to the membership of the organization to the national leadership provides a salience to their redefinition of blindness, to the membership at large. Consequently, the need for members to remember that society, sighted and blind individuals alike, can become educated, provide a platform for empowerment to the SMO members to stay level-headed when not in the presence of like-minded individuals. “We know that with reasonable

opportunity we can compete on terms of full equality in society, and we also know that with reasonable opportunity the sighted can come to accept us for what we are.” (1988)

It is the mission of the organization to pass along the knowledge of blindness and its definition, as the Blind to the communities in which members live perceives it. The intensity of the momentum of the movement of the organized blind lies in the member’s ability to illustratively demonstrate the dignity of being Blind, through their actions and lived experiences. “He is not content to be cared for and supported by custodians; the free man demands the opportunity for self-care and self-support (1964).

At the crux of the Federation’s demands for autonomy and the opportunities for freedom lies the implication of respectability of blindness. Public attitudes about the blind too often become the attitudes of the blind. The blind tend to see themselves as others see them. They too often accept the public view of their limitations and thereby do much to make those limitations a reality. Only those members able to truly internalize the philosophical dictates of the NFB acquire the skills to not succumb to society’s stereotypes. It is through the keynote address and the various media outlets that the leadership of the Federation are able to help scaffold these beliefs, and reinforce The imperative for Blind individuals to maintain faith in their own self-worth indicative the need to understand the inherent differences between an internalized trait (avowed) or externally (ascribed) enforced ideology.

For thousands of years false and downbeat words have been forced upon the blind—words like wretched, purposeless, and unfortunate. But we are no longer willing to abide such labels. We are not inarticulate. We will write our own story and use our own words. Our thoughts will be the dreams of tomorrow, and the language will say: success, independence, and freedom. (1989)

Building on the premise that with an opportunity, much like other marginalized groups, Blind individuals can acquire equality, independence and success, builds the foundation premise that with education, step-by-step, the misinformation about blindness can be corrected. It is only through a dignified diligence that the word blind will no longer be defined in a negative fashion, instead understood to demand respect. The call for regard and worth that a capable Blind individual deserves, underscores the call for equality and recognition where recognition is due. Admiration and respectability are in many a broader reaching extension of the frame that with proper training and opportunity, blindness can be reduced to a mere physical nuisance.

For all time blind people have been regarded as dependent, incompetent, and subnormal—some would even describe us as subhuman. However, we know better than to accept such a description of us, for it is false. We have decided to correct the error...because we know the strength which is within us, we share the spirit that is part of us, and we feel the determination to create the factors that will shape the future.

Who can tell us what our lives will become? Nobody can do this except us. There are those who would like to dismiss us, but we will be heard. There are those who would like to instruct us, but from our experience we have gained more information than they can hope to accumulate. There are those who would like to control us, but if they try, they will do so at their peril. Partners we seek from every aspect of public and private life, but those who would seek to dictate to us what our lives should be will be tolerated not at all. (2008)

Yet, the leaders of the NFB are also forthright in admitting that although deserving regard and respect sometimes, blindness is also still a form of limitation. However, the organizational elite refused to place emphasis upon blindness as said limitation. The emphasis of the presidential speeches is upon how many other

characteristics, especially avowed characteristics, can also be understood as nuisances and a point of contention.

If blindness is a limitation (and, indeed, it is), it is so in quite the same way as innumerable other characteristics which human flesh is heir to. Often when I have advanced this proposition, I have been met with the response, "But you can't look at it that way. Just consider what you might have done if you had been sighted and still had all the other capacities you now possess."

"Not so," I reply. "We do not compete against what we might have been, but only against other people as they are, with their combinations of strengths and weaknesses, handicaps and limitations." If we are going down that track, why not ask me what I might have done if I had been born with Rockefeller's money, the brains of Einstein, the physique of the young Joe Louis, and the persuasive abilities of Franklin Roosevelt? (And do I need to remind anyone, in passing, that FDR was severely handicapped physically?) I wonder if anyone ever said to him: "Mr. President, just consider what you might have done if you had not had polio!" (1963)

FRAMING BLINDNESS THROUGH RHETORICAL HUMOR IN NARRATIVE. ACTION/REACTION IN THE RIDICULOUS AND ABSURD

The leaders of the NFB rekey the narratives about the Blind, from the public at large, to reinterpret past and future, and provide meaning by locating events in an unfolding or evolving story. Through the telling of the organizational "becoming", identity is transformed and recreated. Similar to the strategy of civil rights narratives, the Blind do not always stress clarity and agency, but rather being swept up in a force larger than oneself. "It is not the blindness which should be mourned but the social attitudes...Second-class status and deep despair come not from lack of sight but from lack of opportunity, lack of acceptance, lack of equal treatment under the law..." (1975)

Revealing through narrative humor, public attitudes about the blind the organizational leadership are able to highlight and uncover the social construction of

"ablest" discourse, which discounts bodily similarities for emphasis on differences and variation.

...article captioned, 'Woman Opens Cut, Bleeds to Death'...'A 59-year-old woman bled to death in her home Wednesday after she accidentally reopened an incision she received while undergoing kidney dialysis...{the} County Medical Examiner said she did not realize how much blood she was losing because she was nearly blind.' The human body contains several quarts of blood. Do you really think an individual (sighted or blind) would bleed quart after quart and not know it because of blindness? (1980)

As an organizational rekeying of the general communities perceptions through humor, the elites of the National Federation of the Blind negate any rhetoric, which could increase society's intolerance for disability by disallowing assumptions and fears about blind people to remain unchallenged. The portrayal of these challenges through humor, encourages a satirical look at societies many "oddities", which in part helps remind the general public of other instances in history where "mistakes" and "misassumptions" were promoted due to misinformation. Critiques by the leadership rekeys the "given frames of the media" and challenges the collective representation of disability, and it exposes through the use of humor and narrative, it as an oppressive system rather than the "natural" order of bodily difference.

A report circulated by Fox News in May of this year describes an incident in which a blind man was refused the opportunity to ride on a roller coaster because of blindness. The report says that the blind man had already ridden the roller coaster three times that day. When the owner of the amusement park discovered that the blind man was seeking a fourth ride, management refused. Management personnel said that safety requires a person to assume certain positions during a roller coaster ride. These positions can be anticipated only by those who can see well enough during the course of the ride that they can anticipate the twists and drop-offs before they happen.

The denial of the opportunity to participate in the experience of riding a roller coaster is an example of the idiocy that blind people often face. The blind man in question had already ridden the roller coaster three times without incident or injury. The owner of the amusement park ignored the evidence. He had already decided that blind people were not welcome. Evidence was irrelevant. Of course evidence is not required from the sighted. If sighted people need not provide any evidence of their capacity to ride, blind people should not be expected to provide it either. (2008)

Understanding that the frames of SMO's must be relevant to the realities of the participants and inform them. Relevancy can be constrained by empirical credibility or testability, it relates to participant experience, and has narrative fidelity. Investigating Through narrative humor, Public attitudes about the blind the president, uses personal narrative to further drive “home” the illustration of the power of absurd misinformation and misunderstanding towards uncovering the social construction of ablest actions and discourse:

In the early 1980s I was conducting a law practice...I traveled to my office, very often by bus, and each evening I returned home, using the same method...One summer evening I was standing at a bus stop... dressed in a suit... I had a briefcase with me... I was also carrying a can of coffee. I had run out...at home, and I needed this can...A person came up to me and peered at me from one side. Then...walked around to my other side and peered again. I was standing next to the pole that had the bus stop sign on it. My briefcase was sitting on the ground next to my left leg, I was leaning on my cane, and I had the can of coffee in my hand. After I had been examined from both sides, a man’s voice said to me, “Where’s the slot?”
“What?” I asked.
To which my companion responded, “Where do you put the money?”
Although I was startled by these questions, I realized suddenly that he wanted to put some change into the canister I was holding. He thought I was begging. What else would a respectably dressed blind man with a briefcase and a coffee can be doing?
“This is my coffee,” I said, and my companion left (2006).

It is through personal narratives that the elite of the organization can hold themselves up as trailblazers, role models, reminding the membership that many believe that blindness matters more than reality would suggest. Validating that all have let fear of the unknown control us, and then attributed the embarrassment, awkwardness, and even fear to blindness:

The California Tax Board's notion that the signature of a blind person is different from the signature of a sighted person (and presumably less legible) is widely held. Probably most people (including many in this room) would accept it without question, simply as a matter of common sense. Not long ago I stood at a counter in a bank. I signed a document. My sighted associate said to the teller, "Maybe I had better print his name below the signature, so that you can read it." Then, my associate put her signature on the document. After a moment of embarrassed hesitation, the teller said, "Perhaps you wouldn't mind printing your name, too. I can't read your signature any better than his." My associate has perfect eyesight. If she had been blind, her unreadable signature would have been attributed to blindness. Mine might have been due to haste, lack of attention, poor training, or any of a dozen other things, but it was automatically chalked up to blindness. Moreover, the bank teller probably surrounded the incident with connotations of inferiority, and I doubt that she changed her opinion because of the actions of my associate—or, for that matter, even remarked or remembered them. Blind people cannot write legibly. Sighted people must print their names for them. She has proof. (1981)

Keeping up with the times, the Presidential speeches of the NFB remind those “in the know” that the popular myths, such as the one above- are still alive and well. The masses believe that inventing technology is good, and inventing technology to help the blind is even better. The elites of the organization now urge the membership to consider the results when the inventor is completely without information about the blind—the people for whom the invention is intended. The critique from the organization troubles the generalized collective depiction of disability, revealing through the use of the goofy

and funny the same oppressive structure of beliefs- blindness creates a sub humanity rather than a natural order to bodily difference.

An article entitled "Good Vibrations: Shoe Helps Blind to Walk"... describing the project to create shoes for the blind that incorporate vibrating motors. Do these motors help the blind walk faster or jump higher? No, their objective is more limited. The motors vibrate when the shoes get near something that the wearer might bump into... invented so that blind people would no longer need to carry white canes. Some of what the article tells us is so bizarre that it is hard to believe...Here are excerpts:

The shoes look innocuous enough, black with wires and gadgets glued and Velcroed across the faces.

But put them on, and walk around, and suddenly the walls of the shoes begin to shake. Get a little closer to that couch, and they shake faster. Move around, and the vibrations move to different parts of the shoe. Designed...as a way to assist blind people, the shoes work by transferring objects from a visual plane to a vibrating one.

The infrared sensors can detect things from a meter away...For a blind person, the new and improved shoes could provide a way to get around without a walking stick or seeing-eye dog.

Then, rather than using a cane...a blind person could rely on the shoes to tell him where a doorway or the coffee table is located... the article continues] {future plans include the creation of} some kind of sensor that would detect when the wearer is walking down stairs. Currently, drops in elevation are not registered on the shoes. [Although they may be registered on the blind person, especially if they happen unexpectedly. I admit I added this last bit myself.] The images portrayed give a whole new meaning to the expression "shaking in your shoes."

But I think this inventor has only scratched the surface. What might blind people learn from expanding this technology to other items of clothing and to other parts of the body? The vibrating hat, the vibrating shirt, the vibrating pair of trousers might all be employed. In an information-rich environment, the blind person might jiggle all over, wearing the innovative vibrosuit for the blind... What a ridiculous bunch of nonsense! Has this engineer met any blind people? Has he formed the opinion that we don't already know where the couch and the coffee table are in our own houses? Does he think we are idiots? ...we will tell him in no uncertain terms that he must not foist upon us his ignorance or prejudice. We need new technologies, but not vibrating shoes. We have already found the couch, and we are now looking for something else--something like business success, political capacity, or high adventure (2004).

The comedic, humorous, and sometimes droll Critique challenges our collective representation of disability, and it exposes through the use of jokes and narrative, it as an disempowering oppressive system rather than a natural difference in the body. The social/cultural model comes from a location of the disability discourse used by the National Federation of the Blind within the presidential narratives. The elite discourse uncovers perspectives that prove valuable for gaining knowledge about body-self impressions and social ideologies that trap personal and organizational identity. Investigating Through narrative witticisms, the organizational leadership are able to highlight and uncover the social construction of "ablest" discourse, and an ideological premise that discounts body variation. It becomes highlighted that different bodies require and create new modes of representation, as symbolic expressions and as treatments of humanity.

RESULTS/DISCUSSION: HUMOR IN NARRATIVE, EDUCATION, AND REDEFINITION AS TRANSFORMATIVE

The above frames of the organized Blind, as an disability based SMO-- which include re-educating misconceptions among sighted allies, de-stigmatizing blindness as a characteristic; and as respectability, and re-narrating public prejudices as comedy, together serve a common function: to reconstitute, and thusly broaden, the meaning of the word Blind and the members whom make up a movement of organized 'Blind' individuals, for the members of the NFB, as well as, the population at large. This is especially necessary, in light of the "broken frames resulting from a seemingly narrow scope of individuals whom are willing to identify as Blind. In a limited understanding of an organization of the Blind, being framed only for those whom are understood to be blind, cannot be accorded legitimacy when applied to sighted individuals, nor that of individuals with residual or usable vision, e.g. those whom self-identify as being visually impaired. The inability to amass implicit consent for a normative status of being 'Blind', as framed by the NFB would result in an inability, for the federation of the Blind, to survive as a social movement, or as an organization.

Through re-keying and constituting afresh the notion of Blindness for all visual acuities, the NFB reconstitutes the meaning of Blindness, and the Blind. *Through a framework of no longer being identified as stigmatized or synonymous to that of lacking in perception, but a characteristic firmly based in knowledge, education, and solidly grounded in capability and respectability, the broken frames are transformative symbolically.* The reassembly of ability based frames broken by the incorporation of individuals with and without disabilities into roles as social/ organizational trail blazers and activists *transformed the membership of the NFB* into symbolic capital against the prejudices and stereotypes of ablest beliefs and discourse. The elite of the National

Federation of the Blind demonstrate that any average individual (no matter his/ her visual acuity), with the correct philosophical understanding and educational information about blindness, can strive to achieve “membership meetness”. As a member of the organization a force becomes solidified, as long as the membership of the NFB continues to buy into the organizational framework and provide it legitimacy.

The frames explored here demonstrate the NFB leadership’s active redefinition of society’s commonly only surface-level understandings of the beliefs, and values of the Blind. These framing strategies, as utilized by the leadership of the NFB, serve multiple functions that include lending enhanced potency to organizational operations, expanding potential bases of recruitment, appealing to audiences geographically distant from, and potentially financially influential to the movement, and, perhaps most importantly, re-assembling a broken frame to justify the membership of individuals with seemingly low “membership meetness” (i.e. in this case individuals with varying visual acuities, in an organization of the Blind). Framing is essential to incorporating varying individuals with various disabilities and locations on the visual spectrum, into blindness and disability based.

With so many varying organizations, each devoted to its own unique disability, not only will the ability to draw larger numbers impact the advancement of social movements of the “disabled”, but also the solidarity among the differing groups. It is important to note that though such marginalized organizations may be considered as special interest, or fringe groups in the main publics, they still constitute, for many of the arenas in which they operate, political actors who rely on public support for social legitimacy. In so far as these groups constitute a form of representation within the political arena, there will remain strong incentives to frame participation that may be controversial or problematic, in innovative ways.

CONCLUSION

As the field of disability studies inevitably grows, scholars must contend with new challenges of disability organizational flexibility/ malleability and move beyond problematic analyses of individual motivation or narrowly conceived understandings of the impacts of organizational strategies only among those with disabilities. The foregoing examination demonstrates the saliency of framing social movement tactics, resiliency, and sensitivity to its environment and constituencies. The notion that social movement members are also organizational representatives amplifies the extent to which “membership meetness” is likely to become a critical concern for precisely those “marginalized” movements whom *are perceived as* successful in framing. As more and more individuals seek membership, incorporation of diverse, potentially unsuited, backgrounds become part of the movement and organizational strategies in the process of membership and organizational framing.

Given that this study is limited by both sample size and available data (provided the researchers use of the language, rhetoric and discourse only specific to the NFB can impact the efficacy of the foregoing frames is ambiguous. This can also be understood as a weakness of social movement scholarship more generally (Benford 1997). However, this examination’s extension of Goffman’s “broken frame” and an appeal to investigate more closely internal dynamics of membership meetness attempts does fall into the shortcoming of studies of larger SMO’s, that of social movement scholarship referred to by Benford (1997) as an “elite bias.” Social movement scholars methodologically prioritize interviews with activist leaders or examine organizationally produced documents such that analyses of frames focus primarily on the framing constructions of elites about the organizations to which they belong. Although falling into such common

shortcomings, it is the attempt of this paper, however, to highlight a unique issue of SMO's serving small, marginalized and often ignored populations. Membership diversity, and associated stigmatization and preconceived misconceptions among the participants, and the public as a whole. This suggests that such individuals (or bodies) can be especially disruptive to prevailing organizational frames. The analysis of the organizational rekeying of frame binds and broken frames, as performed by the NFB, offers a way to consider how framing with unique identity and diversity quotients within a movement might interact with one another. This is to say that an organizational framing of the degrees of a specified characteristic (such as blindness, or other disabilities) or abilities, in a social movement can interact with one another and intersectional ties are formed, offering another unique way to consider frames. A corollary to this investigation might be to examine how other disability based SMO's handle the issues of recruitment and resource acquisition. In my preliminary analyses, there is also a space for the membership at large, to frame their own involvement, from a grassroots level. The research can also become broadened, by further historicizing the various social movements classified within the disability movement at large, and contextualizing the various frames, frame variations, frame troubles and binds, chronologically.

The framing processes examined here outline necessary components to a more systematic study of specific disability based organizations, in different environmental contexts and are united by a common emphasis on the significance of relationships among *heterogeneous* SMO actors, leaders and their membership to the "outside world" and the study of disability. This analysis indicates that blindness (and disability) organizational re-assembly of broken frames is an ongoing process that may create a rhetorical space that ultimately informs and profoundly shapes the contours of future

membership participation in the disability SMOs. The preceding analysis also illustrates how social norms and values are exalted, reinterpreted, and subverted within society, demonstrating the ongoing construction and persistent conspicuousness of beliefs and norms to accomplish a multitude of work on the societal level.

Appendix

Appendix A- Disability Studies Terminology- Disability v. impairment.

In order to truly appreciate the methods in which identities are framed among the members of the disability rights movement, the many definitions of disability and impairment must be provided and critiqued. Wendell (1996) states that the ways in which specific labels such as disability, impairment, and handicap (a word that is losing favor in current terminology) are defined affects the lives of those who have impairments. These definitions reflect "social practices that involve unequal exercise of power and have major economic, social, and psychological consequences in some people's lives" (p. 23). One problem with the definitions of disability and impairment is that they are often assumed to have universal application. Wendell (1996), for instance, critiques the United Nations definition for attempting to universalize what Constitutes disability and handicap. Such definitions, Wendell (1996) claims, do not recognize the "social and cultural relativity of impairment and disability" (p. 15).

Of greater interest to the discussion in this thesis are two well-known models of impairment and disability: the medical model and the social model of disability. The medical model, in its traditional form, sees disability and the individuals with a disability- as well as the body, as impairment itself. This means that disability is synonymous with impairment whereas more recent versions of this model suggest that disability is caused by chronic illness and impairment which restrict activity. (C. Thomas, 1999, p. 14). The medical model views impairment as an individual tragedy, taking the position "that

individuals with disabilities problems stem mainly or exclusively from their impairment. This raises the perception of rehabilitation - or restoration of said individual to as near normal functioning as possible - must be the desired goal, and that people with impairments are dependent, limited, objects of pity" (C. Thomas, 1999, p. 17).

The social model of disability dichotomizes the concepts of impairment and disability, arguing that socially constructed barriers cause disability)" (C. Thomas, 1999, p. 14). This model "rests on the distinction between disability, which is socially created, and impairment, which is referred to as a physical attribute of the body" (Corker & French, 1999, p. 2). Instead of focusing primarily upon the limitations that a functional impairment imposes on the individual, "the social model of disability calls into question the social organization of society that excludes individuals with mental or cognitive impairments and/or impaired bodily functions from mainstream social activities" (Moss & Dyck, 2002, p. 16). Disability activists have used the social model effectively when advocating for disability rights and when seeking social, political, and economic change. Wendell (1996) comments that such a separation does have "an educative function and she goes to define and distinguish the terms thusly: "Impairment {is defined as} ay loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure or function." This is specifically in contrast to the definition of disability: "Any restriction or lack (resulting from impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered 'normal' for a human being." Handicap: A disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or disability, that limits or prevents the

fulfillment of a role that is normal, depending on age, sex, social and cultural factors” for said individual. Handicap is therefore a function of the relationship between disabled persons and their environment. It occurs when they encounter cultural, physical or social barriers, which prevent their access to the various systems of society that are available to other citizens. Thus, handicap is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the life of the community on an equal level with others.

Many of the obstacles faced by people with disabilities are not necessary consequences of their physical conditions" (p. 23). Thomas (1999) remarks that the social model has helped disabled individuals make sense of their life experiences, "particularly in respect to education, employment, standards of living, housing and living arrangements, transport and mobility" (p. 18). She goes on to state that the "political implications are clear: what is required is the removal of social barriers and not the adaptation of individual persons to the putatively 'inevitable consequences' of being impaired" (p. 18).

Thomas (1999, 2007) and others (e.g., Budgeon, 2003; Crow, 1996; Morris, 1998; Titchkosky, 2003; Wendell, 1996, 2001) have criticized the social model for negating the individual and the impairment, for negating the body. Morris (1998) argues that “in focusing on the external barriers we have tended to push to one side the experience of our bodies” (p. 13). Crow (1996) maintains that the experiences of the body cannot be separated from social practices that disable, as "disability and impairment interact" (p. 220, italics in original). Wendell (1996) says that disability has biological and

experiential components that, in their interaction with the social and other relevant factors, cause restrictions of activities. Thomas (1999), Wendell (1996), and Crow (1996), in recognizing the value of the social model, suggest that rather than abandoning it, the model should be reconceptualized to include other factors that are relevant to the experience of disability. Thomas (2007) states that the insistence by scholars that disability studies "must find space for the lived experience of impaired bodies, alongside the personal experience of disablism" is winning greater acceptance. (p. 149)

Acceptable terminology in discussions of disability varies from one geographic location to another. Definitions of disability influence how words are used to describe impairment and disability. In North America, for instance, there is a preference for person-first language such as person with a disability that puts the emphasis on the individual as a person rather than on the particular functional limitation. In Britain, where the influence of the social model is more noticeable, the term disabled person is used more frequently. According to the social model, "person with a disability" is incorrect; as people do not have disabilities they have impairments. For the discussion in this thesis, however, I have used language that more readily fits with Wendell's (1996) critique of the social model, recognizing that disability is caused by the interaction of impairment with social factors. I use the word impairment to refer to the body as a biological entity and to the physical functioning of the body, when I think it important to make this distinction. However, I use the terms disability and disabled to include both the biological impairment and the social and physical barriers encountered by those who have

impairments. In this instance, I use a combination of words when referring to participants: for instance, disabled persons, Blind persons or people with disabilities/ blindness, and women/ men with disabilities/ blindness. As elaborated later in this paper, I will be using the expression 'Blind to describe the members of the movement for advocacy of the collective mobilization of persons with visual impairments. The movement of the 'organized blind' to describe The word Blind is the word in which the movement has gathered around, to alter the negative connotations and incorrect usage and definitions of said word. It is a calling card, much like the word Queer is used by the gay rights movement. I have borrowed this expression from the literature of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in the United States (Jernigan, 1999; Matson, 1990; Omvig, 2003).

Appendix B- The Organization: A History of the Movement of the NFB and the Blind in the United States

The activists of the organized blind in the U.S. launched a movement for their rights with the founding of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in 1940 (Fleischer & Zems, 2001; Jernigan, 1999; Matson, 1990). One major issue that evoked an impassioned response from blind people was the lack of agency in conveying the needs and the voice of the Blind, to the sighted/ non-blind professionals (including doctors, agency professionals, and rehabilitation councilors) took the reins in articulating the needs of the blind with little consultation with the blind themselves. . Blind activists argued that they no longer wanted to be under the control of professionals. Therefore, they fought collectively for the ability to advocate and organize on behalf of themselves; additionally, men and women with blindness fought for higher quality services and to be full participants in the formulation of policies and programs affecting them (Fleischer & Zems, 2001; Jernigan 1999; Matson, 1990). As Kenneth Jernigan (1999), the prominent leader of the movement of the organized blind in the second half of the 20th century in the US argued, "Professionals do not have the right to speak for us ... At best they can speak with us" (p.5).

In his very last speech titled "A Day after Civil Rights," which Jernigan delivered at the annual Convention of the National Federation of the Blind in 1997, he divided the history of the enlightened blind into four stages. The first stage began with the founding of the NFB in the United States in 1940. According to Jernigan (1999), the period prior to

1940 was the period of the "dark age, a pre-enlightened era" (p. 211). Jernigan's four stages include: The first stage, the stage of 'starvation' during the 1940s to mid 1950s, in which the focus was to satisfy hunger; the second stage, the stage of 'rehabilitation' from the mid-1950s to the 1970s, in which the focus was on seeking jobs; the third stage, the stage of 'civil rights' from the 1970s to the mid-1990s, in which the blind fought for their rights by way of demonstrations, lobbying, picketing, and the like; and finally, the fourth stage, the 'stage beyond civil rights' starting from the mid-1990s in which the blind sought to move toward self-esteem" (pp. 212-215).

Whether this classification of the history of blind persons in the United States is conclusive or not is a separate topic of research, and is beyond the scope of this thesis, as it requires further in-depth study. Yet, for the purposes of this work, this is the most well documented history of the 'organized Blind' and is the chronological road map of the of the largest advocacy organization dealing with blindness in the United States to date. The movement of the organized blind began much earlier than the independent living movement, which, as has been previously noted, was launched in the 1960s and the 1970s. A crucial factor which contributed to the origin and growth of the movement of the organized blind in the United States was the concentration of blind people in the special schools created for them. The beginning of organized work in the field of services for the blind in America is 1828, the year in which the Massachusetts legislature passed a bill incorporating the New England Asylum for the Blind, which led to the establishment of the first special school for the blind in the U.S., Opened in 1832, the school is now called

the Perkins School for the Blind (Scott, 1969, p. 122).). Around this same time, other schools for the blind were established along the East Coast of the United States. The New York Institute for the Blind began to accept students in 1831, followed by another school for the blind in Philadelphia, Pennsylvanian 1833 (Scott, 1969, p. 123). Similar schools were opened in various parts of United States in the 19th century. Many of the graduates of these schools got together and started advocating for their rights (Matson, 1990, pp. 1011). However, it was following the passage of the Social Security Act of 1935 (which was the first Federal law to accord benefits to the blind people in the United States) that blind people began to organize on a national level (Matson, 1990, pp. 10-11)

Under the Social Security Act of 1935, the needs of blind people were defined as the bare minimum needs of human beings, specifically only those required to sustain life. Persons with blindness were placed into the same category as paupers, the aged and indigenous people (Matson, 1990, p. 14). While delivering the inaugural speech in the first Convention of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in 1940, tenBroek, the founding father of the movement of the organized blind in the United States, denounced this categorization of blind people and argued that the needs of blind people were far greater than those of paupers, the aged, and indigenous people. He called on blind people to organize at the national level and advocate for their rights: "Individually we are the victims of discrimination . . . Collectively we are the masters of our own future" (tenBroek cited in Matson, 1990, p. 14). So, while the concentration of blind people in special schools created a fertile ground for the beginning of a solid movement in different

parts of the country, the immediate factor which triggered the founding of the NFB in the United States was the Social Security Act of 1935. Thus, with the founding of the NFB in 1940, blind activists began to wage a united struggle for their rights and a radical movement of the organized blind in the United States began at the national level.

In 1948, tenBroek declared a manifesto during his speech titled “A Bill of Rights for the Blind,” delivered before the audience of the 1948 National Convention of the NFB. The radical assertion that blind people had a right to employment was articulated in terms of 'equality,' 'security,' and 'opportunity' for blind people (tenBroek, 1948; Matson YEAR). Regarded as the Magna Carta of blind people; tenBroek forcefully argued that, first and foremost, blind people have a right to employment just like anybody else. Thus, by asking for the provision of jobs, the leadership of the NFB was shifting from an acceptance of 'relief to a demand for 'rehabilitation'.

Appendix C: Blindness Specific Terminology and Definitions

- Blindness is a level of vision loss that has been legally defined to determine eligibility for benefits. The clinical diagnosis refers to a central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with the best possible correction, and/or a visual field of 20 degrees or less. Often, people who are diagnosed with legal blindness still have some useable vision.
- Total blindness refers to an inability to see anything with either eye.
- Low vision is a term often used interchangeably with visual impairment and refers to a loss of vision that may be severe enough to hinder an individual's ability to complete daily activities such as reading, cooking, or walking outside safely, while still retaining some degree of useable vision.
- Visual impairment is often defined clinically as a visual acuity of 20/70 or worse in the better eye with best correction, or a total field loss of 140 degrees. Additional factors influencing visual impairment might be contrast sensitivity, light sensitivity, glare sensitivity, and light/dark adaptation.
- Functional limitation refers to the interaction of visual functioning and ability to perform activities of daily living/instrumental activities of daily living. Common daily activities affected by vision loss are reading, safe pedestrian travel, self-care, cooking, and recreational activities.

- Visual acuity is the clinical measure of the eye's ability to distinguish details of the smallest identifiable letter or symbol. This measurement is usually given in a fraction and is based upon visible print size. Typical vision is 20/20. If an individual sees 20/200, the smallest letter that this individual can see at 20 feet could be seen by someone with typical vision at 200 feet.

(All terms and definitions are paraphrased from the website of the American Foundation for the Blind “AFB”, the governmental agency on blindness)

Appendix D: Table One

Summer of Year	Author	Title of Speech	Location
1940	Jacobus tenBroek	Have Our Blind Social Security?	Anaheim, CA
1948	Jacobus tenBroek	A Bill of Rights for the Blind	Baltimore, MD
1951	Jacobus tenBroek	The Neurotic Blind and the Neurotic Sighted—Twin Psychological Fallacies	Oklahoma City, OK
1952	Jacobus tenBroek	The Role of the Blind in a Democratic Society	Nashville, TN
1955	Jacobus tenBroek	Pros and Cons of Preferential Treatment for the Blind	Omaha, NB
1956	Jacobus tenBroek	Within the Grace of God	San Fransisco, CA
1957	Jacobus tenBroek	Cross of Blindness	New Orleans, LA
1960	Jacobus tenBroek	He Walks by A Faith Justified by Law	Miami, FL
1961	Jacobus tenBroek	Newell Perry: Teacher of Youth and Leader of Men	Berkley, CA
1962	Jacobus tenBroek	Welfare of the Blind: Perils and Prospects	Detroit, MI
1963	Kenneth Jernigan	Blindness: Handicap or Characteristic	Philidelphia, PA
1964	Jacobus tenBroek	The Paralament of Man	Phoenix, AZ
1965	Jacobus tenBroek	The Federation at 25	Washington DC
1966	Jacobus tenBroek	The Future of the Federation	Louisville, KY
1967	Jacobus tenBroek	Are We Equal to the Challenge?	Los Angeles, CA
1968	Kenneth Jernigan	Milestones and Millstone	Des Moines, IA
1969	Kenneth Jernigan	New Insights on Old Outlooks	Columbia, NY

1970	Kenneth Jernigan	The Myth and the Image	Minneapolis, MN
1971	Kenneth Jernigan	To Man the Barricades	Houston, TX
1972	Kenneth Jernigan	Blindness: The New Generation	Chicago, IL
1973	Kenneth Jernigan	Is History Against Us?	New York, NY
1974	Kenneth Jernigan	Is the Literature Against Us?	Chicago, IL
1975	Kenneth Jernigan	Is the Public Against Us?	Chicago, IL
1976	Kenneth Jernigan	Of Visions and Vultures	Los Angeles, CA
1977	Kenneth Jernigan	To Everything There is a Season	New Orleans, LA
1979	Kenneth Jernigan	At the Top of the Stairs	Miami, FL
1980	Kenneth Jernigan	The Lessons of History	Minneapolis, MN
1981	Kenneth Jernigan	The Corner of Time	Baltimore, MD
1982	Kenneth Jernigan	Blindness: Simplicity, Complexity, and the Public Mind	Minneapolis, MN
1983	Kenneth Jernigan	Blindness: The Other Half of Inertia	Kansas City, KS
1984	Kenneth Jernigan	Circle of Sophistry	Phoenix, AZ
1985	Kenneth Jernigan	The Pattern of Freedom	Louisville, KY
1986	Kenneth Jernigan	Coming of the Third Generation	Kansas City, KS
1987	Marc Maurer	Back to Notre Dame	Phoenix, AZ
1988	Marc Maurer	Preparation and the Critical Nudge	Chicago, IL
1989	Marc Maurer	Language and the Future of the Blind	Denver, CO
1990	Kenneth Jernigan	The Federation at 50	Dallas, TX
1991	Marc Maurer	Reflecting the Flame	New Orleans, LA

1992	Kenneth Jernigan	Shifting balances in the blindness field	Charlotte, NC
1992	Marc Maurer	The Mysterious Ten Percent	Charlotte, NC
1993	Kenneth Jernigan	The Nature of Independence	Dallas, TX
1993	Marc Maurer	The Continuity of Leadership	Dallas, TX
1994	Marc Maurer	Let the Wing of the Butterfly Flap	Detroit, MI
1995	Marc Maurer	The Heritage of Conflict	Chicago, IL
1996	Marc Maurer	The Essence of Maturity	Anaheim, CA
1997	Kenneth Jernigan	The Day After Civil Rights	New Orleans, LA
1998	Marc Maurer	The Search for Anonymity	Dallas, TX
1999	Marc Maurer	The Mental Disaplin of the Movement	Atlanta, GA
2000	Marc Maurer	Personality of Freedom	Atlanta, GA
2001	Marc Maurer	Independence and the Necessity for Diplomacy	Philidelphia, PA
2002	Marc Maurer	Leadership and the Matrix of Power	Louisville, KY
2003	Marc Maurer	The Rest of Reality	Louisville, KY
2004	Marc Maurer	The Assymulation of Crisis	Atlanta, GA
2005	Marc Maurer	The Edge of Tomorrow	Louisville, KY
2006	Marc Maurer	An Element of Justice	Dallas, TX
2007	Marc Maurer	Expanding the Limits	Atlanta, GA
2008	Marc Maurer	The Urgency of Optimism	Dallas, TX
2009	Marc Maurer	The Value of Decision	Detroit, MI

2010	Marc Maurer	The advantage of uncertainty	Dallas, TX
2011	Marc Maurer	Oppertunity, Danger, and the balance of risk	Orlando, FL
2012	Marc Maurer	The intersection of law and love	Dallas, TX

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