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Turf wars and corporate sponsorship: Challenges in the food system and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

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TURF WARS AND CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP:
CHALLENGES IN THE FOOD SYSTEM AND THE
ACADEMY OF NUTRITION AND DIETETICS

A Thesis Presented

by

Kristin K. Smith

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Science,
Specializing in Community Development and Applied Economics

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Accepted by the Faculty of the Graduate College, The University of Vermont, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, specializing in Community Development and Applied Economics.

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ABSTRACT

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics is the leading professional organization for registered dietitians (RDs)—globally—with over 75,000 members. Professional organizations are often overlooked in communication scholarship. However, the Academy offers a rich setting for researching occupational identities, health activism, and neoliberalism.

I used semi-structured interviews to explore how taken-for-granted discourses, power relationships, and unquestioned norms are challenged, reinforced, and (re)constructed within the Academy. Specifically, this study analyzed two challenges to the Academy and the dietetics profession: claims to professional expertise and a debate surrounding the Academy's corporate sponsorship. My findings suggest that the profession, which happens to be predominantly female, is struggling with issues of marginalization. RDs described their expertise through a rhetorical turf war—in which they defined themselves against nutritionists—to help elevate their profession. Further, I found that the Academy has a sub-group of health activists that are unified through their holistic approach to nutrition. These health activists attempted to address complaints about the Academy's corporate sponsorship program but lacked a unified vision for their efforts.

By researching the Academy, I hope to contribute new understandings about how professional organizations, discourses of expertise, and corporate sponsorship contribute and influence the public's understandings of health and nutrition. While my results have practical and theoretical implications for RDs and the Academy, they also have broader implications for understanding power relationships and hidden discourses within our complex, dynamic food system.

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At the beginning of my graduate studies, qualitative research was explained to me as a cyclical process. Two years and many spirals later, I made it out of the cycle with a new appreciation for the complexities of seemingly normal, everyday life. I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Sarah N. Heiss, for her enthusiasm, guidance, and thoughtful feedback. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Amy Trubek and Dr. Chris Koliba, for their time, contributions, and meaningful questions.

While my research is not directly about Ecological Economics, my thesis is informed by my time spent at the Gund Institute for Ecological Economics. I would like to thank all the staff, faculty, and students associated with the Gund for constantly challenging my beliefs and encouraging my multi-disciplinary perspective.

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ACRONYMS

ADA / AND / Academy – Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, formerly the American Dietetics Association

BOD – Board of Directors

DPG – Dietetic Practice Group

DFPI – Dietitians for Professional Integrity

FNCE – Food and Nutrition Conference and Expo

HEN – Hunger and Environmental Nutrition dietetic practice group

HOD – House of Delegates

RD – Registered Dietitian

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

They were women to be admired. Women of intelligence, courage, and vision. They were professionals in a new field, dietetics, and they were determined that future dietitians would meet the high standards they had set for themselves. They were the founding members of The American Dietetic Association, now the largest professional association for dietitians in the world and a leader in the promotion of sound nutrition practices. (Cassell, 1990, p. 3)

The above quote opens the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' (formerly The American Dietetic Association) 70th year commemorative book, published in 1990. The book hints at some of the challenges facing the profession, with implications for public health and the broader food system. First, the quote acknowledges the profession's gendered beginnings. Dietetics has its roots in home economics, a field dominated by women. Even today, the profession is an estimated 96% female (Payne-Palacio & Canter, 2013). Professions that are dominated by females tend to have more difficulties reaching professional status, including professions associated with cooking, nutrition, and public health (Shapiro, 1986).

Second, the quote places the responsibility of promoting good nutrition practices on the Academy. However, what is considered a "sound nutrition practice" is contested (Biltekoff, 2013; Nestle, 2002). In recent years, the Academy has been criticized for being sponsored by large food companies, including Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Unilever, and Kraft, amongst others. Does sponsorship enable or impede the Academy's ability to

promote sound nutrition? In a climate of increasing corporate consolidation and public health crises, the answers to this question and others have far reaching impacts on our food system.

The profession of dietetics offers an interesting entry point into discussing aspects of the food system that are often overlooked. Much scholarship in recent years has focused on the food system as a *wicked* problem—i.e. a complex, unbounded problem with far-reaching consequences and no right/wrong solutions (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Scholarship has focused on food politics (for example Gussow, 1978; Nestle, 2002), the inequity and injustices embedded within the food system (Estabrook, 2011; Hesterman, 2011), environmental consequences (Ackerman-Leist, 2013; McMichael, 2009), and infiltration of discourses such as neoliberalism and food sovereignty that shape how we define and discuss food-related problems in the first place (Alkon & Mares, 2012; Guthman, 2011). By researching the Academy, I hope to contribute new understandings about how professional organizations, discourses of expertise, and corporate sponsorship contribute and influence the public's understandings of health and nutrition. I argue that the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics is both a product of and contributor to discourses surrounding the food system.

I take a multi-disciplinary approach to analyzing registered dietitians and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics but borrow heavily from the fields of organizational and health communication. I am interested in how members organize themselves and others through communication practices. By using an organizational and health communication lens, I seek to uncover taken-for-granted discourses, power relationships,

and unquestioned norms. While my results have implications for dietitians and the Academy, I believe they also have broader implications for understanding how professions claim knowledge as well as contextualizing our food system as a complex, dynamic process.

1.1 Research Questions

Specifically, my thesis research explores and discusses the following research questions (RQ):

RQ 1: What discourses emerge as significant as members of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics make sense of the dietetics profession and their membership with the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics?

RQ 2: How do the organizational policies and practices of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics reflect, contribute to, distract from dietitians' perceptions of legitimacy?

RQ 3: How do discourses such as neoliberalism enable and/or constrain members of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics?

To explore these questions, I begin chapter two with an overview of the profession of dietetics, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, and its members. I then review the existing literature about the sociology of professions and organizational communication with a focus on identity and discourses of professionalism. Next, I review the literature on health communication with a focus on health activism and neoliberal discourses. In chapter three, I explain the research methods I used to investigate and analyze my research questions. I then provide my findings in two articles. In my first article, chapter

four, I use in-depth, semi-structured interviews to understand how dietitians perceive the Academy's organizational practices as affecting their identity and their profession's legitimacy. In chapter five, my second article, I use semi-structured interviews to explore how members within a subgroup of the Academy make sense of the controversy surrounding corporate sponsorship within the Academy. In the process I examine how discourses of neoliberalism are reproduced and challenged within members' discussions of corporate sponsorships. I conclude my thesis in chapter six with a discussion about the practical and theoretical implications of my findings.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Profession of Dietetics and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics is the leading professional organization for registered dietitians (RDs)—globally—with over 75,000 members (O'Malley & MacMunn, 2013). The Academy works to promote RDs as the nutritional experts while increasing their voice in local, national, and global public health issues. The Academy positions itself as a critical voice in health advocacy and policy debates: “Our messages shape the media’s portrayal of food and nutrition. Our public policy advocacy efforts create meaningful healthcare legislation” (Bergman, 2012, p 2). From a membership perspective, RDs benefit from the Academy’s networking opportunities, educational resources, and collective identity. Members of the Academy work in a variety of occupational settings, some of which include hospitals, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and the food industry (Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 2012). Given the Academy’s breadth of reach and influence, the organization and its members are important contributors to national conversations about public health and nutrition.

RDs are connected through their education, RD certification, and—for the majority—their participation in the Academy. Of the 89,300 registered dietitians in the United States, an estimated 74% are members of the Academy (“About the Academy,” 2013; Payne-Palacio & Canter, 2013). The Academy often touts this strong representation within the profession, noting that similar general industry organizations tend to “have a market share between 20 percent and 50 percent” (O'Malley & MacMunn, 2013, para. 8). Thus, the Academy and the profession of dietetics are closely

intertwined, resulting in a potentially blurry boundary between the organization and the profession.

2.1.1 The founding of the dietetics profession

Dietetics grew out of the field of home economics, a history that has enabled, constrained, and ultimately shaped the profession's identity and legitimacy (Barber, 1959; Cassell, 1990). Throughout the 1800s, changing gender roles for females and approaches to domesticity converged into "a major domestic reform movement" (Shapiro, 1986, p. 4-5). These forces spurred a series of conferences dubbed the Lake Placid Conferences, the first of which was held in 1889 and resulted in the founding and naming of the field of home economics (Weigley, 1974). Notably, the founders, predominantly females, strategically chose this name to situate home economics as a "distinct part of the larger field of economics," helping to increase the field's legitimacy and encourage its acceptance into academia (Weigley, 1974, p. 85). Furthermore, the name was chosen to align the field with the sciences, specifically "rational, objective, and methodical—traits that gave the term a definite air of maleness" (Shapiro, 1986, p. 37). With its emphasis on professionalism and the later founding of the American Home Economics Association (AHEA) in 1908, the emerging field of home economics opened up new possibilities for women while confirming the home as the sphere of women (Shapiro, 1986).

Dietitians first began organizing themselves within the home economics field at the Lake Placid Conferences. A group of clinical dietitians formed a subgroup within the AHEA, the Institutional Administration Section, and began hosting separate meetings to

discuss more specific, professionally relevant topics (Weigley, 1974). When the AHEA canceled its annual meeting in 1917 due to the WWI, these dietitians met anyway to discuss how “they could best serve hospitals and the war needs at home and overseas” (Weigley, 1974, p. 217). The meeting prompted a resolution to form an organization solely for dietitians, the American Dietetic Association (ADA). Unlike the AHEA, which was open to anyone interested in the domestic sciences, the ADA was exclusively for professionals and individuals trained and educated in home economics and/or dietetics (Weigley, 1974). Thus, from its founding, members of the Academy defined themselves as a group of specialty nutritional experts: “the true dietitian when properly trained and experienced is a specialist and deserves that recognition in the hospital” (Barber, 1959, p. 1).

Given their similar beginnings, the field of dietetics and home economics offer useful comparisons and contrasts. Both professions developed from what was historically considered “women’s work” and were subsequently almost exclusively female; further, both employed theories, methods, and terminology from the natural and physical sciences to elevate and legitimize the domestic movement (Cassell, 1990; Shapiro, 1986). Home economists and dietitians also both established professional organizations to legitimize and advocate for their professions. Despite these continuities, the fields developed differently. The association representing home economics generalized its mission to allow more women to participate but in the process lost its claim to expertise: “by striving to be all things to all women scholars, a kind of intellectual ghetto was inadvertently created” (Whittenberger-Keith, 1994, p. 129). In contrast, membership in

the ADA implied a level of exclusivity and separation from other nutritional professionals, a distinction currently still important to the organization (Weigley, 1974).

Today, the professions continue to differentiate themselves. While home economics has diminished, dietetics is a growing profession. Dietitians are employed in increasingly diverse settings, such as “the food and nutrition industry, in business, journalism, sports nutrition, and corporate wellness programs” (“Becoming an RD,” 2013, para. 1). Further, since 2005, the Academy has consistently grown its membership despite decreasing trends in similar professional organizations (O’Malley & MacMunn, 2013) The organization has affiliate branches in every state, plus Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, and an American Overseas Dietetic Association. In the next section, I’ll discuss how the field of dietetics has become more legitimized and suggest that, despite this development, the profession still struggles with marginalization.

2.1.2 Legitimizing the profession of dietetics

From the organization’s founding, the Academy took strategic steps to help legitimize the profession. The Academy used positivist and scientific language to frame its purpose and goals. In 1955 the president of the Academy explained its mission was “to improve the nutrition of human beings, to advance the science of dietetics and nutrition, and to advance education in these allied areas” (Barber, 1959, p. 112). The academy’s continual emphasis on science, research, and expertise aligned it with academia and elevated the profession. Furthermore, the profession set minimum requirements to be an Academy member, which also emphasized dietitians’ medical and scientific expertise. The Academy’s current messages continue this rhetoric. When the Academy changed its

name from the American Dietetic Association to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, it strategically chose the word Academy to imply “a society of learned persons organized to advance science” (Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 2012, para. 4).

During the 20th century, many professions developed accreditation systems to use legitimizing bodies and/or the state to display legitimacy (Cheney & Lee Ashcraft, 2007). While accreditation was a heated debate within the Academy, registration for dietitians went into effect in 1969, though its requirements have frequently changed since (Cassell, 1990). To become accredited today, RDs must earn a four year degree through a certified program, finish a 900 hour internship, pass an exam, and complete continuing education credits to maintain registration status (Payne-Palacio & Canter, 2013). In some states, the Academy has also fought for additional statewide certifications, further legitimizing dietitians’ work through legally recognized designations. This effort to legitimize dietitians’ work, however, has also resulted in the exclusion of other food and nutrition professionals from registration and thus from certain employment opportunities. These national and statewide certification processes became legitimacy practices that set dietitians apart from other food and nutritional professionals.

Despite these strategies to build legitimacy, the profession of dietetics still struggles with marginalization. The Academy was all female until 1936, when the first male, Claud Samuel Pritchett, was granted active membership (Barber, 1959). Professions dominated by females have historically struggled with issues of professional recognition and legitimacy due to its designation as “women’s work” (Shapiro, 1986, p. 219). These professions are often seen as “semi-professional” at best, a view that is often

lamented and contested (Cheney & Lee Ashcraft, 2007). In Gingras's (2010) research about Canadian dietitians, she found that many participants felt disappointed that they never obtained the level of professionalism promised to them during their educational training. The Academy has acknowledged similar struggles. In the Academy's 70th anniversary book published in 1990, the editor notes that "another long-standing problem was the profession's seeming lack of self-confidence" (Cassell, 1990, p. 395). As of 2013, approximately 96% of RDs within the Academy are female (Payne-Palacio & Canter, 2013), with implications that RDs may still struggle achieving professional status.

2.1.3 Organizational structure.

The Academy consists of a complicated arrangement of interest groups and governing bodies, organized to meet the needs of its professionally diverse members. For additional membership fees, Academy members can join subgroups based on common careers or dietetic approaches, known as Dietetic Practice Groups (DPGs). There are 28 DPGs, ranging from the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition DPG to the Sports, Cardiovascular and Wellness Nutrition DPG. While DPGs emerged from early and informal networking amongst members, they became more formalized over time and, as of 2011, include responsibilities with the Academy's governing body (Stein, 2013). Members can also opt into Members Interest Groups (MIGs), which are less formalized groups organized around non-career interests. Members often cite DPGs and MIGs as top benefits of Academy membership (Stein, 2013).

To govern the Academy's 75,000+ members, 28 DPGs, 7 MIGs, and 53 local affiliates, the Academy is structured into a member-elected House of Delegates (HOD)

and an 18-member Board of Directors (BOD). Between 1999 and 2000, the BOD and HOD went through a restructuring process to create a more representative and inclusive decision-making procedure (Stein, 2012). As a result of this process, the HOD was given additional responsibilities and the BOD’s makeup was changed to include six delegates from the HOD and two public members (Stein, 2012). These changes were made to address members’ complaints of top-down governing. However, there has been no follow-up research to understand if these structural changes solved member complaints .

The Academy is funded through diverse revenue streams. In 2012 the Academy and its related organizations had combined revenues of \$33,964,432 and expenses of \$34,490,637 (AND annual report, 2012). Figure 1 illustrates a breakdown of the Academy’s reported expenses for 2012:

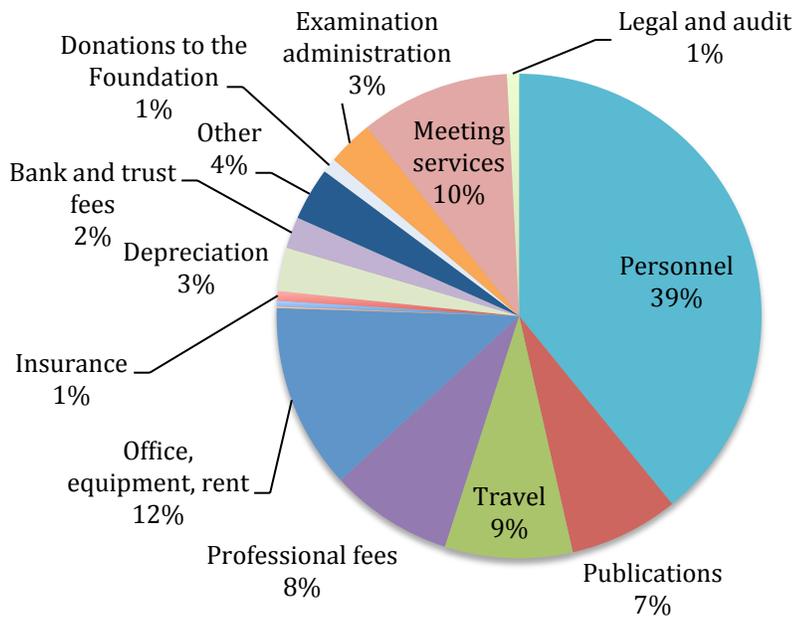


Figure 1: Expenses for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 2012.

Adapted from Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics/Foundation: Fiscal year 2012 annual report. 2012.

Figure 2 illustrates the Academy's revenue sources:

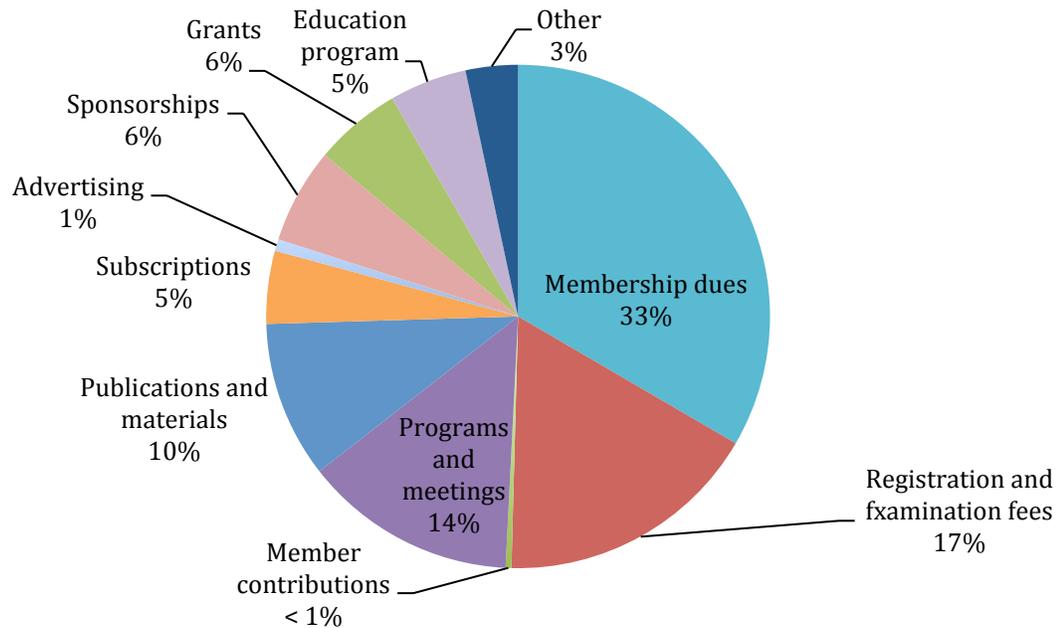


Figure 2: Revenues for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 2012.

Adapted from *Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics/Foundation: Fiscal year 2012 annual report*. 2012.

Of particular note in Figure 2 is the \$2,079,751 in corporate sponsorship revenue, representing approximately 6% of all revenues (AND annual report, 2012). Notably, it is unclear if this percentage is exhaustive of all funding received from corporate sponsors or if additional funding from corporate sponsors is included in the programs and meetings, advertising, and/or publications categories. In recent years the Academy's practices of corporate sponsorship have become increasingly scrutinized, both within the organization and from outside stakeholders. Critics of the programs suggest that the practice raises questions about corporate influence into issues of public health.

The Academy's most controversial sponsorships include partnerships with large food companies, such as Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, McDonalds, Unilever, and others. Brownell and Warner (2009) compared the food industry to big tobacco companies from the 1950's, suggesting that the food industry is attempting to purposely mislead the public about the risks of overeating. They specifically identified the Academy as a professional organization that the food industry uses to legitimize the food industry's marketing claims related to health: "The ADA has taken a strong stand that there are no good foods or bad foods, a position that the food industry has exploited" (Brownell & Warner, 2009, p.277). Similarly, Marion Nestle (2002) argued that the Academy's nutritional advice often becomes confused with their corporate sponsors' agenda, "blurring the distinction between food advertising and dietary advice" (Nestle, 2002, p.127). Nestle also suggested that partnerships with food industry detract from the Academy's legitimacy.

In response, the Academy has continually denied that corporate sponsors influence dietitians' research or the Academy's official positions ("Addressing inaccuracies," 2013). Proponents of the Academy's sponsorship program argue that corporations offset the Academy's costs, lessening the financial burden for members. Sponsorships can also provide access into the food industry, creating opportunities for dietitians to make positive nutritional changes from the inside (Hiatt, 2010). Since 2008, the Academy has polled members about its sponsorship program and report that results show an "increased awareness of the Academy's sponsorship program and continued

support by members” (“Addressing inaccuracies,” 2013). This poll has often been cited to justify the Academy’s corporate sponsorship program when faced with criticism.

Reitshamer, Schrier, Herbold, and Metallinos-Katsaras (2012) surveyed Academy members’ opinions about corporate sponsorships to understand the organizational practice in more detail. The authors asked Academy members to rate the Academy’s current corporate sponsors based on their perceived “acceptance” level. They found that a majority of members felt three of the thirteen companies were “unacceptable” as Academy sponsors: Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and Mars, Inc. The other sponsors, including Unilever, Kellogg Company, and General Mills, were perceived as “acceptable” sponsors by the majority of respondents. The survey also found that 83% of responders believe that members should “have a say in deciding who should be Academy sponsors” (Reitshamer et al., 2012, p 153). Thus, the survey found that many Academy members do support the Academy’s corporate sponsorship program but that changes are also desired.

Corporate sponsorships illustrate the blurring of boundaries between the Academy as an organization and the profession of dietetics. If corporate sponsorship is perceived as harming the organization’s legitimacy, then the profession of dietetics may lose legitimacy as well. This interplay between the organization and the occupation complicates research about identity and legitimacy. In the next section I will review the literature on discourse, identity, and legitimacy, arguing that dietitians’ multilayered identities cannot be reduced to simplistic categories.

2.2 Organizational Communication: Identity, Legitimacy, and Professionalism

Organizational communication scholars often approach organizations as important sites of identity formations and negotiations (B. J. Allen, 2005). However, within organizational studies, most identity research has stayed within the organization (Ashcraft, 2007). Alvesson and colleagues (2008) argued that this approach is limiting:

Much of the research that is focused on perceptions and practices in particular organizations neglects what is not immediately visible from the vantage point of participants and researchers—that which remains silent in live interviews or obscured by survey instruments. The broader historical, cultural, institutional, and political influences that inevitably shape local dilemmas and responses thus fade from sight. (p. 11)

Thus, organizational communication scholars have called for more research into how individuals interact with culture, norms, politics, institutions, and history within and outside of the organization. In response, a growing body of literature attempts to connect discourses with organizational and identity theorizing. I am personally inspired by Ashcraft's (2007) work on gender discourses and airline pilots, as well as Alkon and Mare's (2012) work on organizational practices and neoliberal discourses. These studies reject prescriptive approaches to organizational communication and instead embed organizational members within broader societal discourses and power relationship.

2.2.1 Occupational identity

Identities are multifaceted, fragmented, shifting sites of negotiation and tension (Ashcraft, 2007; Meisenbach, 2008). Despite this fluidity, occupations and identities

often appear static and orderly, leading to assumptions that their characteristics are inherent (Alvesson et al., 2008; Meisenbach, 2008). Identity scholars seek to understand how individuals categorize themselves and others, while making sense of how “images and representations (physical, symbolic, verbal, textual, behavioral) become imbued with meaning and taken as being part of one’s identity” (Beech, 2008, p. 52). This process questions “taken for granted” characteristics and explores how identity negotiations occur and impact perceptions of self, organizations, and professions. Thus, the process of identity is “constantly open and available to be negotiated and re-negotiated, defined and redefined” (Collinson, 1992, p. 31). As people make sense of who they are, they contribute to their perceptions of the self, the other, and the world (Deetz, 1992). The result is a constantly changing, complex mix of multiple identities that coexist within each person, at times reinforcing and at other times contradicting (Alvesson et al., 2008; Collinson, 2003).

Occupational identities extend organizational communication’s typical focus on identity to a broader level. Meisenbach (2008) defined occupational identity as a “group or social identity in that it represents how individuals construct their sense of who they are and what they do in relation to their jobs” (p. 263). Ashcraft (2007) argued that many studies limit their examinations to “organizational discourse / communication as phenomena occurring in organizations or within their physical borders,” though these boundaries are often acknowledged as arbitrary. Similarly, power differences within the organization and within society are often ignored, though identity negotiations can be greatly affected by them (Deetz, 1992). This limited approach often misses how

individuals interact with culture, norms, politics, institutions, and history within and outside of the organization. In response, a growing body of literature attempts to connect external discourses with internal organizational and identity theorizing. Alvesson, Ashcraft, and Thomas (2008) argued for one such approach, emphasizing the individual and the organization as simultaneously a product and a contributor to their historical moment. This approach helps contextualize occupational identities—including their implications for who is included in and/or who is excluded from the occupation—as a product of cultural and historical norms (Ashcraft, 2007).

Occupational identity research analyzes how individuals negotiate professional norms and discourses to make sense of their identities. For example, in Meisenbach's (2008) research on fundraisers, she found that individuals use six major categories of discursive frames to understand their relationship with their work: financial, relational, educational, mission, coordination, and magical. Through these frames, fundraising professionals “discursively rely and often simultaneously accommodate and resist as they attempt to make meaning of their work and form occupational identities” (Meisenbach, 2008, p. 267). Similarly, Sanders and Harrison (2008) explore the professional boundaries of primary and secondary health professionals in England. In their study, they acknowledge that sub-groups with their own values, rules, and cultures often form within professions, though to the general public the profession is still viewed as homogenous. In both examples, occupations act as sites for identity negotiations—“the shifting, material, and discursive framing of image and practices associated with a particular type of work” (Meisenbach, 2008, p. 263).

2.2.2. Discourses of legitimacy and professionalism

Discourses surrounding legitimacy and expertise result from and contribute to occupational identities. From an organizational point of view, legitimacy is critical for longevity and stability (Suchman, 1995). Suchman (1995) defined legitimacy as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (p. 574). It is a generally desired condition. As individuals make sense of their occupational identities, they want to feel that their employer and their work is legitimate. Further, organizations lacking legitimacy become “more vulnerable to claims that they are negligent, irrational, or unnecessary” (p. 575). While much scholarship about legitimacy has fallen into prescriptive descriptions and solutions, I understand legitimacy as a dynamic discourse that shapes understandings of one’s occupational identity. Therefore, in my research, legitimacy is fluid, layered, and socially constructed (Scott, 2008).

Similarly, professionalization is the process of a profession becoming legitimized. While “professional” seems like a common, well-understood term, it is contested. Questions about as who are considered professionals and who are not, what occupations obtain “professional” status and which ones do not—suggest that the term is deeply rooted in conflicted, shifting, historical, cultural, gendered discourses (Ashcraft, Muhr, Rennstam, & Sullivan, 2012). Cheney and Ashcraft (2007) argued that professionalization is “a fundamentally rhetoric process because the identity and status of any job is not given or determined but is rather a precarious, contested formation

constantly negotiated through discursive activity” (p. 164-165). They emphasized the need to understand how professions interact with each other, intersect with discourses, and intertwine with other forms of identity. This idea of the professional extends beyond the traditional scope of organizational studies.

Given the general desire for people to want to identify as “professional,” professionalization strategies are often used to increase occupational legitimacy. For example, George (2013) studied how life coaches use different framings and discourses to build their occupation’s legitimacy: they compared/contrasted their profession with others that were already legitimate and attempted to standardize the profession by institutionalizing knowledge and forming a credentialing body. Similarly, Whittenberger-Keith’s (1994) analysis of the *Journal of Home Economics* found home economists used communication strategies to legitimize their work by describing their profession as scholarly, scientific, and professional. The founding members of the home economics movement “believed that by surrounding their new discipline with the right kinds of rhetoric, they would gain acceptance within the academy” (Whittenberger-Keith, 1994, p. 123-124). I argue that the Academy and its members are performing a similar rhetorical process. By claiming nutritional expertise as their own and challenging nutritionists’ claim to the same expertise, members communicate their legitimacy through a turf war narrative.

Organizational and professional legitimacy are useful constructs for understanding how the Academy functions as a gatekeeper for the dietetics profession and, subsequently, a contributor to and reflection of dietitians’ identity. Further, since

professional knowledge is situated—a product of history, society, and institutional structures (J. R. Taylor, 2004), issues of legitimacy are important for the occupation's longevity and relevance. Dietitians are currently seen as nutritional experts who have a responsibility to increase the general public's wellbeing. As such, dietitians often benefit from having a privileged status: insurance companies may only reimburse services if provided by a registered dietitians and/or an employer may only hire someone if he or she has RD certification. If the profession of dietetics is somehow tainted, through internal or external perceptions of illegitimacy, dietitians may lose this preferred status. Thus, issues of identity, legitimacy, and professionalization can have a material impact on public health.

2.3 Health Communication: Health Activism and Neoliberalism

My approach to and understanding of health communication is similar to organizational communication. Health is a socially constructed concept, a product of multi-layered and complex discourses and organizing (Zoller, 2010). Health communication “draws together elements of health education, health promotion, preventive medicine, organizational communication and interpersonal communication in the health care setting” (Lupton, 1994, p. 56). Thus, health communication scholarship studies the processes and messaging that identity and frame issues of health with implications for both theory and practice (Dutta, 2010; Zoller, 2005). While post-positivist perspectives and message-driven research are dominant in the field of health communication, so-called “alternative” approaches have increasingly questioned taken-for-granted assumption about what constitutes health and medical care (Dutta & Zoller,

2008). Thus, many health communication scholars have argued for the need to take a culturally broader, more critical approach to health communication to uncover biases and values of seemingly objective health claims (Dutta, 2010; Lupton, 1994; Zoller, 2005).

2.3.1 A critical approach to health activism

In response to Lupton's seminal (1994) essay, "Toward the Development of a Critical Health Communication Practice," a growing body of scholarship has taken a critical perspective to health communication. A critical approach seeks to understand how ideologies and power relationships reinforce, challenge, and (re)construct taken-for-granted social norms and structures (Dutta & Zoller, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This perspective challenges assumptions about what is or is not healthy and whose knowledge related to health is accepted as expertise (Lupton, 1994; Zoller, 2005). Through this process, critical health communication questions ideas about the universality of health and the dominance of health claims based on Westernized approach to "objective" science (Dutta, 2010). By pointing out how health components are constructed and continue to be (re)constructed, a critical approach highlights opportunities to change the system, with an explicit interest in issues of social equity (Dutta & Zoller, 2008). Zoller (2005) encouraged using a critical lens to examine health activism, particularly underscoring the need to understand "sociopolitical and economic influences on health status at local and global levels" (p. 342).

Within health communication scholarship, health activism is often overlooked (Zoller, 2005). Zoller (2005) defined health activism as "a challenge to existing orders and power relationships that are perceived to influence negatively some aspects of health

or impede health promotion. Activism involves attempts to change the status quo, including social norms, embedded practices, policies, and power relationships” (p. 360-361). Health activism both is influenced by and an influencer of social, cultural, economics, and political discourses. Examples of past health activism include the fight for Medicare, anti-tobacco campaigns, and fundraising efforts for breast cancer research, amongst others. Given Zoller’s (2005) definition, the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition (HEN) Dietetic Practice Group’s organizing in response to the Academy’s corporate sponsorship can be understood as health activism.

Health activists tend to organize themselves through two frameworks: issue focus and political orientation (Zoller, 2005). Zoller (2005) described three issue categories: “(a) medical care access and improvement, (b) illness and disability activism, and (c) public health promotion and disease prevention activism” (p. 348). HEN’s work on corporate sponsorship fits into the last category, specifically under public health promotion. Zoller (2005) also proposed four categories of political orientation as a heuristic for directly discussing issues of power: transformative, redemptive, reformative, and alternative. Alternative and redemptive approaches focus on the individual level, while reformative and transformative approaches seek societal change. Activists working for reformative changes tend to seek improvements within the existing structures while activists working for transformative change tend to work for fundamental changes in the system’s structure. Zoller (2005) further explained the difference between reformative and transformative approaches by describing their tactics: “Reformative efforts are more likely to call for improved government funding, altered medical practice, or changed

policy. Transformative efforts may ask for broader changes in social norms, industrial and economic practices, or the medical care system” (p. 354). Activists can change their political orientation over time and/or can impede or aid other activists with different political orientations. A critical communication perspective, with its focus on power relationships, is particularly well suited for understanding and contextualizing how these political orientations affect health activism.

Studying health activism with a critical communication lens creates insights into how discourses interact with identity negotiation, meaning construction, and problem/solution definition (Zoller, 2005). Through a critical perspective, communication scholarship analyzes how people categorize themselves and others (Beech, 2008), while also identifying hegemonic discourses within the public sphere and/or within health advocacy (Lupton, 1994). According to Dutta (2010), “critical interrogations draw attention to the political and economic agendas of the status quo and the knowledge-producing institutions embedded within the status quo” (p 537). A critical communication approach can therefore illustrate how HEN’s work can be understood as health activism and how this activism is both challenging and reproducing social norms and structures. Thus, by taking a critical approach to my research, I seek to fulfill Zoller’s (2005) call for future research to contextualize health activism within its “socioeconomic and political roots” (p. 360).

2.3.2 Neoliberalism and health communication

In the 1970’s political and economic thought shifted toward neoliberalism—a regime change that marked the decline of the Keynesian fiscal and welfare policies put

into place after the Second World War (Harvey, 2005; Jessop, 2002; Peck & Tickell, 2002) Neoliberalism is not concrete, and its meanings have varied over time and amongst theorists. However, Harvey (2005) is often cited for his definition of neoliberalism, a system advocating for “liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p. 2). The shift toward neoliberalism promoted deregulation, individualized solutions, commodification, and an overall faith in the market’s ability to govern the economy and society (Harvey, 2005; Jessop, 2002; Peck & Tickell, 2002). Through neoliberalism, efficiency became the ultimate goal, and responsibilities once held by the government were either privatized or assigned to community organizations (Alkon & Mares, 2012).

Neoliberalism is a construction, the “work of many hands” (Peck, 2011, p. xi). Part of its entrenchment can be attributed to its enticing rhetorical appeals to cultural beliefs and myths (Urciuoli, 2011). The founding advocates of neoliberalism built off “political ideals of human dignity and individual freedom as fundamental, as ‘the central values of civilization’” (Harvey, 2005, p. 5). These ideals are hard to argue and/or question. However, they noticeably leave out other cultural values and beliefs, such as the importance of equality and/or the power of collective action. While neoliberalism was once considered a product of the radical right, it has since developed into a dominant, mainstream approach (Harvey, 2005). This shift further demonstrates that neoliberalism is not a truth set in stone. It was crafted, has evolved, and will continue to evolve.

Neoliberal discourses are frequently discussed in critical health communication scholarship (Ayo, 2012). While neoliberalism is heralded for its emphasis on robust market competition, its privatization and free market policies have contributed to intense consolidation, commodification, and environmental degradation —especially within the food system (Harvey, 2005; McMichael, 2009). This has resulted in what McMichael (2009) describes as the “corporate food regime...a relatively stable set of relationships privileging corporate agriculture” (p. 289). Guthman (2011) described neoliberalism as “an utter disaster: economically, socially, and ecologically” (p. 168). Many others cite its detrimental impacts, including the limiting of state and civil society (Giroux, 2002), social fragmentation, loss of accountability, and new forms of marginalization (Greenhouse, 2011), the amassing of power in an elitist class and the concentration of corporate power (Harvey, 2005), among others.

The literature describes neoliberalism as so entrenched and prevalent in our everyday lives that it is often overlooked (Greenhouse, 2011; Harvey, 2005). It has become an unquestioned, normalized discourse. Within the food system, discourses surrounding neoliberalism have shaped how individuals and professionals understand their roles, responsibilities, and capacities. Accordingly, Greenhouse (2011) argued that, like any discourse, neoliberalism is a lived experience with impacts on individuals, even if the individuals are not aware of its influence. Scholars have adopted the term “neoliberal subjectivity” to describe the ways individuals internalize and incorporate neoliberal discourses into their everyday lives (Alkon & Mares, 2012; P. Allen & Guthman, 2006). Within neoliberal subjectivities, the market reigns above all. A “good

citizen” is redefined as a “good consumer;” and political acts are limited to “voting with your dollars” (Guthman, 2011, p. 18). Similarly, previously political struggles, such as issues of inequality or calls for government regulation, are redefined as individual problems that can be solved with market-based solutions. Giroux (2002) expanded the argument by describing a corporate culture that “functions largely to either cancel out or devalue social, class-specific, and racial injustices of the existing social order by absorbing the democratic impulses and practices of civil society within narrow economic relations” (p. 429).

Given the normalization of free market ethos, professionals seeking transformation within the food system have at times unwittingly reinforced neoliberalism as a dominant discourse. Alkon and Mares (2012) used interviews and ethnographic observations to research two food security organizations that were unwittingly reinforcing neoliberalism by advocating for market-based solutions to social problems instead of systemic transformation. Others have used similar approaches to undercover neoliberal discourses embedded in professional contexts. For example, Allen and Guthman (2006) argued that, in shifting responsibility of school food from the welfare state to the local, farm-to-school programs recreate neoliberalism. Similarly, neoliberal subjectivities within policy makers and health care lobbyists have been attributed to increasingly privatized health care policy reforms (McGregor, 2001).

Within a higher education context, Urciuoli (2011) used ethnographic methodology to analyze neoliberal discourses propagated by a private liberal arts college. The school relied on “skills” discourses that framed students as products waiting to be

snatched off the factory line, and students confirmed that they often thought of themselves as “bundles of skills” (Urciuoli, 2011, p. 176). Giroux (2002) discussed how neoliberal discourses within higher education affect budgeting allocations by judging an academic discipline’s value by its ability to make money. These case studies suggest the many ways that neoliberal discourses pervade organizations and professionals’ everyday lives.

Taking a critical approach to health communication can help uncover how neoliberalism shapes health activism and how practitioners define problems and solutions. Ayo (2012) argued that health promotion and health practices “are not merely the result of objective reasoning but rather as contingent on aggregates of social, cultural, political, and economic conditions” (p. 104). Similarly, Zoller (2005) wrote, “Global economic policy is central to health communication but is often ignored” (p. 359). However, some caution with this approach is needed. A communication perspective reminds us that neoliberalism does not simply wash over everyone and everything in its path. It is a discourse that is constantly being challenged, reinterpreted, reified, and—potentially—ignored through communication and organizing practices.

Harris (2009) suggested that neoliberal readings are just one interpretation of organizing and that other interpretations, which might contradict a neoliberal reading’s findings, are possible. Johnston and Cairns (2012) echoed this sentiment, arguing that “binary accounts depicting consumer-based food movements as entirely hopeful or hopeless obscure possibilities for action that challenge a neoliberal model of consumer politics” (p. 234). While neoliberalism’s entrenchment often prevents critical discussion,

only discussing neoliberalism can also prevent dialogue. I thus approach my own research with an acknowledgement of the limitations of “seeing neoliberalism everywhere.” However, I also argue that pointing out neoliberalism through a critical communication perspective can help organizations and professionals discover opportunities for transformation.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

3.2 My Approach to Qualitative Research

I take an iterative approach to qualitative research—what Berg and Lune (2004) dubbed a “spiraling research approach” that moves forward and backward between literature review, data collection, analysis, and dissemination (p. 25). I used a process similar to the constant comparative technique described by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2011). In constant comparative analysis, researchers “go back and forth between analysis and data collection because each informs and advances the other” (Charmaz, 2011, p. 361). Lindlof (1995) further explained the process as a cyclical and continuous method of processing, reducing, explaining, and theory building. Constant comparative analysis creates rigor as researchers (re)read and analyze data, code and categorize themes, and compare/contrast themes to subsequent readings of data and literature (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). However, Gerbensky Kerber (2011) described her “data analysis processes [as] more dynamic, serendipitous, and guided by theory than the inductive approach suggested by the constant-comparative method” (p. 101). I relate to Gerbensky Kerber’s reaction against a prescriptive, inductively methodical approach to qualitative research. Nonetheless, I borrowed the framework of constant comparative techniques from grounded theory to help structure my approach to data analysis. This framework allowed me to rigorously analyze my data for emergent patterns, kept me deeply engaged in the research, and helped me focus my analysis.

I was further inspired by Ellingson’s (2009) crystallization methodology. Ellingson asked researchers to reject the dichotomies often used in research—including

art/science, hard/soft, qualitative/quantitative—in favor of understanding these approaches as continuums that can offer different insights. Through crystallization, researchers employ multiple genres (traditional research articles, narratives, videos, etc.) to analyze their research through different lenses. These lenses “crystallize” the research by showing new perspectives and offering interesting, often unexpected insights. Crystallization argues for a pluralistic approach to creating rigor in qualitative research that is distinct from other pluralistic approaches, like triangulation. While triangulation uses multiple methods to hone in on and corroborate a truth (Berg & Lune, 2004), crystallization seeks to illustrate different perceptions and ways of understanding the problem. Crystallization uses multiple genres to “[problematize] the multiple truths it presents” (Ellingson, 2009, p. 22). Its rigor comes from its reliance on transparency, its willingness to contradict itself, and its ability to vocalize the complexities of everyday life.

Ellingson (2009) argued that as we write about, discuss, and produce knowledge, “we need to consider the claims—about reality, our participants, and ourselves—that we make as researchers and writers” (p. 30). Ellingson urged researchers to reflect on their philosophical approaches to the world, their knowledge, and their own work—their paradigms. As defined by Guba (1990), a paradigm “is a basic set of beliefs that guides action” (p. 17). These beliefs stem from ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions, which by definition cannot be proven or disproven (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Researchers with different paradigms have led to varying ideas and value

judgments about research approaches and their perceived rigor. Thus, before discussing my methodology in more detail, I will first discuss my paradigm.

Using the terminology put forth by Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011), I approached my research with interpretivist sensibilities. I understand meaning as neither stable nor naturally defined. It is co-created and recreated through social interactions, verbal and non-verbal communications, and practices (Ellingson, 2009; Gergen, 1999). Accordingly, knowledge is “shaped by our lived experiences... [which] will always come out in the knowledge we generate as researchers and in the data generated by our subjects“ (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 104). Further, I sympathize with and tend toward a critical and feminist approach that seeks to articulate marginalization and correct inequalities (Gerbensky Kerber, 2011; Opie, 1992). Given this paradigm, I did not seek to “uncover” universal truths or achieve objectivity through my research. My goal was not to make statistically generalizable statements or use an inductive approach to create theory. Rather, my research goals were more akin to Ellingson’s (2009) goals for crystallization methodology: to offer in-depth descriptions, to illustrate social complexities, and to make useful practical and theoretical contributions. I was interested in how people arranged themselves, identified with each other and their occupations, and made sense of their daily lives. I also acknowledge that my own understandings are fragmented and offer impartial visions of the world. They are subject to change as I continue to reflect on and expand upon my own beliefs.

3.2.1 Rigor in theory and practice

Both constant comparison and crystallization demand continual reflection to create and communicate rigor in qualitative research. Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) defined reflection as the “interpretation of interpretation” (p. 9). They described the need to reflect on different layers and structures embedded within the research:

Reflection turns attention ‘inwards’ towards the person of the researcher, the relevant research community, society as a whole, intellectual and cultural traditions, and the central importance, as well as the problematic nature, of language and narrative (the form of presentation) in the research context.

(Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 9)

Reflection forces researchers to question the take-for-granted discourses in the research while disclosing their positionality as a researcher. Through reflection, Ellingson (2009) encouraged researchers to ask themselves, how does my role influence the research process? Have I taken ownership of my research (such as by using an active voice)? Have I fully explored research participants’ positionality and context? How might my research be interpreted and/or co-opted by others? These questions and others draw out new and important conversations to improve research rigor. Further, being open and honest about the research process, including reflecting on the problems and complications that arise, can prompt dialogue while demonstrating integrity (Ellingson, 2009).

During my research planning, collection, and analysis stages, I took cues from constant comparison analysis and crystallization’s framework for rigor. I sought to represent research participants’ voices with respect toward their intent while using my own reflections to demonstrate integrity as a researcher. Through ethnographic

participant observations and semi-structured interviews, I used a variety of techniques to explore my data through different lenses—with an eye towards crafting a methodology akin to crystallization. My research process was cyclical and admittedly slow. However, this enabled me to reflect fully on the research process and use constant comparison analysis on the extensive data collected. To structure my reflections, I used Golden-Biddle and Locke's (1993) three dimensions of successfully-communicated qualitative research to question my work: does it have authenticity, plausibility, and criticality? I wanted the reader to be assured that I actually spoke with and understood my research participants (authenticity), that the research was relevant to the readers' lives even if not directly connected (plausibility), and that the research prompted new thinking or questions (criticality).

Further, throughout the research process I used Geertz's (1994) strategy of writing "thick descriptions" of my experiences to prompt reflection and capture nuanced details (p. 217). While collecting ethnographic observations, I wrote rich, detailed notes to help make sense of my data. I discussed these notes and my general thoughts with my research partner and advisor, Dr. Sarah Heiss, PhD, after each collection day to compare and contrast themes. Throughout the research collection and analysis process, I also kept a journal of my thoughts and reflections. I constantly asked myself what is the big problem being discussed? Am I oversimplifying? Have I considered alternative interpretations? By taking notes and journaling, I sought to avoid reductionist research in favor of illuminating complexity. When possible, I included these insights and detail in my data analysis to speak to the intricacy of the research.

Another way I created rigor in my research was to represent it with dynamic, engaging writing. To illustrate the spirit of the research and to make the writing more personable, I included many quotes: this helped honor my participants' voices, highlighted their lived experiences, and represented the emergent themes in the data. I chose quotes that reinforced emergent themes, were thoughtfully articulated, and spoke directly to my research questions (Ellingson, 2011). When a quote did not speak to an emergent theme, I specifically described the quote as an exception or as a unique point of view. In addition, I highlighted my involvement in the research process by writing the analysis in the first person. This drew attention to my role as a co-creator in the knowledge production and allowed me to easily include reflections on my role as researcher. The writing style and structure was an important way that I demonstrated rigor in my research.

3.3 Article One

In my first article I examined the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics as the site of a turf war between registered dietitians and nutritionists. I analyzed how the turf war prompts dietitians to negotiate discourses and make legitimacy claims that affect their occupational identities. I explored the following research questions (RQ):

RQ 1: What discourses emerge as significant as members of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics makes sense of their profession and membership?

RQ 2: How do members of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics discursively frame and organize their identities to establish themselves as professional?

RQ 3: How do members understand their claims of expertise and knowledge as contributing to or detracting from their professional wellbeing?

3.3.1 Data collection and participants

To explore these questions, I used field notes from ethnographic observations and 17 in-depth, semi structured interviews with members of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. I collected ethnographic observations from the Academy's largest annual event, the Food and Nutrition Conference and Expo (FNCE), which I attended in October 2012. While I was transparent about my research at the conference, I also attempted to blend in as much as possible, taking on the participant observer role. My observations from the conference helped me gain a better understanding of the Academy's culture and social norms. After attending the events, my observations and extensive field notes enabled me to write fuller, richer descriptions about the Academy's organizational practices and how members negotiate them. The goal for my participatory observations was to gain an understanding of how dietitians interact with each other and the Academy as an organization.

I also conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with members of the Academy (see Appendix A). As noted by Berg (2004), semi-structured interviews follow an outline for an interview script but also give the interviewer "freedom to digress" to explore emergent themes (p. 61). I conducted face-to-face interviews at FNCE and phone interviews after the event. Interview subjects were recruited through an initial group of key informants and snowballing techniques. I interviewed 16 current members of the Academy and one member who had recently ended her Academy membership. The

average age of interviewees was 39, with a range of 20 years old to 66 years old. The number of years spent as an Academy member varied from less than one year to 38 years, with an average of 13 years of membership. Fourteen of the interviewees identified as female (~ 82%) and three interviewees identified as male (~ 18%). Approximately 88% of interviewees identified as Cuacasian, with one interviewee identifying as Hispanic and one interviewee identifying as Asian. Professionally, the 17 interviewees ranged from having less than one year of experience to more than 30 years as a RD. Interviewees worked in a variety of settings, including hospitals, universities, public health settings, and the corporate food industry. Three interviewees identified as current students, and one interviewee identified as a PhD student. The group represented 13 states and the District of Columbia. Interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes.

3.3.2 Data analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim. I uploaded the transcripts to HyperRESEARCH, a code-and-retrieve data analysis program. In my initial reading of the data, I made notes to record my thoughts, suggest potential themes, and capture the essence of what was being said by interviewees. I frequently coded line-by-line in the first reading, often using phrases that described what was being said. During repeated readings, I continued to add codes but also began making sense of the patterns as they began to emerge. Thus, the codes in subsequent readings tended to summarize data as opposed to simply describe it. This included collapsing related codes into each other while dividing other codes to offer more detail. For example, as issues of occupational legitimacy began to emerge as an important theme, I returned to these coded sections and

refined their descriptions. In addition to being coded as “occupational legitimacy” the passage might be subdivided into a new code labeled “using the nutritional other to define one’s own expertise.” Through this process of collapsing, categorizing, and refining codes, larger and more complex themes emerged which were then used to organize my argument.

Throughout my coding and research process, I used constant comparison analysis as a guiding framework. Lindlof (1995) describes constant comparative analysis as a cyclical and continuous method of processing, reducing, explaining. New comparisons and themes are created during the coding process and continually compared to previously categorized data and theories (Charmaz, 2005; Lindlof, 1995). As themes emerged from my work, I compared them with previous research to understand how they confirmed, expanded, and/or diverged from previous understandings of identity and legitimacy theories. I crafted my data into a research article for future publication in a peer-reviewed journal.

3.4 Article Two

The idea for my second article emerged while I was analyzing the interviews collected for chapter four. Through multiple readings of my first data collection, the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition dietetic practice group increasingly stood out as a group of RDs with a particularly strong collective identity. I also began to view them as important contributors to the corporate sponsorship debate within the Academy. As this theme became more visible, I realized that it warranted its own analysis, including follow-up interviews. Thus, my second article focused on how members of the Hunger

and Environmental Nutrition (HEN) made sense of corporate sponsorship within the Academy. Specifically, I explored the following research questions (RQ):

RQ 1: Why are members of the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group involved in the corporate sponsorship debate?

RQ 2: How do members of the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group make sense of corporate sponsorship within the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics?

RQ 3: How do neoliberal discourses enable and/or constrain their understandings of and solutions to corporate sponsorship?

3.4.1 Data collection and participants

My second article used data from six of the semi-structured interviews conducted in October 2012 that were used in my research analysis for chapter four. I only used data from participants in my first round of data collection who identified as HEN members. These interviewees were recruited at the 2012 Food and Nutrition Conference and Expo, the Academy's annual gathering. Participants were interviewed either on site at the conference or by phone shortly after the conference. I also conducted seven follow-up interviews in December 2013. These were new interviews that were not included in chapter four's analysis. I interviewed these participants by phone in December 2013. They were recruited through snowballing techniques obtained from previous interviews.

In total, I interviewed 13 current members of HEN (see Appendix B for interview protocol). Similar to the first article, I gave interviewees the "freedom to digress" (Berg & Lune, 2004, p. 61). Following Opie's (1992) suggestion, I paid particular attention to

fringe comments and digressions, where unacknowledged discourses and/or comments may lie beyond the performed responses to interview questions. I also attempted to create more room for reflection and reciprocity, creating a conversation-like atmosphere in which subjects feel more empowered to take control of the conversation (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes.

While all 13 interviewees identified as Registered Dietitians, they worked in a variety of occupational fields, from public and community health to state government, consulting, and self-employment. Two of the interviewees were students. The interviewees were diverse geographically, representing eleven states: three from the East Coast, four from the Midwest or South, and four from the West. Their average age was 33 years old. The group was predominantly female and white, with only one male interviewee. On average, the group had been members of the Academy for over 11 years. Their participation in HEN ranged from under six months to over 15 years.

3.4.2 Data analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and then uploaded to HyperRESEARCH, a code-and-retrieve data analysis program. I used a similar process to code, analyze, and make sense of my data as described in the previous section. I repeatedly read, coded, and analyzed the interviews to create familiarity with the data. Using constant comparative methods, I sought emergent themes while comparing and contrast the interview data with the literature (Lindlof, 1995). To show rigor in my work and to allow interviewees to speak for themselves, I included many quotes throughout my analysis. Throughout the process, I continually reflected on my research findings and writing with the goal of

challenging my own assumptions and worldview. I wrote my data and analysis into a research article for future publication in a peer-reviewed journal.

CHAPTER 4: TURF WARS AND OCCUPATIONAL IDENTITY: THE BATTLE FOR EXPERTISE AND LEGITIMACY IN THE ACADEMY OF NUTRITION AND DIETETICS

4.1 Abstract

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics is the leading professional organization for registered dietitians. As gatekeepers of formal knowledge, professional organizations can profoundly impact the public's everyday lives (Freidson, 1988). This study uses qualitative interviews to analyze how members of the Academy make sense of their occupation and position themselves as professionals. I argue that Academy members use a rhetorical turf war to claim control over nutritional knowledge, at the expense of nutritionists. RDs use this turf war to organize their work, elevate their profession, and gain occupational legitimacy. However, I argue that the turf war shifts focus away from broader cultural and historical discourses that may be causing marginalization within the RD profession, such as gender. This study contributes to identity research by combining sociology and organizational communication perspectives to analyze how RDs make sense of their profession and their professional organization.

Keywords: Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, identity, sociology of professions, legitimacy

4.2 Introduction

In January 2012, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics—the leading professional association for registered dietitians (RDs)—did something it had never done before in its 95-year history: it changed its name. Once the American Dietetic Association, its new name, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, was chosen to better communicate its mission while promoting the “strong science background and academic expertise of our members”(Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 2012, para 3). Scarcely a year later, the Academy announced that dietitians could now choose their preferred title, Registered Dietitian (RD) or Registered Dietetic Nutritionist (RDN) (O’Malley & MacMunn, 2013a). In the press release announcing the change, Academy spokespeople wrote, “All registered dietitians are nutritionists – but not all nutritionists are registered dietitians. It’s an important distinction that can matter a great deal to your health” (O’Malley & MacMunn, 2013a).

These organizational changes are more than simple changes in semantics. They hint at deeper tensions in the dietetics profession, bristling beneath the surface of public awareness, over who gets to be the gatekeeper of nutritional knowledge—registered dietitians or nutritionists. The Academy’s name change and adoption of the RDN title suggest that the Academy is actively working to position RDs as *the* nutritional experts in the United States. In other words, the Academy is striving to give RDs the exclusive right to provide dietetic advice and services—at the expense of nutritionists’ claims. By attempting to limit nutritionists’ influence, the Academy seeks to create professional and economic benefits for its members. Further, as the Academy strives to make RDs the

exclusive nutritional experts, it also seeks to increase RDs' influence into the public's everyday lives. If RDs were to become the exclusive gatekeepers of nutritional knowledge and advice, they would also have the power to decide what is healthy or unhealthy in the United States—with immense impacts for our food system.

In this paper I argue that the Academy of Dietetics and Nutrition and its members are propagating a rhetorical turf war between RDs and nutritionists as a way to increase their own occupational legitimacy and economic security. By exploring this turf war from the registered dietitian's point of view, I seek to understand how Academy members are claiming control of nutritional expertise and positioning the Academy as a gatekeeper of nutritional knowledge. I frame this study around the following research questions:

RQ 1: What discourses emerge as significant as members of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics makes sense of their profession and membership?

RQ 2: How do members of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics discursively frame and organize their identities to establish themselves as professional?

RQ 3: How do members understand their claims of expertise and knowledge as contributing to or detracting from their professional wellbeing?

To explore these questions, I analyze how members of the Academy communicate about and legitimize their profession, often resulting in the drawing of boundary lines between RDs and nutritionists. While my analysis of the Academy members' turf war rhetoric is specific to RDs, it has larger implications for other professions and how they communicate their credentials, legitimacy, and expertise. I begin by reviewing the

literature on professions, legitimacy, and identity and then transition into a brief history of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

4.3 Literature Review

4.3.1 Professions and legitimacy

The literature on professions spans many disciplines and research questions, ranging from how to define a profession to more prescriptive analyses on how to build professional legitimacy (Abbott & Meerabeau, 1998). Yet, the research is unified through several common themes: first, a profession implies formal knowledge, often obtained through higher education (Freidson, 1988). Professions are thus differentiated from other forms of work, which might be considered lower status or vocational. Second, the terms “profession” and “professional” are contested. Not everyone can achieve professional status. For example, professions dominated by females have historically struggled with issues of professional recognition and legitimacy due to its designation as “women’s work” (Shapiro, 1986, p. 219). These professions are often seen as “semi-professional” at best, a view that is often lamented and contested (Cheney & Lee Ashcraft, 2007). The idea of becoming a professional is deeply rooted in conflicted, shifting, historical, cultural, gendered discourses (Ashcraft et al., 2012). Lastly, professions shape everyday life (Freidson, 1988). Professions claim expertise in specialized areas of policy, and, in return, society frequently looks to professionals for “expert” advice with regards to policy decisions. Thus, professional status is generally desired—for the occupation and its workers.

Professionalization is the process of an occupation becoming legitimized. In the twentieth century, credentialing became an important way for professions to professionalize, to regulate their services, and to display their legitimacy (Cheney & Lee Ashcraft, 2007). Credentialing can be regulated through the state or through private occupation entities, such as professional associations (Freidson, 1988). Economically, credentialing is meant to help increase professions' incomes by limiting the supply of service providers. Freidson (1988) likened credentialing to building an occupation cartel that has "the exclusive right to offer specific services, a right sustained by the state" (p. 63). However, Cheney and Ashcraft (2007) argued that professionalization is "a fundamentally rhetoric process because the identity and status of any job is not given or determined but is rather a precarious, contested formation constantly negotiated through discursive activity" (p. 164-165). Thus, credentialing will not inherently lead to professionalization. For the credential to be meaningful, there must be some sort of gatekeeping—such as social norms or a law requiring a licensed medical provider for insurance reimbursements—to encourage use of credentialed professionals (Freidson, 1988).

Social workers and nurses are two professions that have aspired for greater professionalization. However, Abbott and Meerabeau (Abbott & Meerabeau, 1998) argued that "neither social workers nor nurses have achieved recognition as professional occupations in terms of financial reward or autonomy over work" (p. 15). Notably, both social work and nursing are associated with female "caring" work and both have struggled "to claim a distinct, professional knowledge base and a unique expertise"

(Abbott & Meerabeau, 1998, p. 10). Although social workers have attempted to obtain state regulated licensures, their efforts have frequently failed due to their work's overlapping boundaries with other regulated professionals, specifically clinical psychologists and psychiatrists (Freidson, 1988). These failures suggest that social work's claim to formal knowledge is not specialized or differentiated enough from other professions. In contrast, nursing has a more effective credential and is often regulated through state licensure (Freidson, 1988). However, given the complex and often gendered professional hierarchies within hospitals, nurses still struggle to gain professional legitimacy within the workplace. Both nursing and social work suggest that, while professions often seem unified, stable, and defined to outsiders, they are constantly being negotiated, contested, and (re)constructed on the inside (Cheney & Lee Ashcraft, 2007; Freidson, 1988). These negotiations have implications for occupational identities.

4.3.2 Occupational identity

Meisenbach (2008) defined occupational identity as a “group or social identity in that it represents how individuals construct their sense of who they are and what they do in relation to their jobs” (p. 263). Occupational identities are multifaceted, fragmented, shifting sites of negotiation and tension (Ashcraft, 2007; Meisenbach, 2008). Despite this fluidity, occupations and identities often appear their static and orderly, leading to assumptions that characteristics are inherent (Alvesson et al., 2008; Meisenbach, 2008). Identity scholars seek to question these “taken for granted” characteristics and explore how identity negotiations are a product of and contributor to everyday practices, routines, and discourses. Thus, the process of identity is “constantly open and available to be

negotiated and re-negotiated, defined and redefined” (Collinson, 1992, p. 31). As people make sense of who they are, they contribute to their perceptions of the self, the other, and the world (Deetz, 1992). The result is a constantly changing, complex mix of multiple identities that coexist within each person, at times reinforcing and at other times contradicting (Alvesson et al., 2008; Collinson, 2003).

Within organizational studies, identity work has been predominantly confined to the organization (Alvesson et al., 2008). Ashcraft (2007) argued that many studies limit their examinations to “organizational discourse / communication as phenomena occurring in organizations or within their physical borders,” though these boundaries are often acknowledged as arbitrary. Similarly, power differences within the organization and within society are often ignored, though identity negotiations can be greatly affected by them (Deetz, 1992). This limited approach often misses how individuals interact with culture, norms, politics, institutions, and history within and outside of the organization. In response, a growing body of literature attempts to connect external discourses with internal organizational and identity theorizing.

Discourses surrounding one’s profession and its professionalization result from and contribute to occupational identities. As individuals make sense of their occupational identities, they want to feel that their employer and their work is legitimate. By combining research related to professions and identities, I seek to understand how members of the Academy claim their profession’s formal knowledge and how these professionalization strategies are embedded within members’ occupational identities. This approach helps contextualize identities—including their implications for who feels

included in and/or who feels excluded from the occupation—as a product of norms that exist both within and beyond the organization.

4.3.3 The profession of dietetics and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

As of December 2013, there were 89,300 RDs in the United States (“About the Academy,” 2013). Approximately 74% of these RDs are members of the Academy (Payne-Palacio & Canter, 2013). Academy members work in a variety of occupational settings, including hospitals, nonprofit organizations, and the food industry (Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 2012). Within these employee settings, RDs work in the following practice areas: acute care (43%), ambulatory and outpatient care (15%), long-term and extended care (16%), rehab facility (7%), community and public health program (14%), government agency (9%), non-profit agency (8%), private practice (12%), and college or university faculty (11%) (“About the Academy,” 2013). While the profession is quite diverse, they are unified through their RD credential and their membership in the Academy.

Dietetics grew out of the field of home economics, a history that has enabled, constrained, and ultimately shaped the profession’s identity and legitimacy (Barber, 1959; Cassell, 1990). While dietitians first organized themselves as part of the American Home Economics Association (AHEA), they broke off from this group and formed the American Dietetic Association (ADA) in 1917 (Weigley, 1974). The ADA was exclusively for professionals and individuals who were officially trained and educated in home economics and/or dietetics (Weigley, 1974). Thus, beginning in 1917, members of the Academy differentiated themselves from other nutritional professionals: “the true

dietitian when properly trained and experienced is a specialist and deserves that recognition in the hospital” (Barber, 1959, p. 1).

From its founding, the Academy understood the need to build dietetics’ legitimacy by going through a process of professionalization. To do so, the Academy pointedly used positivist and scientific language to frame its purpose and goals. In 1955 the president of the Academy explained its mission was “to improve the nutrition of human beings, to advance the science of dietetics and nutrition, and to advance education in these allied areas" (Barber, 1959, p. 112). The Academy’s continual emphasis on science, research, and expertise aligned it with academia and elevated the profession. The profession also set minimum requirements to be a member to help differentiate dietitians’ medical and scientific expertise.

The Academy also passed a credential requirement in 1969 to further legitimize the profession (Cassell, 1990). To become accredited today, RDs must earn a four year degree through a certified program, finish a 900 hour internship, pass an exam, and complete continuing education credits to maintain registration status (Payne-Palacio & Canter, 2013). In addition to the private credential, 46 states also regulate RDs through certificates and licensures (Commission on Dietetic Registration, 2014). These statewide regulations further differentiate dietitians’ work through legal statutes and help designate RDs’ knowledge as unique, specialized, and valuable. This effort to legitimize dietitians’ work, however, has also resulted in the exclusion of other food and nutrition professionals from registration and thus from certain employment opportunities.

Despite strategies to build legitimacy, the profession of dietetics has struggled with marginalization--perhaps due to its gendered beginnings. The Academy was all female until 1936, when the first male, Claud Samuel Pritchett, was granted active membership (Barber, 1959). Today, the organization is still gendered. Approximately 96% of RDs within the Academy are female (Payne-Palacio & Canter, 2013). In Gingras's (2010) research about Canadian dietitians, she found that many participants felt disappointed that they never obtained the level of professionalism promised to them during their educational training. The Academy has acknowledged similar struggles. In the Academy's 70th anniversary book published in 1990, the editor notes that "another long-standing problem was the profession's seeming lack of self-confidence" (Cassell, 1990, p. 395). This study explores how members of the Academy make sense of their occupational identities given the profession's diversity, historic challenges, and professionalization strategies. Using qualitative interviews with members of the Academy, I analyze how members claim their legitimacy, professionalism, and expertise.

4.4 Methods

This study uses data from 17 in-depth, semi structured interviews with RDs and members of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. As noted by Berg (2004), semi-structured interviews follow an outline for an interview script but also give the interviewer "freedom to digress" to explore emergent themes (p. 61). I conducted face-to-face interviews at the 2012 Food and Nutrition Conference and Expo—the Academy's annual conference—and completed follow-up phone interviews after the event.

Interview subjects were recruited through an initial group of key informants and snowballing techniques. Interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes.

Interviewees represented a diverse subset of Academy members. The average age of interviewees was 39, with a range of 20 years old to 66 years old. The number of years spent as an Academy member varied from less than one year to over 38 years, with an average of 13 years of membership. Fourteen of the interviewees identified as female (~ 82%) and three interviewees identified as male (~ 18%). Approximately 88% of interviewees identified as Caucasian, with one interviewee identifying as Hispanic and one interviewee identifying as Asian. Professionally, the 17 interviewees ranged from having less than one year of experience to more than 30 years as a RD. Interviewees worked in a variety of settings, including hospitals, universities, public health settings, and the corporate food industry. Three interviewees identified as current students, and one interviewee identified as a PhD student. The group represented 13 states and the District of Columbia. Table 1 provides a profile of my interviewees' professional background and demographic information.

Table 1: *Profile of Academy Members Interviewed*

#	Position	Years as RD	Years in Academy	Current Member	Age	Race	Gender
1	Self Employed	5	7	Yes	45	Caucasian	F
2	Administrative Director	29	33	Yes	52	Caucasian	F
3	Clinical Dietitian	3	6	Yes	32	Caucasian	F

4	Hospital Nutrition Director	27	15	Yes	56	Caucasian	F
5	Public Health	9	9	Yes	34	Caucasian	M
6	Undergraduate Student	0	2	Yes	22	Caucasian	F
7	Undergraduate Student	0	1	Yes	20	Caucasian	F
8	Administrative Director	33	38	Yes	66	Caucasian	F
9	Consultant	20	22	Yes	43	Caucasian	F
10	Undergraduate Student	0	1	Yes	21	Caucasian	F
11	Nutrition and Wellness	5	5	Yes	30	Hispanic	M
12	PhD Student	7	7	Yes	30	Caucasian	F
13	Public Health	1	6	Yes	26	Caucasian	F
14	Dir. Food and Nutrition Services	23	23	Yes	52	Asian	M
15	Wellness Coordinator	2	7	Yes	49	Caucasian	F
16	Nutrition Policy	20	20	Yes	49	Caucasian	F
17	Public Health	16	15	No	45	Caucasian	F

4.4.1 Data analysis.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim. I uploaded the transcripts to HyperRESEARCH, a code-and-retrieve data analysis program. In my initial reading of the data, I made notes to record my thoughts and potential themes. During repeated readings, I continued to add codes but also began to collapse related codes into each while dividing other codes to offer more detail as patterns began to emerge. For example,

as issues of occupational legitimacy materialized as an important theme, I returned to these coded sections and refined their descriptions. In addition to being coded as “occupational legitimacy” the passage might further be refined as “using the nutritional other to define oneself.” Through this process of collapsing and refining codes, larger themes emerged which were then used as the basis for my argument.

I used constant comparative analysis as a framework to guide my work. Lindlof (1995) described constant comparative analysis as a cyclical and continuous method of processing, reducing, explaining. New comparisons and themes are created during the coding process and continually compared to the literature and previously categorized data (Charmaz, 2005; Lindlof, 1995). As themes emerged from my work, I compared them with previous research to understand how they confirmed, expanded, and/or diverged from previous understandings of identity and legitimacy theories.

In the next section, I describe how Academy members identify with their profession and claim their legitimacy. I begin by describing members’ feelings of unmet professional expectations, suggesting a need for additional professionalization. I then discuss how RDs use a rhetorical turf war to make sense of their occupational identity and end with a section on perceived economic implications.

4.5 Analysis

4.5.1 Unmet professional expectations: “I have a master’s degree, and I make less than half of them.”

Throughout my conversations with members of the Academy, I perceived a level of defensiveness, as if registered dietitians (RDs) were trying to justify their

profession and their training to me. They emphasized how hard they worked, how long they spent in school, and how they were diligently trained in objective, scientific research methods. One member described the process of becoming a RD as “really difficult. Much more difficult than people realize.” I began to understand these conversations as indicative of their perceptions of professional marginalization in the health field. I felt as if the dietitians were attempting to prove their value—and their status as professionals. These conversations suggested that RDs have unmet professional expectations.

Despite having bachelor’s degrees—or more advanced professional degrees—members often voiced complaints of being underpaid. One RD argued, “There should be more recognition in terms of pay and things like that for people who have spent some time...and effort into becoming an expert that they might not be recognized for right now in terms of pay or position.” In another interview, a member was more blatantly frustrated. She explained, “Dieticians are not super well paid, especially for half our workforce having a masters degree or higher education level.” She went on to compare dietetics to other health professionals to emphasize this inequity. “I think that we make less than half of what the pharmacists at our hospital make, and other – and like the P.T.’s and things like that – and the O.T.’s... And I have a masters degree and I make less than half of them.” These interviews hinted at perceived wage ceilings within the occupation and greater professional inequalities within the health field. Many members of the Academy felt that they were paid less than other health professionals, though they had similar or higher levels of educational training and/or experience.

Members also discussed having to manage multiple jobs. Many members had side projects and/or private practices to accompany their main jobs. Others worked multiple part-time jobs to create full time employment. One member described working a full-time job at a community hospital while working an “as needed” job at a long-term acute care facility and participating in a professional program on cystic fibrosis. Another member explained that she “[strings] things together” by working a clinical job at a long-term care nursing facility, an advising job at a college campus, and a nutritional messaging job with a food service company. For some members, the lived experience of being a RD included juggling multiple jobs.

In addition to these material consequences, members frequently voiced frustration that the general public did not understand the dietetics occupation or differentiate it from other nutritional professions. Many doubted that the Academy was known outside of specific public health circles and/or wondered if the public understood the occupation’s value. One dietitian began her interview by assuming that this was a common theme in my conversations: “And I’m sure you’ve probably heard that before where people—you talk to people, you want to be a dietitian, and they’re like, what is that. So we’re really trying to get that information out there.” As RDs made sense of who they were in relation to their jobs, they struggled with the perception that their profession lacked status and public recognition. Members proudly declared themselves nutritional experts but would later question if the general public had even heard of their profession.

Further, members repeatedly told stories about how RDs were often confused with nutritionists, which they perceived as negative. Academy members lamented this

confusion, suggesting that it dismissed RDs' specialized training, skillset, and expertise. One RD told a story about how she was assumed to be a nutritionist, forcing her to both correct and explain her profession:

And during this nutrition traineeship that I'm doing, I was at a neuromuscular clinic yesterday and the pulmonologist kept on introducing me as a nutritionist to everybody. And finally after one person, I was like well, I am a registered dietitian, I work in nutrition. I kind of felt like I needed to put that out there.

In this story, the introducer assumed that nutritionists and RDs inhabited the same professional terrain. However, the Academy member sought to differentiate her knowledge and expertise from other nutrition professions. In order to accurately communicate her professional identity, the member felt she could not be labeled a nutritionist.

Another member commented that, when he gave public lectures, the audiences rarely understood the difference between nutritionists and dietitians: "They all have that kind of confusion. So it's nothing new...But at least luckily I have the opportunity to tell some people." Again, this member felt that the public did not understand the dietitian as distinct from nutritionist. Like the previous member, he also felt the need to correct his audiences and inform them of the differences. Other comments like these continually emerged from my interviews. Members voiced frustration with the confusion between dietitians and nutritionists, emphasizing the need to frame the RD profession as distinct from and more legitimate than other nutrition professions.

Members' stories about unequal pay and public confusion about their occupation suggest that RDs are still working to achieve professionalization. Their comments reflected continuity with earlier identity work that suggested dietitians have a "melancholia... associated with lack of recognition, loss arising from unfulfilled promises of professionalism and 'spiritual injury'" (Gingras, 2010, p. 441). Their unmet professional expectations included disappointment that they were not seen as having nutritional expertise that is different from nutritionists. In the next sections I describe how members' frustration with these unmet professional expectations translated into turf war rhetoric that they employed to claim nutritional expertise.

4.5.2 Claiming expertise: "Dieticians fight long and hard to have the control of the nutrition field."

Academy members' frustrations with professional marginalization suggest that their expectations for professionalization are not being met. Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005) argued that individuals use organizational sensemaking to organize unmet expectations. Sensemaking is a communication process that seeks to answer "what's going on here" and "what do I do next" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 411). When faced with perceived marginalization, members of the Academy used organizational sensemaking to claim control over formal nutritional knowledge (re)define themselves as professionals. This process involves categorizing, labeling, and creating hierarchies to bring order to their occupational identity (Weick et al., 2005). To legitimize and elevate their profession, members used turf war rhetoric to create a hierarchy of nutritional professionals. As one member put it, "...really there's turf wars happening in the states

on who gets to practice as a dietician or practice the practice of nutrition. And dieticians fight long and hard to have the control of the nutrition field.” Members used this turf war rhetoric to make sense of their occupational identity by describing their professional expertise as different from and more legitimate than nutritionists.

Academy members symbolized and communicated their expertise by discussing their education and RD certification to differentiate their profession. One member compared his education to “basically [getting] a pre-med degree,” while another emphasized that “over 50% of dietitians who are practicing and [are Academy] members also have a master’s degree, so that’s at least five to six years of education on top of their internship.” Members described their RD certification as culminating proof of their extensive training and as validation of their expertise. As described by one member, it is “a credential that means that you have a certain set of skills that you have...mastered and demonstrated your mastery of.”

Another member used her certification to illustrate her journey to becoming a professional. She emphasized the “specific course load of work that you have to do, undergraduate, bachelor’s degree work in sciences –in nutritional sciences and food safety.” She then noted the exam that RDs must pass to become registered and discussed her profession as a “certified practice.” This member went into great detail about how she became a professional, noting the specific, bureaucratic symbols and milestones along the way, such as her course load and the exam. Her rhetoric is in line with Taylor’s (1995) descriptions of professionals as individuals who “achieve their status after long years of specialized training” (p. 500). Other Academy members also made claims to

professionalism by discussing the milestones—like their education and certification—that best communicated their journey to becoming professional. In this view, the profession is framed as an achievement to be gained after long years of hard work.

Members' descriptions of their profession as an "achievement" starkly contrasted with how members described and defined a nutritionist. While RDs self-defined themselves as specialized, scientifically trained professionals, nutritionists were continually described as having an unknown level of expertise and status. One member described a nutritionist as "anyone that self-proclaims as an expert—and they don't even have to say expert, but just someone who gives nutritional advice." Another member further explained, "The term nutritionist is not defined. It's undefined. So you could read a book about diets or a book about nutritional science and call yourself a nutritionist. Anyone can call themselves a nutritionist because it's not overseen by an entity." Others went even further and described nutritionists as lacking "any practical experience in public health and nutrition." While the RD process is highly structured, bureaucratic, and framed as legitimate, members described nutritionists as having varying—often-unknown—degrees of expertise.

By contrasting nutritionists' occupational ambiguity with the highly specific regulations of RDs, Academy members created a nutritional "Other." Members drew on the nutritional Other to communicate what it is that they are not: nutritionists are undefined; RDs are certified; nutritionists are amateurs or have ambiguous educational backgrounds; RD are carefully regulated and therefore legitimate. Members used nutritionists—as the Other—to elevate their own profession. One member noted, "As far

as job descriptions go...RD is kind of a distinction and level of education where as...anyone that wants to call themselves a nutritionist, they don't really have to have anything to verify that." This strategy fits into Ashcraft and colleagues' review of the literature on how professions are crafted. They argue that the "construction of professions entails not only aligning occupations with particular people, but also contrasting them with lowly Others" (Ashcraft et al., 2012, p. 471). Those that are excluded from the profession are therefore a necessary part of occupational identity. The implication is that, while members often complained about nutritionists, they are actually an important component of how members made sense of their occupational identity and claimed expertise.

Members framed themselves as more educated, trained, and/or legitimate than nutritionists, creating a hierarchy of expertise within the nutritional field. As one member succinctly put it, "a dietitian is a higher level than a nutritionist." Some members added to the hierarchy by comparing RDs' work to health professions that are already seen as legitimate, such as doctors or physicians: "So what I'd like to see is in the future the dietitian is recognized as important as the doctor. When we talk about nutrition as a preventive medicine, it's important." The hierarchy creates an "us" (RDs) and a "them" (nutritionists) dichotomy that RDs use to claim expertise for their profession. This hierarchy is thus one way that members labeled, categorized, and ordered their work to make sense of their occupational identity. Yet, despite this constructed hierarchy, members often noted that while this hierarchy might be "true" in their opinion, the public still did not understand this difference. While the turf war helps organize members'

occupational identities, they did not feel the public fully understood their claims to expertise.

4.5.3 Economic implications: “[The Academy] wanted people to understand that dietitians are the nutritional professions.”

Given RDs’ unmet professional expectations, members looked to the Academy to act as a gatekeeper and increase economic benefits for their profession. Thus, members discussed the Academy as an important resource for helping to differentiate between nutritionists and RDs and elevate the profession of dietetics. For example, one member noted how the Academy defined the dietetic profession by describing a page on the Academy’s website:

There’s actually a link that simply breaks down the difference between a dietician and a nutritionist...the Academy plays a great role in that – in really trying to educate the public about the difference in the qualifications and how to safely choose a practitioner for their nutrition health care.

Similarly, when discussing the Academy’s mission, one member noted, “It is about positioning members as nutrition experts and it is about the health of the consuming public.” While both these RDs framed the decision between a nutritionist and RD as a safety issues, it is also an economic issues. The Academy plays an active role in creating economic benefits for dietetics by promoting the turf war rhetoric to limit nutritionists’ influence.

Yet, the Academy’s use of the turf war rhetoric, between nutritionists and RDs, also suggests tension within the occupation. Is the Academy trying to promote the

profession as more inclusive or more exclusive? Professional organizations frequently attempt to limit entry into profession to create scarcity within the profession and increase incomes (Freidson, 1988). However, members debated over whether the Academy was trying to welcome or limit nutritionists into the profession. This debate arose when I discussed the Academy's name change—from the American Dietetics Association to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Many members felt the change was a strategic communication move by the Academy to elevate RDs as “more than” a nutritionist. One member explained that the Academy changed its name because “they wanted people to understand that dietitians are the nutritional professions.” Others, however, felt that the name was meant to frame the Academy as a more inclusive organization. Some felt that “by changing their name to include Nutrition, [the Academy] hoped to bring in other professionals who may not be dietitians but practice in the general field of nutrition to join their Academy and hopefully make it a more well-rounded group of health care practitioners.” Still others felt that the name change simply created confusion.

Perhaps most importantly, members felt that the Academy's use of the turf war rhetoric helped create economic benefits through insurance reimbursements. Academy members discussed their desire to claim nutritional expertise for themselves so that their services—and only RD services—would be reimbursable by insurance agencies. Many members advocated for state licensures that would further differentiate the profession. One member explained, “Every state has an opportunity to have licensed dietitians, just like every state license.” She went on to describe the concept of state licensure and

insurance reimbursements, especially given new healthcare laws, by comparing RDs to other medical professionals:

If you're a doctor, for example, or a physical therapist, you have a state exam and a state licensure which allows you to bill and collect payments. And in the state of Washington, we are not licensed dietitians and the regulations are written for licensed health care professionals which could, depending on which way the political winds blow – could mean that dietitians who are not licensed cannot be reimbursed.

Similarly, another member explained her participation in an advocacy group by saying that she wanted her profession to be “at the front in terms of knowledge of food and nutrition to make sure that we're getting reimbursed for those services; where they already are being reimbursed for and then where we would like to see them be reimbursed for.” The question over what nutritional professions are licensed and reimbursable—nutritionists, RDS, or both—is contested. By using the turf war to claim RDs as *the* nutritional experts, members hoped to become *the reimbursable* nutritional experts.

While the turf war rhetoric is normalized within the occupation, it also distracts from other discourses that may be contributing to the occupation's marginalized status. Yet, members rarely discussed their occupation's struggles with legitimacy as stemming from deeper, more entrenched discourses within society. As an exception, one RD, who had recently ended her membership with the Academy, suggested that the occupation's struggles with marginalization could be traced to its home economics roots:

You have to go through all this training and I don't know, it's interesting. I kind of say dietitians are usually their own worst enemy because they're not the strongest advocates. I mean some are, but aren't more like, yes this is our profession. I mean they came out of home economics and then transferred. So I just think it never got the credibility.

Although identity work is often confined to the organization (Alvesson et al., 2008; Cheney & Lee Ashcraft, 2007), this RD's quote suggested a need to understand dietetics within its historical and cultural context. By embedding members' stories of inequity within the occupation's historical struggles with legitimacy, a larger trend of marginalization appears. My findings of unmet professional expectations reinforced other current and historical accounts of struggles within the Academy and the profession (see Barber, 1959; Gingras, 2010). Yet, Academy members were more likely to claim their expertise through discussing their credentials and/or comparing themselves to nutritionists.

4.6 Discussion

Beneath the general public's awareness, registered dietitians and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics are actively claiming to be *the* nutritional experts. Questions surrounding the nutritional field—with public health implications such as which professions' services should be reimbursable by insurance—pervade the dietetics occupation. Members of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics repeatedly claimed nutritional expertise as their territory and sought to differentiate their profession from nutritionists. In light of frustrations with their own professionalization, they made sense

of their work by using turf war rhetoric to claim nutritional expertise as their own and elevate their profession over nutritionists.

Like nursing and social work, the profession of dietetics has struggled with professionalization. Despite Academy members' claims that their knowledge is unique and specialized, the profession has not been able to differentiate itself. Like social work, this might be attributed to the profession's overlap with other nutrition professions. As Freidson (1988) argued, it is hard to justify a certification when another profession can seemingly do the same job without the title. Academy members desire to be seen as more knowledgeable than nutritionists is that distinction could help limit other professions' entry into their profession—with implications for insurance reimbursements.

My first research question asked what discourses emerged as significant as Academy members made sense of their profession and membership. Through conversations with 17 members of the Academy, I found that the turf war discourse—including its intersections with legitimacy, expertise, and professionalization discourses—emerged as significant within the occupation. Members repeatedly voiced frustration that RDs were not seen as distinct from and/or more professional than nutritionists. Thus, members of the Academy sought to professionalize their occupation and claim their expertise by using turf war rhetoric to differentiate between the RD profession and nutritionists. In the process, they staked claim to nutritional expertise and positioned themselves as *the* nutritional experts, at the expense of other nutritional professionals.

My second research question sought to understand how members discursively frame and organize their occupational identities. Through the turf war narrative, members used nutritionists as foils to frame their expertise. By labeling nutritionists as “undefined” or “amateurs,” they made sense of their own occupational identities. Additionally, members used bureaucratic, “objective” symbols—such as their education and certification—to create a hierarchy in which RDs were shown to be “more than” nutritionists. By establishing the hierarchy, the turf war’s message is clear: RDs are more qualified, more trained, more professional. Weick and colleagues (2005) argued that organizational sensemaking contributes to identity negotiations by using “language, talk, and communication” to organize chaos (p. 409). Within the Academy, members participate in organizational sensemaking and identity negotiations by labeling, categorizing, and dismissing what they are not—nutritionists.

My final research question asked how members understood their claims to knowledge and expertise benefited or detracted from their professional wellbeing. I found that RDs promote the turf war rhetoric and highlight their credentials to increase their economic benefit. By attempting to limit nutritionists’ influence in the nutrition field, RDs hope to become the only reimbursable nutritional experts. Thus, at its root, the turf war rhetoric is about economics.

My findings have practical implications for the Academy and its members. First, I suggest that RDs are using turf war rhetoric to achieve professionalization and increase their economic benefits. However, many members of the Academy voiced unmet professional expectations, suggesting that this professionalization strategy might not be

working. While the turf war rhetoric suggests members' unmet professionalization expectations are due to lack of clarity between nutritionist and dietitian, the bigger problem is arguably more about gendered, culturally embedded ideas of who can become an expert or a professional and who cannot. Through this lens, RDs' constant reinforcement of the turf war is perhaps ineffective in solving their problems with professionalization. Thus, my research raises the question, are members of the Academy working to solve the right problem? By using the turf war rhetoric, RDs are further marginalizing another already-marginalized occupation—the nutritionist. This emphasis on competition instead of collaboration has had questionable results in solving RDs own problems with marginalization.

4.7 Future Research and Conclusion

This study explores how members of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics make sense of their occupation, negotiate their occupational identities, and claim their professional knowledge. The study is limited in that it does not take into account the nutritionist point of view. Further, it does not directly analyze historical and/or cultural discourses within and beyond the Academy's borders. Given the Academy's gendered history, this would be a fruitful endeavor. Additional research is needed to understand how cultural and historic discourses are enabling and constraining the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and the occupation of dietetics. Future research would also benefit from studying credentialing as a professionalization strategy. In today's world, it would be useful to understand if credentialing is effective at creating economic benefit for professions and—if so—at what cost to others?

This study is valuable because it questions taken-for-granted discourses, communication, and organizational sensemaking within a professional organization. My research found that Academy members have unmet professional expectations. To gain professional status, many RDs use turf war rhetoric to position dietetics as the experts and nutritionists as the ambiguous other. This rhetoric helps members claim nutritional knowledge as their own with implications for increasing the profession's economic benefits. However, it does so at the expense of nutritionists. Future research is needed to help members of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics more strategically brand their profession and claim nutritional expertise.

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CHAPTE 5: HEALTH ACTIVISM, NEOLIBERALISM, AND CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP IN THE ACADEMY OF NUTRITION AND DIETETICS

5.1 Abstract

Health activism is an often overlooked yet growing aspect of health communication scholarship (Zoller, 2005). This article use a health activism framework to understand how members of the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition (HEN) dietetics practice group—a subgroup within the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics—perform as health activists and make sense of corporate sponsorship. Using a critical communication perspective, it explores how neoliberal discourses enable and/or constrain their activism. My findings suggest that, although HEN members have a common identity, they lack a unified vision for defining and solving challenges related to corporate sponsorship. Instead, some members take a reformative approach that reproduce neoliberal discourses while others take a transformative approach that challenge the Academy’s existing structure and broader societal norms.

Keywords: Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, health activism, health communication, neoliberalism

5.2 Introduction

Nestle, Kraft Foods, Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, McDonalds, Unilever, General Mills. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' list of corporate sponsors reads like a "who's who" of the global food industry. The Academy is the leading professional organization of registered dietitians (RDs). While the organization has had relationships with food corporations since it began in 1917, in recent years its corporate sponsorship practices have become increasingly scrutinized. In 2013, public health lawyer and food politics activist Michele Simon wrote a scathing report of the Academy's sponsorship policies. She argued,

The food industry's deep infiltration of the nation's top nutrition organization (the Academy) raises serious questions not only about that profession's credibility, but also about its policy positions. The nation is currently embroiled in a series of policy debates about how to fix our broken food system. A 74,000-member health organization has great potential to shape that national discourse – for better and for worse. (Simon, 2013, p. 1)

In response, the Academy has denied that sponsors influence the Academy's organizational decisions or policy positions. On its website, the Academy justifies its corporate sponsorship program by noting its benefits:

Corporate sponsorship enables the Academy—as it does for nonprofit organizations and associations nationwide—to build awareness of the Academy and our members; to share science-based information and new research with members; and to enable the Academy to reach millions more consumers with our

messages than would otherwise be possible. (“Truth and transparency,” 2013, para. 4)

These two quotes illustrate the complexity of corporate sponsorships and the polarization of those who think corporate sponsorship is enabling or constraining RDs.

Within the Academy, the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition (HEN) dietetic practice group has publicly criticized the Academy’s corporate sponsorship practices. In 2012, the group’s leadership established a taskforce to address the debate. To date, the taskforce has resulted in new guidelines to govern HEN’s own corporate sponsorship program and a request to the Academy to adopt similar guidelines. Yet, some HEN members have voiced frustration at the lack of change at the Academy level despite HEN’s efforts. Using Zoller’s (2005) health activism framework, I seek to explore HEN members’ activism and understand why it has or has not been effective. I approached my study with the following research questions (RQ).

5.2.1 Research Questions

RQ 1: Why are members of the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group involved in the corporate sponsorship debate?

RQ 2: How do members of the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group make sense of corporate sponsorship within the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics?

RQ 3: How do neoliberal discourses enable and/or constrain Hunger and Environmental Nutrition members’ understandings of and solutions to corporate sponsorship?

To explore these questions, I conducted semi-structured interviews with current members of the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition dietetic practice group. Before discussing my analysis, I begin by reviewing selected literature on health communication and activism and then briefly describe the Academy of Nutrition and Dietitians.

5.3 Literature Review

5.3.1 Health communication and health activism

Health is a socially constructed concept, a product of multi-layered and complex discourses and organizing (Zoller, 2010). Health communication scholarship studies the processes and messaging that identify and frame issues of health (Dutta, 2010; Zoller, 2005). While post-positivist perspectives and message-driven research are dominant in the field of health communication, so-called “alternative” approaches to health communication have increasingly questioned taken-for-granted assumptions about what constitutes health and medical care (Dutta & Zoller, 2008). Thus, many health communication scholars have advocated for taking a culturally broader, more critical approach to health communication to uncover biases and value judgments in seemingly objective health claims (Dutta, 2010; Lupton, 1994; Zoller, 2005).

A critical approach to health activism. A critical approach to health communication seeks to understand how ideologies and power relationships reinforce, challenge, and (re)construct taken-for-granted social norms and structures (Dutta & Zoller, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This perspective challenges assumptions about what is or is not healthy and whose knowledge related to health is accepted as expertise (Lupton, 1994; Zoller, 2005). Through this process, critical health communication

questions the universality of health and the dominance of health claims based on Westernized approaches to “objective” science (Dutta, 2010). By pointing out how health components are constructed and continue to be (re)constructed, a critical approach highlights opportunities to change the system, with an explicit interest in issues of social equity (Dutta & Zoller, 2008). Zoller (2005) encouraged using a critical lens to examine health activism, particularly underscoring the need to understand “sociopolitical and economic influences on health status at local and global levels” (p. 342).

Within health communication scholarship, health activism is often overlooked (Zoller, 2005). Zoller (2005) defined health activism as “a challenge to existing orders and power relationships that are perceived to influence negatively some aspects of health or impede health promotion. Activism involves attempts to change the status quo, including social norms, embedded practices, policies, and power relationships” (p. 360-361). Health activism both is influenced by and is an influencer of social, cultural, economics, and political discourses. Examples of past health activism include the fight for Medicare, anti-tobacco campaigns, and fundraising efforts for breast cancer research, amongst others. Given Zoller’s (2005) definition, HEN’s organizing in response to the Academy’s corporate sponsorship can be understood as health activism.

Health activists organize themselves through four categories of political orientation that address issues of power: transformative, redemptive, reformative, and alternative (Zoller, 2005). Alternative and redemptive approaches focus on the individual level, while reformative and transformative approaches seek societal change. Activists working for reformative changes tend to seek improvements within the existing

structures, while activists working for transformative change tend to work for fundamental changes in the system's structure. Activists can change their political orientation over time and/or can impede or aid other activists with different political orientations. A critical communication perspective, with its focus on power relationships, is particularly well suited for understanding and contextualizing how these political orientations affect health activism.

Neoliberalism and corporate sponsorship. Neoliberal discourses are frequently discussed in critical health communication scholarship (Ayo, 2012). Neoliberalism is a political and economic system that came into prominence in 1970's; its trademarks include deregulation, individualized solutions, commodification, and an overall faith in the market's ability to govern the economy and society (Harvey, 2005; Jessop, 2002; Peck & Tickell, 2002). Through neoliberalism, efficiency becomes the ultimate goal, and responsibilities once held by the government are either privatized or assigned to community organizations (Alkon & Mares, 2012).

While neoliberalism is heralded for its emphasis on robust market competition, its privatization and free market policies have contributed to intense consolidation, commodification, and environmental degradation —especially within the food system (Harvey, 2005; McMichael, 2009). This has resulted in what McMichael (2009) describes as the “corporate food regime...a relatively stable set of relationships privileging corporate agriculture” (p. 289). Guthman (2011) described neoliberalism as “an utter disaster: economically, socially, and ecologically” (p. 168). Many others cite its detrimental impacts, including the limiting of state and civil society (Giroux, 2002),

social fragmentation, loss of accountability, and new forms of marginalization (Greenhouse, 2011), the amassing of power in an elitist class and the concentration of corporate power (Harvey, 2005), among others.

The literature describes neoliberalism as so entrenched and prevalent in our everyday lives that it is often overlooked (Greenhouse, 2011; Harvey, 2005). It has become an unquestioned, normalized discourse. Accordingly, Greenhouse (2011) argued that neoliberalism is a lived experience with impacts on individuals, even if the individuals are not aware of its influence. Scholars have adopted the term “neoliberal subjectivity” to describe the ways individuals internalize and incorporate neoliberal discourses into their everyday lives (Alkon & Mares, 2012; P. Allen & Guthman, 2006). Within neoliberal subjectivities, the market reigns above all. A “good citizen” is redefined as a “good consumer;” political acts are limited to “voting with your dollars” (Guthman, 2011, p. 18).

Taking a critical approach to health communication can help uncover how neoliberalism shapes health activists’ definitions of problems and proposed solutions. Zoller (2005) argued, “Global economic policy is central to health communication but is often ignored” (p. 359). To frame my study of political orientations within HEN’s activism, I understood reformative orientations as reinforcing neoliberal discourses and transformative orientations as challenging neoliberal discourses. My research thus takes a critical approach, with a focus on neoliberalism, to address Zoller’s call for future research on health activism that addresses economic policies.

5.3.2 The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and dietetic practice groups

With over 75,000 members, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics is the leading professional organization for Registered Dietitians (RDs) (“About the Academy,” 2013). The Academy works to promote RDs as nutritional experts while increasing their voice in local, national, and global public health issues. From a membership perspective, RDs benefit from the Academy’s networking opportunities, educational resources, and collective identity. Academy members work in a variety of occupational settings, including hospitals, nonprofit organizations, and the food industry (Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 2012). Within these employee settings, they work in the following practice areas: acute care (43%), ambulatory and outpatient care (15%), long-term and extended care (16%), rehab facility (7%), community and public health program (14%), government agency (9%), non-profit agency (8%), college or university faculty (11%), and private practice (12%) (“About the Academy,” 2013). Given the Academy’s breadth of reach and influence, the organization and its members are important contributors to national conversations about public health and nutrition.

Due to RDs’ diverse professional needs, members began forming informal groups based on practice area and/or interest as early as 1918, a year after the Academy’s founding (Stein, 2013). The groups became known as dietetic practice groups (DPGs) and were officially recognized through the Academy’s bylaws in 1977. In membership polls, DPGs are regularly highlighted as members’ favorite benefits of Academy membership (Stein, 2013). There are currently 28 DPGs, most of which focus on highly specific aspects of the dietetics profession, such as Infectious Disease Nutrition and Diabetes Care and Education (“About the Academy,” 2013). The Hunger and

Environmental Nutrition group, however, differs from other DPGs by taking a broader food system approach to health and nutrition.

Hunger and Environmental Nutrition dietetic practice group. The Hunger and Environmental Nutrition (HEN) dietetic practice group consists of members who are interested in nutrition, the environment, and the food system (“Hunger and Environmental Nutrition,” 2013). HEN was founded in 2000 by the merging of two pre-existing DPGs: the Environmental Nutrition DPG and the Hunger and Malnutrition DPG (Hartman & Horton, 2010). At its founding, the newly created DPG had 580 members. Ten years later, the group had over 1,400 members (Hartman & Horton, 2010).

HEN members have publicly criticized the Academy’s corporate sponsorship program. In a 2012 survey of HEN members, a majority of responders disapproved of the corporate sponsorship program (Deardorff, 2012). In response, HEN created a taskforce to address corporate sponsorship, which resulted in the creation of a more rigorous set of guidelines to govern how HEN manages its own corporate sponsors. The guidelines require sponsors to contribute to a food system that is health promoting, sustainable, fair and humane, and transparent (External Relations Committee, 2012). Each of these categories has a more specific definition within the guidelines; for example, to be considered health promoting, the company must account for how its products are produced throughout its life cycle and meet the Federal Trade Commission Interagency Work Group’s proposed guidelines for marketing to children. HEN also encouraged the Academy to adopt similar guidelines, though the Academy has not taken this step. Nonetheless, HEN has been at the forefront of the corporate sponsorship controversy.

Corporate sponsorship. The Academy is funded through diverse revenue streams: membership dues and contributions, registration and examination fees, programs and meetings, publications, subscriptions, advertising, grants, education programs, and sponsorships (AND annual report, 2012). In 2012 the Academy received \$2,079,751 in funding from corporate sponsorships, approximately 6 percent of its total revenues. The Academy also encourages DPGs to seek out their own corporate sponsors to offset costs; as a result, many DPGs, including HEN, make use of industry relationships (Stein, 2013).

Corporate sponsorship is a contested organizational practice within the Academy. While the Academy has had corporate sponsorships since its founding, its corporate sponsorship program has recently been criticized internally from members of the Academy and externally from the media. Several widely-distributed articles questioning the practice have appeared in publications as diverse as *Mother Jones* (Butler, 2014), *The New York Times* (Strom, 2013), and *National Public Radio* (“Food companies court nutrition educators,” 2014). The Academy’s most controversial sponsorships include partnerships with large food companies, such as Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, McDonalds, and more. Many are asking, both within and outside of the organization, are Academy members influencing corporate sponsors or are corporate sponsors influencing Academy members?

Previous research has studied the Academy’s corporate sponsorship policies. Brownell and Warner (2009), in their article comparing the food industry to big tobacco companies from the 1950’s, identified the Academy as a professional organization used to legitimize the food industry’s marketing. The authors wrote, “The [Academy] has

taken a strong stand that there are no good foods or bad foods, a position that the food industry has exploited” (Brownell & Warner, 2009, p.277). Similarly, Marion Nestle (2002) argued that the Academy’s nutritional advice often becomes confused with their corporate sponsors’ agenda, “blurring the distinction between food advertising and dietary advice” (Nestle, 2002, p.127). Nestle also suggested that partnerships with the food industry detracted from the Academy’s legitimacy.

In response, the Academy has continually denied that corporate sponsors influence dietitians’ research or the Academy’s official positions (“Addressing inaccuracies,” 2013). Proponents of the Academy’s sponsorship program argue that corporations offset the Academy’s costs, lessening the financial burden for members. Sponsorships can also provide access into the food industry, creating opportunities for dietitians to make positive nutritional changes from the “inside” (Hiatt, 2010). Since 2008, the Academy has polled members about its sponsorship program and report that results show an “increased awareness of the Academy's sponsorship program and continued support by members” (“Addressing inaccuracies,” 2013). The Academy uses this poll as research-driven proof of members’ satisfaction with corporate sponsorship practices.

Reitshamer, Schrier, Herbold, and Metallinos-Katsaras (2012) surveyed Academy members’ opinions about corporate sponsorships to understand the organizational practice in more detail. The authors asked Academy members to rate the Academy’s current corporate sponsors based on their perceived “acceptance” level. They found that a majority of members felt three of the thirteen companies were “unacceptable” as

Academy sponsors: Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and Mars, Inc. The other sponsors, including Unilever, Kellogg Company, and General Mills, were perceived as “acceptable” sponsors by the majority of respondents. The survey also found that 83% of responders believe that members should “have a say in deciding who should be Academy sponsors” (Reitshamer et al., 2012, p 153). While the survey found that the majority of members supported some form of sponsorship, it also suggested that many members felt the need for improvements.

Members of HEN are actively organizing around the complicated issues highlighted in this literature review. My research adds to the increasing body of research on the Academy and corporate sponsorship by using a qualitative approach to analyze HEN members’ health activism. Specifically, I explored the following research questions:

RQ 1: Why are members of the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group involved in the corporate sponsorship debate?

RQ 2: How do members of the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group make sense of corporate sponsorship within the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics?

RQ 3: How do neoliberal discourses enable and/or constrain Hunger and Environmental Nutrition members’ understandings of and solutions to corporate sponsorship?

5.4 Methods

To explore my research questions, I conducted semi-structured interviews with thirteen members of HEN. I focused only on HEN members to highlight the activism

happening internally within the Academy. HEN is unique as a dietetic practice group as they have been at the forefront of the Academy's corporate sponsorship debate.

5.4.1 Data collection

I collected data for this research study in two rounds. I interviewed the first six interviewees while attending the 2012 Food and Nutrition Conference and Expo—the Academy's annual conference. These contacts were interviewed either on site at the conference or by phone shortly after the conference. Interviewees were recruited by word of mouth and snowballing techniques. I interviewed another seven HEN members by phone in December 2013. These interviewees were recruited through snowballing techniques from my first round of interviews. I conducted interviews using a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B). This format gave my interviewees the “freedom to digress” (Berg & Lune, 2004, p. 61), allowing me to explore emergent themes and interesting side comments. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes.

While all thirteen interviewees identified as Registered Dietitians and current members of the Academy, they worked in a variety of occupational fields: public and community health, state government agencies, consulting companies, student, and self-employment. The interviewees were diverse geographically, representing eleven states: three from the East Coast, four from the Midwest or South, and four from the West. The group identified as predominantly female (~92%), with only one male interviewee (~8%). Approximately 92% of the interviewees identified as Caucasian with one interviewee identifying as Hispanic. Participants ranged from 21 years old to 52, with an average age of 33 years old. On average, the group had been members of the Academy for over ten

years. Their participation in HEN ranged from under six months to over fifteen years.

Table 2 provides a profile of the thirteen interviewees.

Table 2: *Profile of HEN Members Interviewed*

#	Position	Years as RD	Years in Academy	Current Member	Age	Race	Gender
1	Public Health	5	9	Yes	27	Caucasian	F
2	Community Health	23	32	Yes	52	Caucasian	F
3	Public Health	10	11	Yes	33	Caucasian	F
4	Community Health	5	5	Yes	21	Caucasian	F
5	Public Health	18	20	Yes	48	Caucasian	F
6	State Government	7	11	Yes	32	Caucasian	F
7	Food/Beverage Industry	5	5	Yes	28	Caucasian	F
8	Self Employed	5	7	Yes	45	Caucasian	F
9	Consultant	20	22	Yes	43	Caucasian	F
10	Undergraduate Student	0	1	Yes	21	Caucasian	F
11	Nutrition and Wellness	5	5	Yes	30	Hispanic	M
12	PhD Student	7	7	Yes	30	Caucasian	F
13	Public Health	5	5	Yes	21	Caucasian	F

5.4.2 Data analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and then uploaded to HyperRESEARCH, a code-and-retrieve data analysis program. I repeatedly read, coded, and analyzed the

interviews to create familiarity with the data. During my initial reading of interviews, I coded the data line-by-line. Frequently these initial codes were descriptive and indicative of my first impressions. During subsequent readings, I began making sense of the data's emerging themes and patterns by collapsing codes into each other and subdividing other codes. As I became more familiar with the data, my codes transformed from being predominantly descriptive to codes that summarized, stated connections, and/or offered insights into the values being displayed by the research subjects. These more nuanced codes then became the basis for my argument.

Throughout the analysis and writing processes, I used constant comparison analysis to guide my research. Lindlof (1995) described constant comparison analysis as a cyclical process in which emergent themes are constantly compared with the literature and the literature is constantly compared with the data's emerging themes. This process helped me understand how my research was both confirming and challenging previous findings in the literature. To show rigor in my work and to allow interviewees to speak for themselves, I included many quotes throughout my analysis. In the next section I discuss how members of the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition (HEN) Dietetic Practice Group make sense of corporate sponsorship within the Academy. I begin by arguing that HEN members share a unique identity within the organization. Despite this shared identity, however, members do not have a common understanding of or solution to the corporate sponsorship debate.

5.5 Analysis

5.5.1 HEN members as health activists: A “renegade point of view”

Throughout my conversations with HEN members, I was continually impressed with members' commitment to the DPG and their overall sense of community. Their attachment to HEN stemmed from a shared approach to nutrition, which they describe as unique within the Academy. This approach is reflected in their mission, which one RD defined as working to build "a sustainable and resilient food and water system that supports public health." Within this framework, members repeatedly used words like "holistic" and "systems" to describe their approach to nutrition. For example, one HEN member described the group's approach as "being able to see past the nutrient content of the food, past the nutrition label. An ability to see and think broadly in a systems fashion." Another member described it as "seeing food in terms of whole food and dietary patterns, instead of just nutrients or just food groups." Similarly, a member noted, "At HEN, we're not talking about how to save ten calories when you make a sandwich. That's not our interest. We're talking about larger issues." HEN members' understandings of nutrition often indicated a multidisciplinary approach that they perceived as being different from other Academy members.

HEN members' holistic approach often challenged the existing occupational norms of RDs by raising questions about environmental impacts or social equity. One RD explained, "It's not just about calories. It's about—are farmers being paid a living wage? Does this kind of food product...destroy the environment?" This member expanded the norms and practices of RDs by connecting her work to other aspects of the food system, many of which are overlooked in dietetics. According to Zoller (2005), health activists "change the status quo, including targets such as social norms, embedded practices,

policies, or the dominance of certain groups” (p. 344). HEN’s holistic approach provides a framework for challenging the status quo by pointing out how their nutritional work connects with health issues, agriculture, the environment, and beyond.

HEN members also described their approach as having an ethical and subjective component. One member described HEN as the “moral compass” of the Academy. Another noted that HEN serves “as a conscious for helping focus the Academy’s attention on issues of hunger, environment, and sustainability.” Notably, the inclusion of ethics and morals is a departure from the profession’s focus on objective, scientific research. This also translated into HEN members identifying as activists. One HEN member described herself as having a “renegade point of view.” Another HEN member described her fellow members as “a little more radical. They’re seen as activists. They are not afraid to voice their opinion.”

HEN members’ approach and self-identification as health activists set them apart from other members of the Academy. One member noted that “there’s a disconnect... [from] the Academy at large because not everybody looks from a systems perspective.” One RD told a story to help illustrate the difference between a “typical” Academy member and a HEN member. She discussed how, in the past, the Academy had criticized organics, specifically “the whole myth about organic food being more nutritious or less nutritious than conventional food.” She noted, however, that HEN members made sense of organic food by thinking about its life cycle, instead of focusing only on the nutrient contents. “It’s not about the actual food for us. It’s about the production part of it. And so we just feel like the Academy just misses the boat on the issue in the first place.” This

story illustrated how HEN's holistic perspective differs from other Academy members, helping to create a shared identity amongst HEN members.

Further, members seemed to enjoy being seen as different from the “typical” Academy member. For example, one member joked that other Academy members might think of HEN members as “a big pain in the butt.” Others had similar reactions when I asked them to compare HEN members to other Academy members. Some said they might be seen as “idealistic” or too “outspoken,” but these comments were often said with positive connotations. Further, by describing themselves as different from Academy members, HEN members created discursive space to criticize the status quo. By identifying as outsiders, HEN members were able to question the Academy's policies and practices—such as corporate sponsorship—without questioning their own membership. Thus, HEN members were unified through the HEN community and in their professional approach to nutrition. Zoller (2005) argued that effective health activists share a common identity and/or self-identify as activists. Through their systems approach and “renegade” point of view, HEN members shared a common identity needed for activist organizing.

5.5.2 Making sense of corporate sponsorship: From “I don't want Coca Cola speaking on my behalf” to “you need partners”

While most HEN members shared a common approach to nutrition, they made sense of corporate sponsorship in diverse ways. Members critical of the Academy's current corporate sponsorship program had three common complaints: corporate sponsorship was seen as personally damaging to one's reputation, as causing

organizational conflicts of interest, and/or as raising broader questions about unregulated corporate influence within the profession.

Some members directly translated the Academy's corporate sponsorships into personal impacts. One frustrated member exclaimed, "I don't want Coca-Cola speaking on my behalf. I don't want to be identified with them. I don't want the organization that represents me as partnering with them. It makes me look bad." Others noted backlash from their clients due to sponsorship. A HEN member explained, "I have actually had potential clients make comments to me about being an RD and 'oh, so you're married to Coca-Cola.'" Another RD told a similar story: "I have the experience of people criticizing my credentialing because my accrediting body is sponsored by...companies that are known for junk food." In these comments, HEN members understood corporate sponsorship—specifically by food companies—to directly affect their professional career. These members criticized the Academy's corporate sponsorship for its perceived damage to their personal reputations.

Other HEN members worried that the Academy's corporate sponsorship policies would cause organizational conflicts of interest. For example, one member noted that corporate sponsors give "dietitians a black eye" because they are "trying to go up against the very things that our Academy is actually taking money from." Another RD noted, "There's a significant conflict of interest [that] challenges the validity of our profession." Many RDs felt that the Academy's current sponsors contradicted the organization's mission. One member bluntly stated, "Right now we think the sponsors that we have are not promoting the Academy's mission, and that's a big problem." Another RD voiced

concerns about being sponsored by food companies that sell processed foods. She felt that “it’s kind of conflicting with our mission of being a nutrition expert, because a nutrition expert probably won’t recommend very many of those foods.”

Other HEN members understood corporate sponsorship as having broader, more systemic implications for public health. HEN members worried that food corporations were trying to take advantage of the Academy by using sponsorship to imply endorsement of products that may or may not be considered healthy by RDs. One member hinted at the problem of implied endorsement by acknowledging that “there are many food and beverage organizations looking to partner with [the Academy], whether they’re healthy or not.” Echoing this sentiment, another members worried that the Academy had “sold out” and lamented that “they’ll take the dollar anywhere it comes.” One member explained. “The thing that bothers me the most is them using us for promoting their products...where we’ve sold our reputation to a company who’s using us to give their products or their company a halo effect.”

Further, RDs worried that the corporate sponsors’ marketing messages might be confused with RDs’ educational messages. One RD strongly felt that “there should be more of a clear divide between what dietitians are telling the public and what the corporations are trying to market.” She argued that this divide was needed “because one group has the public’s health interest in mind and the other group just has selling their products in mind.” Another member lamented the increasing reliance on privatized funding for research by showing how it can be co-opted:

With the public funding of research being cut at...local, state and federal levels, we are seeing an increase in industry-sponsored research, which is co-opting their messages, handing it to dieticians, and saying this is evidence based because it's the only evidence there is—and therefore taking advantage of the association and its membership.

These HEN members defined corporate sponsorship as a problem extending beyond the Academy and/or their professional reputation. According to these RDs, corporate sponsorship allows the food industry to promote their products through the Academy, negatively impacting public health. They questioned the value of commodifying and selling their nutritional knowledge for the benefit of corporations. This reaction can also be seen as a challenge to neoliberal discourse.

Other HEN members, though they were the minority in my conversations, felt that corporate sponsorship, if done correctly, could increase the Academy's impact and visibility. These RDs described industry relations as necessary for creating change in public health. One member said, "I think a lot of things can't get done alone...you need partners." She went on to say that "it takes people, it takes resources, it takes time, and it takes brains to pool resources together to get things done," implying that corporate sponsors were a necessary part of this equation. Others brought up issues of scale and suggested that an organization as large as the Academy—with over 75,000 members—needs corporate sponsors to "sustain" itself. Still others worried about taking a political stance. One member explained, "We...have to be careful that there are all kinds of businesses and industries out there, and if we align with one kind then we get defined

along that line.” These members reified neoliberal discourses by framing private companies as needed to help solve health problems, absolving the government of this responsibility.

Interestingly, the members who defined corporate sponsorship as a way to increase the Academy’s influence did not identify with the systems approach to nutrition taken by other HEN members. One woman who discussed the benefits of corporate sponsors joined HEN to “find out more amongst the dietetic professional about what was going on in regards to hunger.” She was then disappointed that much of HEN’s work was not directly related to hunger, suggesting that she was interested in a level of specificity not achieved by HEN’s more holistic approach. For those HEN members that did collectively identify as having a systems approach, they were more willing to engage in health activism against corporate sponsorship. As shown from this brief summary of viewpoints on corporate sponsorship, HEN members understood the problem on different scales—from the individual to the professional to the society level. There were also some HEN members who did not feel that corporate sponsorship was a problem. While HEN members have a unified identity, they do not have a unified problem definition for corporate sponsorship. This creates a challenge for their activism.

5.5.3 Solutions to corporate sponsorship: Reformative or transformative?

For those HEN members who did think the Academy needed to change its corporate sponsorship program, HEN members offered both reformative and transformative solutions. HEN members with a reformative political orientation continually discussed the need for better corporate sponsorship guidelines and/or more

transparency. One member stated, “We will be willing to work with certain companies but only if they meet certain criteria that we want them to meet.” Another felt that “there are plenty of companies out there that would probably be very happy to benefit from getting the word out about their products—even if it’s not food products, if it’s technology companies, sustainability, environmental companies, anything really that doesn’t have to do with junk food.” One member felt that the problem would be solved when the assortment of corporate sponsors has “a better balance... so it’s not so heavy on the all the junk food.” Another felt that the rules regulating corporate sponsorships need “to be much more definitive, much more transparent, and much more publicly accessible.” None of these solutions fundamentally questioned the status quo of corporate sponsorship. Instead, they reinforced neoliberal subjectivities that limit political acts to “voting with your dollars” and equated responsible citizenship with “good consumerism” (Guthman, 2011, p. 18). For the Academy, a reformatory orientation means accepting money from companies that are deemed “good” through refined guidelines and not questioning sponsorship as a whole.

Many HEN members struggled to find solutions beyond the reformatory level, suggesting the entrenchment of the status quo and neoliberal norms. When directly asked what the Academy would look like without any corporate sponsorship, members often felt like it was impossible. One noted, “I know [it’s] a lot of money to run an organization...and to be quite honest, I don’t know enough about the [Academy’s] financial situation to say if it would be possible for us to get along without corporate sponsorships.” Again, this speaks to how entrenched neoliberal discourses are within

health institutions. Deetz (1992) suggested that “the greatest censorship comes in what is never thought of and in the forces that make some things unthinkable” (p. 49). As shown by the Academy’s 2012 annual report, only 6% of revenues come from corporate sponsorships (AND annual report, 2012). However, most HEN members could not imagine a scenario in which the Academy could exist without their sponsors.

While the majority of HEN members’ offered reformative solutions, some RDs suggested transformative solutions. For example, one member felt like the recently passed Affordable Care Act could offer more government funding to replace corporate sponsorship. She hoped the Academy would partner with healthcare agencies to “[take] advantage of some of the funding that coming out that’s supposed to be supporting prevention.” Another member questioned the Academy’s current structure. She wondered if “the size of FNCE could be cut down” and asked, “How much of the money that the Academy is bringing in is actually necessary?” Others called for a more democratic decision-making process that would allow additional member input into corporate sponsorship decisions. Another member suggested the “opportunity to divest in any industry organization that may have some sort of conflict of interest with Academy members.” These comments suggested more transformative orientations that challenged the existing status quo within the Academy. They also questioned “taken-for-granted” neoliberal discourses by calling for increased democratization of decisions and assigning the government more responsibilities related to governing public health. However, these transformative solutions also lacked cohesiveness and often read as a checklist of items rattled off by members.

While HEN members offered a variety of solutions to the corporate sponsorship debate, the way they communicated these solutions suggested different political orientations. Some HEN members felt that the Academy only needed to make reformative changes, while others felt that transformative changes were needed. Zoller (2005) wrote that health activists need a common identity, vision, and political orientation for their organizing. While HEN members had a common identity, they lacked a unified definition and political orientation towards understanding corporate sponsorship.

5.6 Discussion

This research began with a simple question: why are members of HEN involved in the corporate sponsorship debate? My research found that HEN members' systems approach prompted them to understand corporate sponsorship as part of the complex power dynamics that affect health and nutrition. Furthermore, HEN members often directly identified as activists. Next, I asked, "How do HEN members make sense of corporate sponsorship?" I found that HEN members made sense of corporate sponsorship in different ways. Some members made sense of sponsorship on an individual or organizational level, paying particular attention to how sponsorship might damage the Academy or their own professional credibility. Others made sense of corporate sponsorship on a broader scale, suggesting that sponsorship could negatively impact public health by allowing food companies undue influence into decisions about what is healthy or unhealthy. Lastly, other HEN members understood sponsorship as enabling the Academy to have more influence and visibility.

My final research question explored how neoliberal discourses enabled and/or constrained HEN's solutions to the corporate sponsorship debate. Using Zoller's (2005) framework, I found HEN members proposed solutions with both a reformative and transformative orientations. Reformative solutions tended to reinforce neoliberal discourses and uphold the Academy's structures with minimal changes. Changes to the guidelines, for instance, would create a more just system but would not fundamentally change the sponsorship program. These solutions tended to reinforce neoliberalism by assuming private investment was needed to help accomplish public health work. RDs desiring transformative solutions, in contrast, suggested broader changes in social norms and regulations—ranging from divesting from corporate food companies to lobbying for more government research funding. Although these transformative solutions often challenged neoliberal tendencies, the solutions felt ad hoc. None of the HEN members proposed a cohesive plan for achieving transformative action. Further, few HEN members could imagine an Academy without any corporate sponsorship. This suggests the power of neoliberalism, which often masks non-market solutions.

Health communication operates at the intersection of praxis and theory (Lupton, 1994). Fittingly, this study makes both theoretical and practical contributions. On the theoretical side, this study introduces professional organizations as research sites in health activism scholarship. Although Zoller (2005) and other social movement researchers have claimed that social movements must extend beyond one organization, this study challenged this framework by suggesting that HEN members qualify as health activists. Although HEN members belong to a common organization, they are also

working across diverse occupational settings and, at times, actively challenge the status quo with regards to corporate sponsorship. Confirming Zoller's (2005) discussion of political orientations, they also have both reformative and transformative orientations, some of which were at odds with each other.

On the practical side, this study sought to highlight the activist work that HEN has performed with regards to corporate sponsorship. HEN members typically shared a common identity, built around a holistic approach to nutrition. While HEN members' holistic approach seemed to challenge neoliberal discourses, their solutions frequently reinforced them, perhaps unwittingly. Further, members did not have a unified vision of what they are hoping to accomplish. Some members proposed solutions with a reformative orientation while others took a transformative orientation. If HEN members want to further their efforts, they need to decide which approach is most suitable for their mission.

Like all research, this study has its limitations. First, members were recruited using snowballing techniques, potentially limiting the variety in opinions and worldviews represented in the data. Second, non-HEN members' perspectives were not taken into account in this study, though their perceptions of HEN members as activists would offer valuable insights. Finally, this research was contained to the Academy. It would be interesting to interview members of other health-related organizations that either accept or do not accept funding from corporate sponsors. Thus, this study raises many avenues for future research. For example, the findings suggest that RDs with a certain ontology, epistemology, and methodology---described here as RDs taking a holistic approach---

seem to have a different understanding of corporate sponsorship. Further research is needed to understand how different ontologies and epistemologies affect health activism. If differences do exist, can they be reconciled? If so, how can the tensions be managed?

5.7 Conclusion

Corporate sponsorship is a contested practice within the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. This study sought to understand members of the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition dietetic practice group as health activists. HEN members are unified through their shared interest in food systems and holistic approach. However, HEN members lack a unified vision for how they understand corporate sponsorship and what should be done to address the problem. Some HEN members take a reformative orientation to the problem while others take a transformative orientation. This lack of a unified vision and orientation decreased the strength of their organizing. Further, members who did not identify with HEN's holistic identity did not agree with their attitude towards corporate sponsorship. Thus, for HEN activists to move forward with this issue, they need to be able to explain their systems approach to other Academy members who do not currently identify with their holistic methodology. They also need to decide if they want to take a short-term reformative approach or a longer-term, transformative approach.

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CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 A Brief Personal Reflection

In September 2012, I began a two-year research project on the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and the profession of dietetics for my master's thesis. I initially approached the project with some reservations. Before starting graduate school, I had worked at the Rutland Area Farm and Food Link—a nonprofit in southern Vermont that provides technical assistance to small-scale farmers while also building community support for a more localized food system. I was—and still am—passionate about these issues and others regarding rural community and economic development. Thus, my initial reaction upon learning about the Academy's corporate sponsorship policy—which seemed to directly contradict my previous advocacy work—was shock, dismay, and, admittedly, some alarm about RDs who refused to acknowledge potential conflicts of interest. However, the more registered dietitians (RDs) I talked to and the more research I read, the more grey areas appeared with regards to the Academy and, on a broader level, how I approached food systems issues in general. By the end of my two years in graduate school, I had questioned, critiqued, and refined many of my beliefs about health, economics, and local food activism.

While my research began with the controversy surrounding the Academy's corporate sponsors, it evolved to include the sociology of professions and discourses of expertise surrounding registered dietitians. Like most of the general public, I did not realize that a RD was different from a nutritionist prior to my data collection or that this distinction could lead to a heated debate. However, the topic emerged from the beginning

of my interviews with Academy members and became so prominent that I began to see it as a critical component of members' process of understanding and organizing their work. My interviews also aligned with a noteworthy event in the Academy's history: for the first time in its 95 years, the Academy changed its name. Previously known as the American Dietetic Association, the organization is now called the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Further, in 2013, the Academy released an official statement that RDs can now chose to be called either Registered Dietitians (RDs) or Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDNs). These changes brought many questions to mind: Was the organization attempting to claim the nutritionist title? Was it trying to create a professional organization that was more inclusive or exclusive? How will RDs benefit from these changes? These questions distracted me away from my initial research questions and resulted in an unplanned article, found in chapter four, that borrowed as much from sociology as communication studies.

Despite my distraction into discourses of professions, I eventually did return to questions of influence, public health, and corporate sponsorship within the Academy and the food system. However, I had also discovered the field of ecological economics and delved deeper into the politics of food and health. With these new perspectives, I grappled with and continue to grapple with whether or not the problem of influence and sponsorship can be solved at the Academy level. I began to understand the Academy's policies as part of larger problems related to corporate consolidation and privatization of everyday life—symptoms of neoliberalism. As an extremely conservative form of capitalism, neoliberalism seemed to have effects on many aspects of RDs' professional

lives: less public funding available for research translated into a reliance on private funding, faith in market solutions increased the need for RDs to be reimbursable for their services, and a de-politicalization of citizens seemed to limit the way they speak out. Many of these symptoms are tensions we all face as citizens and professionals during this historical moment.

Yet, within this context, the Hunger and Environmental (HEN) dietetic practice group stood out. Members openly identified as activists. They discussed the importance of social capital. They challenged the status quo. However, this group also presented problems. While the organization gives dietitians a venue to ask hard questions about the Academy and its practices, the group also limited the conversation to just the Academy—when I was increasingly seeing their complaints as a symptom of a bigger societal problem. This tension stayed with me throughout the project. Several of the RDs that I interviewed asked me to write an article proclaiming the horrors of the Academy’s sponsorship policies. However, by the end of two years of research, this approach seemed to miss the bigger picture of the problems in the food system, including power dynamics and neoliberal discourses. Instead, I chose to write an article that analyzed HEN members’ collective activism with the added benefit that I include members’ concerns about corporate sponsorship. My hope is that the article honors a part of my interviewees’ original research request without simplifying the complex challenges of sponsorship.

As I reflect on the last two years, I believe the greatest lesson learned through my master’s thesis is the difficulty of performing, analyzing, and writing multidisciplinary research. Throughout this article I attempted to combine arguments and

frameworks borrowed from organizational and health communication, economics, sociology, business management, culture studies, and beyond. More often than not, the result was an unwieldy and incoherent first draft. My introduction to new disciplines and new ways of thinking continually challenged my conclusions and assumptions, resulting in many rewritten articles. Nonetheless, I strongly believe that in an increasingly complex and uncertain world, the limits of the disciplines must be acknowledged. Change is the work of many hands—and of many disciplines. I hope that this thesis is the start, not the end, of my explorations into multidisciplinary research.

6.2 Research Contributions

Although my two articles cover different terrain, they have unifying themes. First, both articles suggest tensions over how RDs understand themselves as professionals: are they scientists or not? Are they biased or not? While many of my interviewees from the first article described themselves as objective researchers, the HEN members I interviewed for my second article would frequently acknowledge their subjectivity and claim to be activists. RDs must constantly confront this paradox, whether they are justifying their professional expertise or describing the Academy's corporate sponsors. For example, one RD informed me that during her dietetics program in college, she was taught that objective scientists question the funding behind the research and look for biases. However, as a professional, she felt the Academy asked her to look the other way when their materials were funded by corporate sponsors. The RD is therefore confronted with the dilemma of following her profession's formal knowledge or her professional association's practices. Members managed tensions between objectivity

versus bias and scientists versus activists in different ways throughout my thesis.

Nonetheless, the tensions were themes that emerged in both articles.

A second and somewhat related theme between the two articles is that the Academy was shown to be a dynamic, diverse site of professional negotiations. While the Academy seems stable to outsiders, insiders participate in continual (re)negotiations of how they make sense of their profession and their occupational identity. The second article particularly emphasized members' negotiations by highlighting HEN members' activism work. One questions whether or not this sub-group within the Academy will be able to effectively manage the professional tensions they are facing. While HEN members currently enjoy being seen as the "outsiders" of the Academy, will they reach a point in which they can no longer effectively manage their tensions and break away from the larger organization?

This brings up the question of the Academy as a gatekeeper. The majority of my interviewees understood the Academy as an advocate for the dietetics profession and gatekeeper of nutritional information. RDs from both articles looked to the Academy to define the profession, increase their occupational legitimacy, and expand their economic benefits using credentialing. However, my research findings also suggested a large diversity of opinion within the organization. Many felt that the Academy refused to take a stand on issues due to this diversity. This confirms Friedson (1988) argument that diverse professional organizations often have limited ability to voice strong opinions:

“The body for formal knowledge an association purports to advance tends to become institutionalized into different specialty practices that often represent

conflicting intellectual perspectives as well as different policy positions and political-economic interests.” (p. 196)

Despite these limitations, the Academy still has the opportunity to heavily influence public health and the food systems through its policy recommendations and position papers.

Additionally, my research findings offer practical contributions for the profession of dietetics and members of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. In my first article, I found that many RDs perceived marginalization within the profession. With 96% of its members identifying as female (Payne-Palacio & Canter, 2013), my findings of perceived marginalization are not surprising. Professions that are dominated by females tend to struggle with professionalization (Shapiro, 1986). The Academy has, in the past, used its credentialing to communicate how unique and specialized a RDs’ knowledge is—hence the turf war rhetoric surrounding the difference between nutritionists and RDs. Since members are still reporting feelings of marginalization over fifty years after passing credentialing, perhaps a new approach—one that directly addressed its gendered roots and current gender imbalance—is needed.

In my second article, I found that HEN members lack a unified vision for their corporate sponsorship activism. If HEN members want to continue working in this realm, my findings suggest that they need to define their goals, establish a shared political orientation, and agree on a desired outcome. They specifically need to decide if they want to take a reformative or transformative approach to their work. This decision-making process would benefit from a collective reflection on neoliberalism within the health

field. Members should remind themselves that embedded neoliberalism often makes some solutions feel impossible, when they are actually achievable. Further, my research findings suggest that those who do not take a holistic, food systems approach to nutrition tend not to understand corporate sponsorship as a problem. Thus, HEN members would benefit from being able to effectively articulate the importance of their approach to other Academy members who may not fully understand their approach.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

Like all research, my study is constrained by time and scope. My research is limited by its lack of engagement with nutritionists. Since nutritionists are an important component of RDs' identity, it would be interesting to perform similar qualitative research with nutritionists to understand how they make sense of RDs. Further, my research is limited by its lack of engagement with gender issues. Since dietetics is a heavily gendered profession, future research is needed to understand how gender affects RDs' daily lives and the Academy's broader professionalization strategies. Finally, the Academy is an extremely diverse professional association. Many Academy members do not share unifying practices except for their RD certification. This professional diversity inevitably also means that Academy members have diverse ontologies. If members do not share core values about how they understand the world, how can they best manage resulting tensions to collaborate with their diverse colleagues? This is a rich area for future research that has important implications for other professions facing similar challenges—such as Ecological Economics.

As the leading professional organization for registered dietitians, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics offers an interesting entry point into studying issues of organizational communication and health communication. Communication scholarship has predominantly overlooked professional and trade organizations, though these organizations often have far-reaching cultural, economic, and political impacts. By researching the Academy, I hoped to contribute new understandings about how professional organizations, discourses of expertise, and corporate sponsorship contribute and influence the public's understandings of health and nutrition.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: Chapter 4 interview script

Are you having a good conference? Why or why not?

Probe A: With so many activities and events, how do you decide what you do or don't do at the conference?

Probe B: Did you come with other people who are attending the conference?

What brought you to this year's Food and Nutrition Conference and Expo?

Probe A: How is your profession related to the Academy and FNCE?

Probe B: What career field? Organization (type)? Clientele? Location?

Probe C: How long have you been in this profession?

Probe D: Can you describe your goals as a professional in this field?

Probe E: What do your typical interactions with other members at FNCE look or sound like? Who did you speak with? What topics did you discuss? Are these interactions persuasive or informative in nature?

Let's take a step back for a moment, are you a member of the Academy?

Probe A: How long have you been involved or when did you first become involved?

Probe B: How did you become involved with the Academy?

In what ways does your involvement with the Academy impact you professionally?

Probe A: How are your professional goals related to those of the Academy and its mission?

Probe B: How does your involvement with the Academy impact your professional life?

Probe C: How does your involvement in the academy impact your image as a professional?

Overall, do you think attending the FNCE conference helps you to or hinders you from achieving your professional goals?

Probe A: What FNCE activities are most helpful to you? Why?

Probe B: What FNCE activities are least helpful to you? Why?

How do _____ influence you professionally after the conference?

Can you tell me a specific story about how _____ helped you as a professional?

Probe C: In what ways do your conference experiences impact your clients' wellbeing?

Tell me about the corporations you have seen at FNCE this year.

Probe A: What are some of your most memorable experiences as the expo or a sponsored event at FNCE?

Probe B: Are there any reoccurring messages you hear or see at the expo or sponsored events?

Probe C: Did you play the "Nutritional Pursuit" game? Can you explain how it worked and your interactions with corporate representatives while playing?

Probe E. Did you attend the ----food expo? A sponsored event? Member-Product Market Place?

-Why did you go to this event?

-Can you describe your interactions with industry representatives at the FNCE?

-Tell me a specific story about an experience you had interacting with corporations at this year's conference. Who? What topics? Persuasive or informative in nature?

-What expo experiences were helpful to you as a professional?

-What expo experiences were not helpful to you as a professional?

Probe F. Research has found that Academy members are more likely to promote products and services they see at the expo? Do you think this is true? Do you think this is good for patients?

-What products or information will you take from the expo back home to share with your clients?

-How do you decide what is worth taking home?

-Do the products and info you bring home impact your client's health?

In general, how do corporate sponsorships and partnerships with the Academy or corporate attendance at the expo help or hurt the Academy from reaching its goals? What about individual members and their goals?

In general, do you think the relationship between the Academy and corporations is persuasive or informative in nature? Who is influencing/informing who? Examples?

Probe A. Do you think corporations and their representatives expect to get out of sponsoring or partnering with the Academy? What? How do you know? Examples?

Probe B. Do you think the Academy expects to get out of sponsoring or partnering with the industry? What?

Let's consider, specially consider public perceptions of these relationships and practices.

What impacts do these relationships have on how the public perceives the Academy?

What impacts do these relationships have on how your clients think about you as a professional?

Do you consider some corporations to be more acceptable to partner with than others? Which? Why?

Do consider some corporations to be less acceptable to partner with than others? Which? Why?

Are some corporate practices or messages more or less acceptable? Which a/un? Why?

What policies or guidelines currently govern relationships between the Academy and corporations? learn?

-How do these compare to the policies or guidelines of other professional associations?
-Do you think the Academy should adopt different policies or guidelines regarding these relationships?

- What would they be?
- How would they be measured?
- Who should decide what they are?
- Who should evaluate?

-To be specific, do members have a say in what corporations can sponsor or partner with the Academy *or* attend FNCE activities? Should they? What does/should that process look like?

-Now focusing on you, have you ever shared these thoughts with the Academy or with other members? What about the industry?
What was the Academy/corporate/member official and/or unofficial reaction?
Did anything change?

Overall, have any of these experiences we've discussed made you question your membership with the Academy or attendance at future events? Do you know of anyone who has questioned their membership?

This is the last set of questions I have for you and they are sort of fun because I want you to pretend... Let's pretend for a moment that you are offering advice to a group of first year FNCE attendees in your field.

- What would you tell them about how to determine what is good or bad info or products to take home?
- What would you tell them about corporate-Academy relationships?
- What would you tell them if after the FNCE conference they decided not to continue being an Academy members because they believed the corporate presence conflicted with their values?
- Have you ever actually given this advice in real life?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experiences with the Academy or at FNCE?

Can you complete this sentence: Our research wouldn't be complete unless we spoke to _____.

Do you know of anyone else who we could talk to about their conference experience?

Some basic demographic questions:

- Career Field? Years in career field?
- Audience/Clientele? State of practice?
- Years in Academy? # conferences attended?
- Current Academy member? (Active, Technical, Student, Retired, life)

Is membership/attendance required by profession?

I have three more questions that don't necessarily pertain to this interview, but will help us compare our interview sample to that of the Academy's general membership.
Age? Gender? Race?

Appendix B: Chapter 5 interview script

1. How many years have you been a member of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND)?
 - a. How many years have you been a member of the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group (HEN)?
2. Why did you join HEN?
3. How would you describe the “typical” member of HEN?
 - a. Are you a typical member?
4. As a member of HEN what do you see as the group’s top priorities and goals?
 - a. How do these priorities relate to your professional goals?
5. Why do you think HEN is involved in the corporate sponsorship debate?
 - a. Do you think HEN is more or less involved in this topic when compared to other DPGs? Why do you think this is?
6. Have you spoken out either for or against the Academy’s corporate sponsorship policy (to the Academy, to HEN, on twitter, blog, etc)?
 - a. If so, how did you become involved in this topic? (personal interest, through HEN, etc
7. Why do you think corporations choose to donate to the AND?
8. Is corporate sponsorship a necessary component for the AND? Why or why not?
 - a. How does corporate sponsorship increase or decrease the Academy’s legitimacy?
9. If the AND didn’t receive funding from corp sponsorships, how would this change the organization?
10. What is your ideal vision for the AND (funding, structure, services, etc)?
 - a. Do you think the government has a role in supporting the AND?
 - b. How should individual members support the AND?
11. Do you discuss your ideas about corporate sponsorship with fellow HEN members?
 - a. If so, how often? What do these conversations entail?
 - b. If not, what topics do you discuss with other HEN members?
12. How has HEN helped you make your voice heard? How has it hindered?

13. Is there anything else I should know about HEN or the issue of corporate sponsorship?

Demographic questions:

Do you know of anyone else who we could talk to about their conference experience?

Some basic demographic questions:

Career Field?	Years in career field?
Organization (type?)	Primary service/product:
State of Organization?	
# conferences attended?	

I have three more questions that don't necessarily pertain to this interview, but will help us compare our interview sample to other research papers.

Age? Gender? Race?