AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF


Title: The First Lady and the American Parent: A Rhetorical Examination of Michelle Obama’s Use of Metaphor to Combat Childhood Obesity

Abstract approved:

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David Bernell

First Ladies have performed a variety of public and private roles, from presidential escort, hostess, and social advocate to policy maker and presidential advisor. The nature of the position has always been both traditional and gendered, greatly influencing each First Lady’s performance. Due to the changing role of women in society, the notion of the First Lady being involved in public policy is a phenomenon isolated to the latter part of the twentieth century. Today the First Lady is expected to serve as a visible advocate for a wide range of social causes. Michelle Obama has championed the Let’s Move! campaign, which strives to end childhood obesity in America within the next generation. On February 28th, 2013, Obama spoke to a group of parents, volunteers, teachers and community members about the state of childhood obesity in America and what the Let’s Move! campaign is doing to change the lives of the next generation. This study aims to find out how Michelle Obama uses metaphor to build a relationship and connect with the audience in order to
communicate and promote the importance of the Let’s Move! campaign. This thesis analyzes the rhetorical strategies used by Obama to alter perceptions of the federal government utilizing the gendered power of the First Lady’s Office. Employing an interdisciplinary approach that concerns rhetorical strategies in political discourse, this thesis utilizes George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s concept of metaphor in conjunction with Kenneth Burke’s theory of substance. The analysis shows that Obama’s use of metaphor helps her to identify with audience members and redefine what it means to be an American parent. The findings of this study suggest that the use of metaphor have powerful implications for affecting society’s beliefs about the role of the federal government.
The First Lady and the American Parent: A Rhetorical Examination of Michelle Obama’s Use of Metaphor to Combat Childhood Obesity

by
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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

__________________________________________
Brittany Acacia Puls, Author
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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION:

On February 28th 2013, just before noon, Michelle Obama delivered the third anniversary speech of the inception of the Let’s Move! campaign. It was delivered in Chicago, Illinois to an audience comprised of parents, schoolteachers, administrators, and community leaders who support the efforts of the Let’s Move! campaign. This speech was part of a Let’s Move! Active Schools event where the First Lady called for support of the program’s goals. Most of Michelle Obama’s speeches in promotion of the Let’s Move! campaign are similar in nature and attitude. This speech is no different, however, it does provide a quintessential example of Michelle Obama’s use of language and metaphor in her efforts to build a relationship and connect with her audience. The cultural and historical significance of Obama’s speech have yet to be determined, however, it is worthy of rhetorical study due to the concepts of metaphor and language utilized within the speech. These tools helped Obama establish credibility with her audience, and ensure they would be open to consider the reasonable changes she suggests. This chapter will provide a general overview of the Office of the First Lady through out history and what her role is today, followed by a discussion of how Michelle Obama came to champion childhood obesity. Next, the purpose and goals of the Let’s Move! campaign will be outlined. Finally, a brief description of what is to come as this thesis explores the public sphere roles of the First Lady.

Since our first President, the role of the First Lady has been filled and maintained. Nonetheless, the United States Constitution does not mention the role or responsibilities of the First Lady. Each new occupant has shaped the expectations of
the position over time. Due to their efforts, it has become an essential component of
the American political process. Her role has included public and private aspects,
according Lisa M. Burns’ book—First Ladies as Political Women: Press Framing of
Presidential Wives, 1900-2001—it has varied “from presidential hostess, escort, and
noblesse oblige to advisor and policymaker” (Burns, 2). The nature of the position
has always been both traditional and gendered above all else, greatly influencing each
First Lady’s performance. Tradition, social norms and expectations and the
performance and personality of each individual woman have shaped what the position
is today. The press and the public have high expectations for First Ladies. Their role
must be equal parts serving the U.S. government and as a role model for American
women. Because of journalistic and historical framing, First Ladies have served as
sites of ideological contestation over women’s roles. The role can best be described,
Porter declares, as an American tradition supported by the White House and the
rhetorical presidency.

The rise of media involvement in politics—both radio and television—had a
large impact on the shifting expectations of the First Lady’s position. The rise of
publications targeting female readership—such as women’s magazines and
newspapers’ women’s pages—increased press coverage of the First Lady. The media
frames women in politics through a feminine lens, focusing on their clothing, family,
hair, and other ‘soft’ or private sphere matters. According to Burns, the early
American press assisted in defining the duties of the First Lady, “by focusing on the
social and ceremonial functions of the position.” They also “set boundaries containing
her largely within the private sphere” (Burns 4). Press coverage often focused on First
Ladies as mothers, wives and homemakers, this simultaneously provided positive press coverage of the First Lady as a public figure, while reinforcing the idea that women’s primary domain was within the home. In addition, the changing role of women in society and the rise of feminism greatly impacted how each First Lady embodied the role, as well as which aspects were embraced and which were rejected. In conjunction with the rise of television and the emerging women’s equality movement, at the time of Jacqueline Kennedy, there was public expectation that First Ladies address current issues; issues that were tailored to their personal ambitions, experiences, strengths and interests (Anthony, The Role of the First Lady) paraphrase.

Today the expectation continues; the First Lady is expected to serve as a visible advocate for a wide range of social causes. Extensive media coverage and discussion of each woman’s embodiment of the role has become commonplace in broadcast and print media. Due to the changing role of women in society, the notion of the First Lady being involved in public policy is a phenomenon isolated to the later part of the twentieth century. Early First Ladies sponsored charities, volunteered extensively and advised on political decisions and appointments; however it wasn’t until Eleanor Roosevelt that First Ladies played active roles in promoting their husband’s policies or advancing and advocating for their own personal agenda. By studying the practices of their predecessors some First Ladies chose to champion safer campaign subjects such as social welfare and children matters. According to Parry-Giles and Blair, this choice to champion the softer issues silenced political criticism (Parry-Giles and Blair, The Rise of the Rhetorical First Lady: Politics, Gender Ideology, and Women's Voice, 1789-2002 586). Most First Ladies, past and
present, have simply played the role of domestic partner, however as women have secured more rights, better conditions of employment, and higher levels of education, First Ladies have become more active and more powerful. Colleen Kelley goes so far as to argue that “...Every First Lady has also served as a metaphor for her generation of women. Each has mirrored the status of American women of her time, symbolizing the “new” or “modern” woman of her era, while simultaneously shaping expectations of what future women might do and might become” (White 11).

It wasn’t until the White House Personnel Authorization-Employment Act of 1978 authorized, as quoted by Gary D. Wekkin, “assistance and services...to be provided to the spouse of the president in connection with assistance provided by such spouse to the president in discharge of the president’s duties and responsibilities,” that the First Lady’s role was defined within American government (Wekkin 2). However, the parameter(s) of the phrase “assistance...to the president” is nevertheless, subject to question. Subsequently, according to Wekkin, “the First Ladyship is both tabula rasa and paradigm, in the sense that while formal capacities and constraints are lacking, very consequential unwritten rules of the game as understood over time by various players and audiences both internal and external to the Presidential establishment await and dare the occupant to bring to the title her own particular brand of political substance” (Wekkin 2).

There are a number of scholars across a variety of disciplines who have studied First Ladies and their impact on American history. Robert P. Watson is a prominent historian of the First Ladyship; he has published a number of books and countless articles discussing the ever-changing role of the First Lady. Watson asserts
that in recent years, a number of First Ladies have “felt comfortable using the symbolic power of their position to perform some active crusading in order to address national problems, or for the purpose of correcting social injustices nation wide” (Watson, American First Ladies 361). Even before the next First Lady takes office, the media debates the potential of each future First Lady. Watson continues, “because there is no formal job description, few legal precedents, and no constitutional guidance available to the First Lady, essentially all of her activities are open to criticism and questioning” (Watson, American First Ladies 361). The lack of constitutional footing causes many, including Wekkin, to describe the position best as an American ‘institution’ (Wekkin 601). According to Eksterowicz and Paynter “social and cultural events, the proclivities of each occupant of the office, issue activism, staff personnel, the first couple’s marital and professional relationship, and the integration of the First Lady’s office with that of the White House Office have all affected the First Lady’s office” (Eksterowicz and Paynter 559).

Lisa Burns is a scholar within political science who has studied First Ladies extensively. Most prominently, she wrote First Ladies and the Fourth Estate: Press Framing of Presidential Wives (2008) which analyzed the coverage of presidents’ wives in leading newspapers and magazines in order to show the press’s influence on the First Lady’s position and the changing roles of American women. By examining how the press portrayed 20th-century First Ladies, Burns was able to highlight the “intersection of gender, publicity, and power at particular historical moments,” she also asserts that “through the years, journalists have used both the gender ideals of the time and the collective memories of previous First Ladies to assess the performance
of the [incumbent] president’s wife” (Burns Introduction). The First Lady has emerged as an advocate for humanitarian causes, a celebrity and, a political activist. Burns argues that this evolution of the First Ladyship “from the “new woman” of the early 1900s to the “new traditionalist” and “superwoman” of the 1990s, and from the domesticity of the Cold War to the activism of second wave feminism, [has] spurred increasingly critical press coverage as the presidential wives expanded their sphere of influence from the personal to the political” (Burns 154). While the First Lady has become a public celebrity and has gained access to U.S. political culture, according to Burns she remains on the “fringes.” Her influence is limited to domestic and women’s issues. Burns states, “When their influence seem[s] to trespass into the male political reserve, the media coverage exhibit[s] a rhetoric of containment that suggested the political activities of certain First Ladies violate the gendered boundaries that the press erected” (Burns 156).

As prospective First Ladies have become increasingly more educated and accomplished in the public sphere, they have been dispatched to speak on the campaign trail on their husband’s behalf. The 2008 and 2012 Obama campaign efforts often sent Obama to speak on behalf of Barack. Her identity as a descendent of slaves, as a woman, and as an African American raised by a middle class family in inner city Chicago was beneficial to her husband’s campaign. In addition, her education and professional accomplishments fostered her credibility with a variety of audiences. When the 2008 Obama campaign first began, Obama had been encouraged to speak of her educational and professional accomplishments as an African American woman. The campaign hoped to create an identity similar to Hillary
Rodham Clinton’s as First Lady; one of power and independence, fostering a First Lady who is active in the presidency. Yet, for the American public to see Michelle Obama as the First Lady, let alone as an independent, involved First Lady, the institution and expectations needed to be renegotiated. According to K.L. White, “a major effort to reimagine a space already defined and designed around constructions of White femininity” became the first obstacle of Michelle Obama’s embodiment of the First Lady (White 11). Consequently, the campaign realized Obama would need to embody a more traditional role of American womanhood. K.L. White asserts that Obama “presents a complex picture of modern America—she embodies the combined efforts of the Modern Civil Rights and Feminist movements at a time when many Americans are launching bitter reprisals against the institutional measures that have allowed such progress to take place” (White 1).

Therefore, the campaign decided that Obama should instead emphasize her identity as a mother. She has maintained this identity throughout her tenure as First Lady. This embodiment of domesticity and a more traditional idea of American womanhood influenced not just her public persona but what causes she committed her time to. In the beginning of her tenure she championed a number of issues—providing military families and working mothers with assistance, encouraging national service, promoting art education and fostering healthy eating and living for families and children. However as time progressed, she narrowed her scope and committed her time to the fight against childhood obesity by launching the Let’s Move! campaign.
In a democratic system the citizens look to the government to provide them with knowledge of the important issues present in their lives. Mixed in with issues of foreign relations and congressional gridlock, there is a national struggle to raise ‘our kids’ right; to provide them with the education they need and to promote a healthier future; awareness of the needs of future generations. First Lady Michelle Obama has dedicated her time to changing the lives of the next generation in regards to personal health. She advocates for active and healthy children in an effort to solve the challenges of childhood obesity. The First Lady’s Let’s Move! program was founded in an effort to “solve the challenge of childhood obesity within a generation so that children born today will reach adulthood at a healthy weight” (Lets Move!: Americas Move to Raise a Healthier Generation of Kids). The campaign was announced on February 9, 2010 with three main areas of change outlined: encourage healthier food in schools, promote better labeling, and urge more physical activity for children. The stated trajectory of the campaign is to encourage a healthy lifestyle through “a comprehensive, collaborative, and community-oriented initiative that addresses all the various factors that lead to childhood obesity… engaging every sector of society that impacts the health of children to provide schools, families and communities the simple tools needed to help kids be more active, eat better, and get healthy” (Lets Move!: Americas Move to Raise a Healthier Generation of Kids).

The First Lady has employed an extensive variety of techniques in an effort to promote health for children. The song “Move Your Body” by Beyoncé and Swizz Beats was released as a dance video to help kids get up and move. In 2013-14 she has released a number of short videos encouraging healthy lifestyles with the help of A
list athletes and celebrities, as well as President Obama. The program has also helped promote the new food pyramid and has assisted the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in creating a website just for kids. Chef’s Move to Schools is another aspect of the Let’s Move! campaign. Professional chefs volunteer to cook with students and school workers in an effort to teach culinary skills to kids and get them to try healthier food options. The Healthy, Hungry-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) passed because of the Let’s Move! campaign’s efforts, marking the first time in thirty years funds were increased for school supplied breakfasts and lunches. The HHFKA also gave the USDA the authority to regulate nutrition of foods regularly sold in schools. The Let’s Move! campaign has also helped double the amounts of fruits and vegetables provided for students, as well as helped schools switch from refined grain products to whole grain. Thousands of communities have committed to the changes the Let’s Move! campaign promotes.

Currently, childhood obesity is of great interest. Numerous studies have strived to understand the causes of childhood obesity within American children and many programs are attempting to promote healthy eating and increased physical activity in order to promote healthy weight (Donato S65). Regular physical activity has well-accepted and important benefits for the health of children. Huhman et al. discusses the prominent health effects of routine physical play in children “optimal cardiovascular functioning, bone health, maintenance of normal weight, improved self-concept, and positive effects on academic performance” (Huhman, Potter and Nolin 638). We are raising the most sedentary generation in history. Less than five states require students k-12 enroll in physical education courses (Portner) (National
Association for Sport and Physical Education & American Heart Association). Children who are not consistently active are susceptible to countless health risks such as: diabetes and obesity, high anxiety and stress, and increased levels of depression. Research shows that physically active children do better in school and are better at concentrating and problem solving.

While the negative effects of a sedentary generation have been discussed at length, what seems most important is our ability to control and reduce the spread of childhood obesity to ensure healthy generations. Promoting positive experiences with physical activity at a young age can ensure that as adults, Americans will stay active. While the current recommendation is 60 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity for school-age children, more often than not, American children are not active at all. The United States government has found, according to O. Werder, that “most consumers are aware of the importance of diet and activity but are overwhelmed by their obligations. They are quickly demotivated to follow extensive and complex suggestions but require doable behaviors they can easily incorporate into their busy lifestyles” (Werder 452). How the message of childhood obesity is presented to the American people is a vital component of solving this issue.

The Lets Move! campaign is unique in that it is promoted and supported by the federal government; however it is also supported heavily in the corporate world. The Alliance for a Healthier Generation, GenYouth, Nike Inc. and Kaiser Permanente are just a few of the corporate sector supporters the Lets Move! campaign has generated. The campaign is also important in that it strives to get state-level organizations involved, as well as to provide the right information to parents. The
campaign’s efforts in these areas reflect the importance of rhetoric in advancing the campaigns goals. This is a function for rhetoric long recognized in rhetorical theory: “Until people see the link between conditions in the world or government policies and their lives, they have little conscious awareness of public problems” (Hauser). The Lets Move! campaign moves to bring the issue of childhood obesity and the health of future generations to the forefront of our minds; to promote change in our cultural norms in an effort to ensure a better future for our children.

The hindrance our generation is placing on those of the future by proliferating childhood obesity and unhealthy cultural norms must be addressed. Our society has come to value ease and accessibility above health and good. By choosing to feed our children fast food and use new media as a babysitter, we are encouraging and teaching unhealthy habits. Fast food has become a symbol of the American lifestyle. Parents revert to fast food as a quick fix to feeding their children, rather than promoting healthy diets. Furthermore, children are not adequately trained to prepare their own food. In the founder’s speech of the Lets Move! campaign Michelle Obama discusses her childhood and how her grandmother promoted a balanced diet at every meal. Pizza was a special dinner, usually reward for good grades in school, occurring 1-2 times a year. Snacking wasn’t an option in her family. She discusses how in her childhood, children were not allowed to eat whatever and whenever they pleased, and observes that children are living a very different childhood. Obama wonders how we can expect children to feed themselves adequately if we do not train them or teach them to do so. One aspect of the Lets Move! campaign strives to teach parents, children and schools how to better prepare our children for the future. The First Lady
strives to find a way to teach them to eat healthy and to find things they love within the healthy group of food, rather than from fast food and junk food.

In addition to the promotion of healthy eating, the Lets Move! campaign strives to get kids to be more active. Children today are more and more likely to engage in sedentary and often time’s individual activities. Video games, movies, and television have become the norm for daily activity. In her speeches the First Lady discusses her childhood experiences with staying active. She discusses how she and her brother would play on the playground as often as they could. They would fight their parents in an effort to stay outside longer. First Lady Obama voices her fear that children today are not gaining the same socialization and physical play as was normalized for past generations. The Lets Move! campaign is making moves to promote physical activity among children both at school and at home in hopes of promoting a healthy lifestyle.

Given the state of our nation today, obesity has become a relevant social issue to our continued success as a nation. If we ignore this obesity epidemic among children our health care system will be unable to maintain the burden of increased health issues that could result from a generation of severely sedentary adults. The problem is already prevalent today, and in order to ensure the success of America, any and all preventative actions should be considered and activated. A rhetorical analysis of the speeches given by the First Lady in promotion of her Lets Move! Program is justifiable based solely on the severity and extent of the obesity problem within our country. But in particular, regarding rhetoric, the campaign offers insight into how a government agency uses rhetoric to generate public awareness. Our
society is constantly changing, and while growth is important, maintaining a healthy population should be at the forefront of our minds. Somehow this American value has slipped through the cracks and is only just now being addressed. If we can better understand the actions that are being enacted now, and how they are succeeding, we can strive for better more healthy generations in the future. The parents, schools and volunteers are working hard in our country, the question is not to do or not to do, but rather how is it being done, and how are audiences being urged to enact change.

The purpose of this research strives to discover how First Lady Michelle Obama uses language and metaphor to shape the discourse around parenting and education and the rhetoric surrounding childhood obesity. Most of the research on First Lady Michelle Obama thus far examines her embodiment of American womanhood, and her status as the first African American First Lady. While these two aspects of Michelle Obama’s persona as First Lady will be discussed, my research will more closely examine the rhetoric of Michelle Obama. I will explore Michelle Obama as a rhetor and how she uses metaphor in her public addresses during the Let’s Move! campaign as a way of connecting and identifying with the audience. This project does not aim to be comprehensive of Michelle Obama’s discourse. Rather, I hope to contribute to the ongoing scholarly conversation regarding the expectations and performances of First Ladies. Additionally, I would like to draw attention to the significance of the First Lady institution not just in gender studies and women’s history, but also in the study of the American presidency, the history of the United States government, rhetorical criticism and political communication. This study seeks to answer the following research question:
How does Michelle Obama use metaphor to build a relationship and connection with the audience in order to communicate and promote the importance of the Let’s Move! campaign?

In order to accomplish these objectives I will be using a metaphoric analysis. I will use the concepts of and delineations of metaphor in *Metaphors We Live By* by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson combined compilation with Kenneth Burke’s discussion of substance in *A Grammar of Motives* to analyze Michelle Obama’s speech.

To begin, my study will provide an overview of the academic literature concerning the First Lady and the Let’s Move! campaign. Next I will discuss the metaphoric theories I will be employing in my analysis of Michelle Obama’s February 28th, 2013 speech. This speech exemplifies the initiatives and goals of the Let’s Move! campaign and also provides strong rhetorical content for study. It is not specifically in response to one controlling exigence, however it addresses a number of key issues in relation to the initiatives of the Let’s Move! campaign. Within the beginning of my analysis, I will demonstrate how this theory is an appropriate theory to apply to this speech because of the power of the metaphors used within the speech. The analysis will provide further insight into the metaphors used in Michelle Obama’s speech and their employment to connect with the audience. The conclusion(s) drawn from this analysis will provide further support for the study of the rhetoric of First Ladies.
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW:

The First Lady occupies a unique position. She is not elected, she is not paid, and her duties are not defined within our constitution. However, she is often viewed as a symbol of her husband’s administration. According to Myra G. Gutin, “There is nothing a First Lady must do, but much she is expected to accomplish” (Gutin, The President's Partner: The First Lady in the Twentieth Century 2). Prior to the twentieth century, First Ladies were largely hostesses, although, as women gained increasing levels of equality, the role of the First Lady transformed as well. Expectations have changed over the years, the most visible of which occurred during Eleanor Roosevelt’s time as First Lady. Now the American public wants an involved First Lady, one who champions causes and plays a partially active role in her husband’s administration. However, this evolution has not come without hard work and commitment from the First Ladies of the past.

In order to grasp this role and how Michelle Obama fits and embodies it, we need to understand the history. I will begin by providing a review of the literature surrounding the roles adopted by past First Ladies. Second, the evolution of the role(s) of both American women and the First Lady will be discussed, followed by the history of the public causes addressed by First Ladies. I will then discuss Michelle Obama before and during her tenure as First Lady, including a personal history as well as examination of Obama as a public speaker. This is followed by a review of the literature surrounding the history and success of government endorsed health campaigns. Finally, the reaction to the Let’s Move! campaign upon its creation and the subsequent three years will be considered. These topics provide the groundwork
necessary for understanding the analysis of First Lady Michelle Obama’s Let’s Move! campaign speech.

*The role of the First Lady*

As the institution of the First Lady has increased, so has the amount of material produced by scholarly authors. In 1997 the National First Ladies’ Library opened in Canton, Ohio, marking only the beginning of the numerous pieces published on the ever-changing role of the First Lady. According to “The Evolution of the Role and Office of the First Lady: The Movement Toward Integration with the White House Office,” written by Anthony J. Eksterowicz and Kristen Paynter, “the study of First Ladies is a new field. Historians have pioneered the field, but in recent years the disciplines of political science, psychology, and sociology have contributed to this emerging field” (Eksterowicz & Paynter 548). Research in the disciplines of rhetoric and communication, however, has been limited. In an effort to provide a holistic review, the literature of scholars across all disciplines mentioned above will be discussed.

A number of scholars have assessed the role of the First Lady in search of overarching themes and commonalities. Robert P. Watson counts eleven duties performed by First Ladies: (1) wife and mother, (2) public figure and celebrity, (3) nation’s social hostess, (4) symbol of American womanhood, (5) White House manager and preservationist, (6) campaigner, (7) social advocate and champion of social causes, (8) presidential spokesperson, (9) presidential and political party booster, (10) diplomat and, (11) political/presidential partner (Watson, The Presidents' Wives: Reassessing the Office of First Lady 71-93). He argues that these
eleven duties have developed through custom and necessity, and that they have become functions of the office. One mistake made in the “media, public, and scholarly literature,” Watson writes, “is to see the First Lady as either traditional or modern. The office is much more complex and multidimensional” (Watson, The Presidents' Wives: Reassessing the Office of First Lady 24). Watson also presents a useful typology, categorizing First Ladies into the following five types: (1) full partner, (2) partial partner, (3) behind-the-scenes partner, (4) partner in marriage and, (5) non-partner (Watson, The Presidents' Wives: Reassessing the Office of First Lady 142). This typology emphasizes the professional and personal relationship between the First Lady and the president, and how each couple’s relationship can impact the way the president’s wife embodies the role of First Lady.

In 2000, Gary D. Wekkin, another scholar of the First Ladyship, published an article attempting to “think systematically about the American First Ladyship, the various roles its occupants may play, the constraints within which those roles must be played, and the capacities or advantages intrinsic to each type of role” (Wekkin 601). Wekkin outlined six roles of the First Lady: (1) the conscript—dragged in, (2) the shield—classical marital partner, (3) the courtesan—gatekeeper, (4) the consigliore—counselor and confidante, (5) The regent—vicarious authority and, (6) the co-president—independent partner to the president. He argues that “to be just a hostess is no longer enough; one must model social concern for fellow Americans to emulate.” He warns, however, that “daring to wield policy power on the strength of the electoral mandate of one’s marital partner is seen by many Americans as flouting democratic processes” (Wekkin 608-609). In 2002, he published an article, Being First Lady in
the Plural Presidency: Rules of the Game, and defined the First Ladyship as:

A subjectively-created construct that lies somewhere in between what the occupant herself understands the job to be, and what the President, the presidential assistants in the White House Office, the Cabinet members, the Congress, the Washington interest-group community, the Washington press corps, and the attentive voting public each adjudge the job to be. The kinds of roles and powers available/unavailable to a First Lady depend, then, not only upon the contemporary occupant’s ambition and accumulated precedent, but upon the legitimating supports received from the other role-players, as well. In so many words, then, the political salience of the First Ladyship is the product of a kind of bargaining process (Wekkin 2).

In this article he came to the conclusion that the political influence of twentieth century First Ladies is not “a new development [so much as] a tardy response to the political development of every other national political institution” (Wekkin 3).

Myra Gutin’s ground breaking study within the field of rhetoric and communication, The President’s Partner: The First Lady in the Twentieth Century (1989), argued that by studying “the speeches, radio and television broadcasts, interviews, press conferences, and magazines and newspaper articles written by the First Lady…one is best able to understand and appreciate the changes [in the office] that have taken place” (Gutin 2). She divided the First Ladies from Harding to Carter into the following categories: (1) White House keepers, social hostesses and ceremonial presences, (2) emerging spokeswomen, and (3) political surrogates and independent advocates. Gutin traced the forms of communication used by each First Lady as well as some of the factors that constrained her in order to better understand the position.

While Gutin found clarity in dividing the First Ladies into three defining categories, Anthony J. Eksterowicz and Robert N. Roberts theorized that there are
seven factors influencing each First Lady in their attempt to embody what is expected of a First Lady: (1) her personal background, (2) the resources available to her due to the amount of integration with the Office of the White House, (3) how she perceives and approaches issues, (4) the type of relationship she has with the President, (5) the public’s opinion of her, (6) her non-mention within the constitution and, (7) the public/private divide in her life. However, Eksterowicz and Roberts believe the issue behind the public/private divide is receding and that the “non-Constitutional nature of the First Lady’s position and lack of a specific job description is largely a non-existent problem” (Eksterowicz and Roberts 23).

In the late 1990’s Karlyn Kohrs Campbell published two significant studies of First Ladies from a rhetorical perspective: *The Rhetorical Presidency: A Two Person Career* (1996) and *The Discursive Performance of Femininity: Hating Hillary* (1998). Both studies provided a framework for understanding why the office of the First Lady is vital to the presidency as well as a difficult rhetorical role to play. In the 1996 article, she discusses the public and private aspects of the First Ladies role and how these are made increasingly difficult by public criticism. In the 1998 article Campbell criticizes the expectation that the First Lady “personify an idealized version of women when one no longer exists” and criticizes the expectation that women who perform professional roles in public are forced to “discursively enact their femininity” (Campbell 15). The conclusions reached by Shawn J. Parry-Giles and Diane M. Blair are consistent with Campbell’s. Parry-Giles and Blair trace the rise of the rhetorical First Lady through Laura Bush. They argue that the First Lady occupies a “contested space” because she functions both as a site “for the performance of archetypal
femininity that privileges the ideal republican mother” and as a site of “feminist advancement that challenges gender stereotypes, expanding women’s political space” (Parry-Giles and Blair, The Rise of the Rhetorical First Lady; Politics, Gender Ideology, and Women’s voice, 1798-2002 586). This conflict over the roles and performance of the First Lady, Parry-Giles and Blair believe, reflects “a synecdoche for the larger cultural continual anxiety over women’s political participation” (Parry-Giles and Blair, The Rise of the Rhetorical First Lady; Politics, Gender Ideology, and Women’s voice, 1798-2002 587).

Lisa Burns, as previously referenced, explains that First Ladies have been positioned as role models for American women and the emergence of the First Lady as a public woman paralleled the rise of the rhetorical presidency and the rhetorical First Lady. Burns divides the First Ladies of the twentieth century into four categories: public women (1900-1929), political celebrities (1932-1961), political activists (1964-1977), or political interlopers (1980-2001) (Burns 50). These categories depict the progress of the women’s movement and in turn the changing role of the First Lady—progress and change that has produced for women in general, and the office of the First Lady in particular, a “double bind.” However, before we discuss the shifting role of the First Lady through history, the changing role of women in American society must be discussed.

First Ladies and the Double Bind

Although women were becoming increasingly active in the public sphere, the domesticity of the past still lingered. The history of First Ladies is an example where the double bind consistently stifled opportunity over decades. According to Monika
Bertaki’s thesis, *Mother Knows Best: The Rhetorical Persona of Michelle Obama and the ‘Let’s Move’ Campaign*, women are expected “to portray simultaneously the traditional roles and modern ones which ultimately forced women into a double bind” (Bertaki 6). Kathleen Jamieson asserts that the double bind is a strategy used by those in power against those with limited or no power (Jamieson 17). The double bind experienced by First Ladies shifted throughout history, but nonetheless its confinement remained. In order to show the connection between the double bind and the American First Lady, I will first define the double bind. Then I will discuss the public/private dichotomy inherent within the term and the First Ladies position. Next I will discuss the role Eleanor Roosevelt played in moving the First Lady away from the double bind. Finally, I will discuss the modern First Lady and her continued struggle with the double bind.

The double bind is two fold in its power, to both limit and water down. There are many existing definitions of the double bind. However, there are common pieces in each: two conflicting options are provided, neither option provides a positive outcome. For example, Bertaki states that the double bind “is a rhetorical construct that posits two and only two alternatives; one or both penalizing the person being offered them, [drawing its power] from the capacity to simplify complexities” (Bertaki 7). Bertaki’s definition summarizes the tension of the double bind well. By providing only two options, the assumption is made that something cannot be both at once. In any aspect of public life (i.e. politics, sports, etc.), women’s loss is seen as a result of their own internal failures whereas men’s loss is attributed by their opponent’s power and strength (Jamieson 122).
Inherent within the double bind is dichotomy; the concept of one or the other. The First Lady is limited by the public/private dichotomy in her embodiment of the role: women’s historically private role and new public roles of women in society. However, both private and public roles have been over simplified and limit the First Lady significantly. In the same regard, there are few ways for First Ladies to maintain roles in public and private life, while avoiding criticism. Although women have moved outside of the private sphere and First Ladies have become more active during campaigns, First Ladies are utilized during presidential campaigns for image and family or private issues. The First Ladies experience of the double bind is directly related to gender normative standards. According to Karlyn K. Campbell, gender is a social construction rather than a “physical or biological given; it is enacted and performed bodily, and in order for a ‘woman’ to be an agent...she must ‘cite’ or ‘enact’ cultural norms of femininity” (Campbell 2). Therefore, the First Lady must embody cultural norms of femininity.

Early First Lady’s roles consisted of being the presidential escort and hostess and embodying traditional gender roles. However, as women’s role within society shifted, the expectations and roles of the First Lady changed as well. As her role expanded, the tension of the double bind grew. During the 20th century, the role shifted and she was expected to champion her own social issues, outside of the President’s agenda. One of the first presidential wives to be involved in volunteer work was Dolly Madison. After the War of 1812, Madison volunteered for the Washington City Orphan Asylum, setting the “standard by which all of her successors were judged” (Anthony 26). While significant steps had been taken to expand the role
of the women and the First Lady during the 19th and early 20th century, her role in the public sphere remained private in scope. The double bind limited her public role to issues surrounding the private sphere.

The American press exacerbated the public private dichotomy, by helping define the First Ladies role. However, the delineation of roles consequently set boundaries limiting the public and private dichotomy of her role. As Lisa Burns argues, “First Ladies have been largely positioned as role models for American women.” Although Bertaki states, “the modern era First Ladies were more vocal, politically active and more publicly visible than the majority of their predecessors” (Bertaki 11). Nonetheless, the media played a large role in defining the First Lady’s role. In its coverage of the First Lady the press aided in confining her public role to private sphere issues.

Eleanor Roosevelt embodied a very different First Lady. As every First Lady does, she fought the simplification the double bind placed on her role. However, she was successful in breaking the norm and defining a new role for the First Lady. According to Bertaki, “Eleanor Roosevelt “was portrayed as a ‘political celebrity’ who inhabited both the public and the domestic spheres” (Bertaki 11). By comparison to her predecessors, Roosevelt was significantly more politically active. Apart from being involved with the President’s staff, she authored “articles in women’s magazines, [held] press conferences, [gave] radio broadcasts and [spoke] to women’s groups” (Bertaki 12). This approach was successful in altering the expectations of the First Ladies role. According to Burns, Eleanor Roosevelt’s work gave rise to seeing the First Lady as a role model for women’s civic engagement—volunteering and
political activism” (Burns 10).

The modern day First Lady still experiences the tension of the double bind, however some struggled with the dichotomy more than others. Lisa Burns categorized American First Ladies into groups, two segments occur in the modern era of first ladies: the political activist and the political interloper. In contrast to Roosevelt’s image of strong civic engagement Bess Truman and Mamie Eisenhower were viewed as average American housewives who embraced ‘Cold War femininity’ (Burns 87). Truman and Eisenhower embodied the image of womanhood for their generation. Jacqueline Kennedy and Pat Nixon further changed the public perception of the First Lady, however their approach was more subtle than Roosevelt’s. They became celebrities by embodying the fashion of their era, rather than championing a social or political issue.

Burns assigned the label “political activist” to the First Ladies from 1964 to 1977. “The First Ladies of this era embodied the contemporary super woman who successfully balanced home and family with a career and outside interests,” states Burns, “thus supporting women’s liberation without rejecting domesticity” (Burns 103). However, just as the First Ladies before them, Bertaki states, “when the First Ladies during this era attempted to expand their interests beyond the women and children’s issues, they were criticized” (Bertaki 12). Although the double bind had changed, the modern First Lady still experienced the restriction of its dichotomy. Lady Bird Johnson and Rosalynn Carter were heavily scrutinized for their involvement in domestic and international affairs. Despite being praised for embodying what Marton refers to as “the ideal woman of her era: modest but fearless,
supportive but smart” (Marton)., Lady Bird Johnson was judged for her involvement in promoting President Johnson’s signing of the 1964 Civil Rights act. While, Rosalynn Carter’s trip in 1977 to Latin America “sparked great criticism over the First Lady’s role in international affairs” (Burns 116).

Burns’ second category of the modern First Lady is the “political interloper,” which she assigned to First Ladies from 1980 to 2001. During this time period, society rejected the ideas presented in second-wave feminism and forced a return of domestic ideals and what was coined as new traditionalism. Instead of focusing on the positive impact the First Ladies have had, the concern was over the First Ladies “hidden power.” Burns states “journalists framed political wives who overstepped the boundaries of First Lady and gender performance as political interlopers whose influence allegedly trespassed too far into the male political sphere” (Burns 8). In order to contain the First Ladies who did step outside of their jurisdiction, journalists called on iconic First Ladies as those who upheld the proper boundaries and referenced the double bind that many First Ladies experience. Nancy Reagan and Hillary Clinton experienced this scrutiny heavily. Reagan was often characterized as a “behind the scenes manipulator” (Burns 140). Although, Clinton was scrutinized during her time as First Lady, thirteen years since Clinton was First Lady, she still struggles with the gendered expectations of women.

Whether or not a First Lady pursues a social cause does not change the

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1In the eighteenth century women were limited to the private/domestic sphere and required to be domestic and submissive. While marriage and motherhood increased their authority, this remained their only source of power. First-wave feminism focused on property rights for women and equality within marriage. It ended when equality was seen as attained with the 19th amendment’s passing.

Second wave feminism encouraged women to explore outside the domestic roles of wife and mother. The second-wave was centered on the common idiom “personal is political,” encouraging cultural and political inequalities between genders be addressed. Women were encouraged to be interested in social reform, development, and personal improvement.
criticism she will endure from the media. Just as elected officials and celebrities do, consequently the First Lady must maintain a public image. However, once this image is created, the press will contain her within it. Watson states that the First Lady is the “most scrutinized lady in the world” (Watson 39). Molly Meijer Wertheimer agrees that the First Lady is heavily scrutinized because she carries with her a “heavy symbolic burden” (Wertheimer xi). Bertaki asserts that each First Lady is given “the opportunity to become [an] agent of change through political power but their ability to exercise that power relies on their choice to conform to the perspective of the ‘ideal woman’ within their generation” (13). As Bertaki’s assertion supports, the double bind, gendered norms, and the press have all played a strong role in the struggle a First Lady experiences as she embodies the role. She walks an invisible line between too much and not enough.

Nonetheless, despite the problem imposed by the double bind, throughout history First Ladies have championed social causes during their tenure in the White House. Through these social causes First Ladies have expanded the jurisdiction of the position, even though the press still contains them within a very limited space.

20th Century First Lady’s social causes

In the past, when the First Lady advocated causes that benefited women and children, they were acting within the supposed proper sphere of First Lady. This advocacy often resulted in more positive press coverage, reflecting the domestic empowerment of previous eras. Conversely, when First Ladies were perceived to have too much power, either in public like Clinton or in private like Reagan, their press coverage was harshly critical. Regardless of which role a First Lady chooses to
enact, they embody the model for American women. Certain First Ladies facilitated the transformation of women’s issues into national issues through their campaigns; according to Parry-Giles and Blair these efforts advanced “the rhetorical power of the post and the public visibility of First Ladies on important deliberative matters” (Parry-Giles and Blair, The Rise of the Rhetorical First Lady; Politics, Gender Ideology, and Women’s voice, 1798-2002 587).

Until Eleanor Roosevelt the concept of a public campaign or cause was not normalized within the role of the First Lady. While the First Lady had become synonymous with the first volunteer in the nineteenth century, not all First Ladies took on a cause, and even fewer publicized their involvement. Due to the limited public role permitted to women, many First Ladies restricted their activities to charitable work, noncontroversial causes, and private support for their husband’s agenda. Over the course of the twentieth century it became increasingly common for First Ladies to select specific causes to promote. Eleanor Roosevelt’s extensive activism was one of the many ways she expanded the role of the First Lady, however she did not select just one issue to support, instead she contributed to civil rights movements, women’s rights issues, welfare discussions, human rights movements, and housing for the poor, to name only a few. Her press conferences, daily newspaper column, and extensive travel made her a national personality in a way that no previous First Lady had achieved. Her example as an activist role model gave her successors a precedent to invoke when they wished to pursue a cause or campaign.

Bess Truman and Mamie Eisenhower represented a return to the more traditional model of the First Lady as the helpmate, out of the public eye with limited
activism. Bess Truman remained mainly out of the public and limited her influence to just giving advice to the President. Due to her chronic illness, Mamie Eisenhower also remained behind the scenes and took on no social causes. Jacqueline Kennedy, strived to remain out of the public eye, however her iconic fashion helped to infuse the First Ladyship with glamour and celebrity and aroused popular interest in the First Lady. While she increased the formal structure of the First Ladyship she did not commit herself to a public cause as Eleanor Roosevelt had. She did however, lead efforts to redecorate and restore the White House. On Valentine’s Day in 1962, CBS News aired the first televised tour of the White House lead by Jacqueline Kennedy. 80 million Americans viewed the tour, showcasing the renovations Kennedy had launched to “restore [the White House] with an eye to returning it to its historic roots” (O’Donnell).

With the growing influence of television, the First Lady became a focus for media attention. During the three decades since Jacqueline Kennedy, a growing emphasis on activism has marked the role of First Lady. Lady Bird Johnson developed a professional partnership by working tirelessly to minimize hostility toward LBJ’s signing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. In addition to campaigning for the President, Lady Bird identified herself with the environment and beautification. In these efforts she was able to assist in the passing of the Highway Beautification Act 1967. Her use of staff, involvement with conservation legislation, and advocacy of environmental causes set a precedent for many of her successors.

Pat Nixon, however, took a more traditional rout, and reluctantly participated in politics and campaigning. Unlike some of her predecessors, she did not have a
wide-ranging political agenda. Her main interest lay in increasing volunteerism throughout the nation. Throughout Nixon’s Presidency, Pat was the symbol of domesticity, and her actions were always in support of the President’s agenda. Betty Ford, on the other hand, was an outspoken proponent of women’s rights. According to Carl S. Anthony, Betty Ford stirred controversy with her “frank discussion of political issues that affected women, [by] registering her support for the Supreme Court decision upholding a woman’s right to choose abortion and [by] lobbying state legislatures to pass the Equal Rights Amendment” (Anthony, First Ladies: The Saga of the Presidents' Wives and Their Power, 1961-1990). In addition to equal rights, she also strived to make health problems a more prominently discussed topic. Betty Ford disclosed her own breast cancer struggle, helping to eradicate the taboo against discussing health problems that affect millions of women.

Rosalynn Carter took a less aggressive approach by attempting to forge a public partnership with her husband. However this strategy produced a public backlash and cemented the traditional ideas regarding the proper behavior of the wife of a president. Under Rosalynn, the office of the First Lady became highly organized, professional, and integrated with the White House Office (Eksterowicz and Paynter 555). She used her influence as First Lady to help draft and pass the Mental Health Systems Act. Just like Rosalynn, Nancy Reagan also experienced criticism of her influence on the presidency, and her commitment to the “Just Say No” antidrug program was a reaction to the negative press coverage. Barbara Bush approached the First Ladyship similarly to Nancy Reagan; however, she was popular as First Lady, and her endorsement of literacy never attracted any criticism (Gould xxi).
Hillary Rodham Clinton highlighted the continually conflicting expectations of the First Lady. Regardless, her enactment of First Lady was a logical progression in the evolution of a society where women are partners and coworkers, not simply homemakers (Kelley 5). She shared a deep commitment to activism and social issues reminiscent of Eleanor Roosevelt. To say that Hillary endorsed health care during the Clinton administration would be a vast understatement. She worked as chair of the Presidential Task Force on Health Care. She was also called before a grand jury regarding what was titled the Whitewater controversy, but was never charged with wrong doing (Eksterowicz and Paynter 559). Her expansion of the First Ladyship caused a polarizing response from the American public. After failure in Congress with health care, Hillary took on the less controversial issue of child welfare. In 1997 and 1999 she played a leading role in advocating for the creation of the State Children’s Health Insurance Program, the Adoption and Safe Families Act, and the Foster Care Independence Act.

Michelle Obama’s immediate predecessor, Laura Bush, championed the same issue as her mother-in-law, illiteracy, and just like Barbara, was well liked by the public. During the spring of 2001, Laura Bush unveiled her ‘Ready to Read, Ready to Learn Initiative,’ and traveled the country promoting early childhood cognitive development and education.

First Lady Michelle Obama

In 2008 when Barak and Michelle took the White House, the expectations awaiting Michelle were drastically different than those of any past First Lady. In two centuries the role of the American First Lady evolved from a domestic wife to a
policy-involved public celebrity. How would Michelle live up to the standards of her predecessors while still pushing the limitations of our society’s gendered ways?

Michelle Robinson was raised to commit her life to education and community service (Bond 46). Fraser Robinson III and Marian Robinson raised their two children on the South side of Chicago. Fraser was a pump operator for the Chicago Water Department and a Democratic precinct captain, while Marian was a stay at home mother to Craig and Michelle. Both Craig and Michelle attended Chicago public schools through high school. In addition, Michelle followed in her brother’s footsteps by attending Princeton University (1981-1985). At Princeton she studied sociology and African-American studies. According to D.B. Brophy in a biography of Michelle, “in the year Michelle entered Princeton minority students made up only 16 percent of the college’s population” (Brophy 16); this greatly influenced Michelle’s college experience. While at Princeton she became involved with the Third World Center (now known as the Carl A. Fields Center for Equality and Understanding) and the Organization of Black Unity (an African-American student group). She worked at the Third World Center to help create “an after-school reading program for the children of manual workers of the university” (National First Ladies Library). Her involvement with both organizations provided her with a sense of community and understanding something she did not feel with the entire student body. Michelle articulated her perception of race’s role at Princeton in her thesis, titled “Princeton-Educated Blacks and the Black Community”:

My experiences at Princeton have made me far more aware of my ‘blackness’ than ever before. I have found that at Princeton no matter how liberal and open-minded some of my white professors and classmates try to be toward me, I sometimes feel like a visitor on campus, as if I really don’t belong.
Regardless of the circumstances under which I interact with whites at Princeton, it often seems as if, to them, I will always be black first and a student second (Brophy 24).

This excerpt from her thesis was just the beginning of her struggle to understand how race plays a role in a person’s academics and career.

After graduating from Princeton, Michelle attended Harvard Law School, completing her law degree in 1988. While at Harvard, she joined the Black Law Students Association “where she took part in demonstrations demanding more minority students and professors” (Bond 46). She also joined the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau, helping “local residents unable to afford legal advice and representation, on issues ranging from divorce, custody and tenant rights” (National First Ladies Library). This organization was a student-run ‘law firm’ where each student committed twenty hours of service a week.

The summer before her final year at Harvard Law School, Michelle took a summer associate position at the Chicago law firm Sidley Austin. Because of her work ethic and intelligence, upon graduation the firm asked her to rejoin the firm as an attorney in the area of marketing and intellectual property. At Sidley Austin she met Barack Obama in June 1989, when he was hired as a summer associate (as she had been in 1987). In 1991, Michelle left law to pursue a career in community service, accepting a position as the Assistant to the Chicago Mayor Richard Daley. This drastic change was provoked by the death of her father and a close friend, who had both worked for the community and the Democratic Party. For the Mayoral office of Richard Daley, she served as a “liaison between the city and fledgling businesses, seeking to help encourage Chicago economic development” (National First Ladies
Alma Bond, author of a biography about Michelle, writes on the significance of this move away from law, “It was a move into public service that proved central to her career and her life” (Bond 47).

On October 3, 1992, Michelle and Barack married at the Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago. In the early years of their marriage, Barack taught at the University of Chicago law school and worked at a small civil rights law firm. Meanwhile, Michelle had accepted a new position as the Assistant Commissioner of Planning and Development, in the office of the Mayor of Chicago. However, soon after she left the office of the Mayor of Chicago founding executive director of the Chicago branch of Public Allies (1993-1996), “a nonprofit leadership-training program that helped young adults develop skills for future careers in the public sector” (The Biography Channel).

In 1996, Michelle joined the University of Chicago as Associate Dean of Student Services. At this position she developed “the university’s first community-service program,” according to the White House website biography of Michelle (The White House: President Barak Obama). During her time at the University of Chicago Michelle and Barack welcomed their daughters, Malia Ann, born July 4, 1998, and Natasha “Sasha,” born June 7, 2001 into their lives. While the new parents were thrilled, the birth of their two daughters caused great tension between Barack and Michelle. According to A.H. Bond’s biography of the First Lady, it took a few years for the couple to figure out how to manage a household of four, while still both being able to pursue their ambitions outside the home (Bond 40). Michelle ended up
changing positions at the University of Chicago in order to work fewer hours and spend more time at home.

From 2002 until Barack began his presidential campaign in 2007, Michelle worked for the University of Chicago Hospital’s community relations and external affairs department. She began as the Executive Director and three years later became the Executive Vice President. At these positions Michelle strived to connect “medical staff and the local community, [she] increased voluntarism…and also reviewed how the hospital’s research might better serve the medical issues and problems uniquely faced by the local residents” (National First Ladies Library).

In January of 2009, alongside her husband; Michelle became First Lady of the United States. As the 44th First Lady, she has committed her time to issues close to her heart—“supporting military families, helping working women balance career and family, encouraging national service, promoting the arts and arts education, and fostering healthy eating and healthy living for children and families across the country” (The White House: President Barak Obama). In the first years of the Obama presidency, President Barak Obama and Michelle volunteered at shelters and soup kitchens in Washington, D.C. regularly. Michelle also spent time traveling the country speaking to children and parents about the importance of education and committing time to volunteering within your community. Additionally, in 2011, with the help of Dr. Jill Biden, the wife of Vice President Joe Biden, Michelle launched Joining Forces. According to the current White House website, Joining Forces is “a nationwide initiative that mobilizes all sectors of society to give service members and their families the opportunities and support they have earned, and to raise
awareness of military families' unique needs as pertains to employment, education and wellness” (The White House: President Barak Obama).

According to the White House website’s biography on Michelle, “promoting service and working with young people has remained a staple of her career and her interest” (The White House: President Barak Obama). During the campaign Michelle’s wardrobe was discussed heavily. Her tendency to wear sleeveless tops and gowns was discussed at length. Because her arms were exposed so regularly, the conversation shifted from what she was wearing to what she was showing, leading the media to discuss her toned arms. When interviewed, Michelle was repeatedly asked about her exercise routine and diet. Stress was placed on how she was able to balance all the roles of a workingwoman with motherhood, while still finding time to take care of herself. This was the starting point behind her trajectory toward focusing on childhood obesity issues.

In March of 2009, along side twenty-three fifth graders from a Washington D.C. school, Michelle worked to plant a 1,100 square foot garden of vegetables as well as install beehives on the south lawn of the White House. Her reason was to promote healthy eating: “Ever conscious of her family's diet and health, Michelle Obama has supported the organic food movement, instructing the White House kitchens to prepare organic food for guests and her family” (The Biography Channel).

In 2012, Michelle wrote a book about the reasoning and process behind this garden titled American Grown: The Story of the White House Kitchen Garden and Gardens Across America. It tells the story of why she wanted to plant a garden, and how the
process was the beginning of her commitment to helping the American people combat childhood obesity.

As both a mother and a First Lady, I was alarmed by reports of skyrocketing childhood obesity rates and the dire consequences for our children’s health. And I hoped this garden would help begin a conversation about this issue—a conversation about the food we eat, the lives we lead, and how all of that affects our children (Obama 7).

Aside from the garden being the beginning of her commitment to health of American children, she hoped the garden would also provide an outdoor classroom for some students. She involved students in every step of the process. They were a part of the plowing, planting, harvesting and cooking. In the summers since the garden was planted, the same students have returned to the White House to assist in harvesting the crop as well as learning how to cook meals with the fresh organic vegetables it produces.

Continuing this effort, in February 2010 Michelle Obama launched Let’s Move!, a campaign to “bring together community leaders, teachers, doctors, nurses, moms and dads in a nationwide effort to tackle the challenge of childhood obesity.” The goal may be simple, but it is an ambitious finish line, “to solve the epidemic of childhood obesity within a generation” (The White House: President Barak Obama). The campaign helps encourage kids to be more physically active, makes healthier foods available in schools, provides parents with support, and strives to “make healthy, affordable food available in every part of our country” (The White House: President Barak Obama).

Health campaigns have been used in national education programs due in part to the positive results displayed in two community-based research projects conducted
in the 1970’s. In these studies, communication researchers and health professionals
 collaborated and focused their attention on the ways a health communication
campaign could change health behaviors. These projects utilized strategies such as
community events, schools, churches, and mass media to encourage people to reduce
the risk factors of heart disease, high cholesterol, smoking and obesity. The results of
these studies influenced the design of a number of national campaigns today.
According to Gobin et al. “mass media campaigns have been used for a range of
health-related areas and have successfully achieved desirable changes in behavior and
the use of healthcare services amongst young people” (Gobin, Verlander and Maurici
3). However, unrealistic expectations about possible outcomes have caused several
failures.

A national health education program involves a web of initiatives directed to
professional, patient and public audiences in order to achieve a specific goal in a
specific health area. Health campaigns compromise certain values, according to
Werder, “in order to promote values and interests deemed more socially,
economically or morally compelling by the sponsoring organization of the change
effort” (Werder 453). These campaigns have the ability to create awareness and
influence behaviors. These programs are, according to Karen Donato, “supported by
national and community organizations willing to direct resources to a common goal”
(Donato S66). Radio and television public service announcements and print ads are
often key to the success of any national education program. The focus of most
campaigns to date has been to promote small changes over time in order to yield a big
reward. However, a health campaign can take a while before it becomes established
among all the other ‘good causes’ promoting their own agenda. Donato’s suggestion of having a very clear purpose plays a role in how quickly a health campaign can establish ground. “It is critical to have one focal point for a national education program able to commit staff time and financial resources to coordinating a national effort” (Donato S67).

A number of scholars, including Donato, theorize about the essential elements of a communication campaign. Donato clarifies four essential elements as follows: First it must have a specific purpose and be aimed at a large audience. In addition it must also have a specific time period and involve an organized set of communication activities (Donato S66). In their extensive literature review, Rogers and Storey trace the history of communication campaigns and offer a similar set of defining factors: (1) it is planned to generate specific outcomes, (2) in a relatively large number of individuals, (3) within a specified time period, and (4) use an organized set of communication activities (Francis, Pirkis and Dunt 65). They also discuss the evidence that communication campaigns can be effective only under certain conditions and for specific audiences. Mugur Geane et al. identify two important components of healthy communication campaigns that align with Donato, Rogers and Storey: “audience-tailored message development and identification of appropriate diffusion sources and distribution channels” (Geana, Greiner and Cully 1254). According to Pechmann (1997) and Werder (2007) the mass media campaigns that promote “public awareness of the health need and advocacy for change have been said to be the best way to reach large segments of the population” (Pechmann 191). Werder also asserts that social advertising would “play a central role in the
development of effective public service announcements” (Werder 453). Most health communication research models have focused on the level of involvement with a message the audience has, the amount of cognitive effort exerted by an audience and, social or vicarious learning of information” (Werder).

The Let’s Move! campaign

The Let’s Move! campaign’s specific purpose is to raise a healthier generation of American children. It has a large audience capable of enacting change individually and collectively: the American people. It also has a limited time period, the eight years the Obamas have held the presidency. And finally, it uses communication activities and media to communicate audience tailored messages. The campaign has been constructed and enacted based on the successes of those health campaigns before it.

As with other First Ladies’ initiatives, Michelle’s Let’s Move! campaign has been met with extensive criticism, which questions the significance of the issue itself, the way she has approached it and what the campaign has said. Some say it is just another excuse for the executive branch to meddle in the everyday decisions of Americans. The Let’s Move! campaign has been pointed to by many critics as an example of big government intervening and the Obama administration attempting to expand the role of government. Others criticize the link to Walmart or worry about the damaging effects to youth’s self-esteem due to the emphasis on obesity. There is also the concern that focusing on childhood obesity could make children hyper-conscious of their body weight. The Let’s Move! campaign is frequently criticized by conservative spokes-people and news programs who believe her initiative is at odds
with personal liberty. However, health advocates and a democratic lawmaker have also expressed disappointment as well.

The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) is a prominent health group that addresses childhood obesity. They have received attention for their provocative campaigning, such as billboards that read ‘Hot Dogs Cause Butt Cancer,’ and insisting President Obama no longer eat junk food in public. While they are in support of addressing the issue of childhood obesity, they do not approve of the noncontroversial route the First Lady is taking. They believe that by focusing on exercise instead of nutrition, the First Lady is ‘abandoning’ major efforts to reform the American diet” (Viebeck). PCRM does not believe that recommendations about fitness are enough to make an impact on childhood obesity rates. Susan Levin, the nutrition education director at PCRM states “Obesity is fueled by the hot dogs, burgers, and junk food that are being fed to children in school and at home. The Let’s Move! campaign needs to address the causes of obesity in America, not sweep them under the rug” (Viebeck). In addition to PCRM, another unlikely source of disapproval came from Tom Harkin, a democratic senator from Iowa. Harkin spoke out about the campaign in April 2012, saying, “Let’s Move! has softened its tone to placate food and drink interests in an election year. They went wobbly in the knees, when it comes to kids’ health they shouldn’t go wobbly in the knees” (Viebeck).

Conservatives also have voiced arguments against the Let’s Move! Campaign’s efforts to lower childhood obesity. The main arguments against the initiative deal with funding for the program, the change in American values, and the expansion of the federal government as a ‘Big Brother.’ Radio talk show host Rush
Limbaugh pointed at the hypocrisy of Obama’s eating habits and made negative remarks about her waistline. “Leaders are supposed to be leaders,” Limbaugh said. “If we are supposed to eat roots, berries and tree bark, show us how” (McClatchy-Tribune News Services). In addition to Limbaugh, other prominent conservatives have spoken out against the Let’s Move! campaign. Mitt Romney and Michelle Bachmann made digs at the President and First Lady on their healthy food and lifestyle initiative during the 2012 campaign season. Bachmann changed the argument from eating healthy and staying active to shaming the Obama campaign for generating more government control. She was quoted as saying, “The First Lady’s view is very consistent with where the hard left is coming from. For them, government is the answer to every problem” (McClatchy-Tribune News Services). Sarah Palin launched a similar attack on Laura Ingraham’s national radio show: “What she is telling us is she cannot trust parents to make decisions for their own children, for their own families in what we should eat. Allow us as individuals to exercise our own God-given rights to make our own decisions and then our country gets back on the right track” (Katz). In addition, the press, when reporting on the initiative, has paid more mind to the diet and caloric intake elements of the initiative than to the physical activity. During the first six months of the Let’s Move! initiative, the majority of headlines in the New York Times, Wall Street Journal and Washington Post focused on the food, diet, or nutrition suggestions of the campaign, with only a few mentioning the physical activity suggestions (McClatchy-Tribune News Services).
In January 2011 Michelle Obama announced that the Let’s Move! campaign would be partnering with Walmart in order to better serve American families. While this partnership brought change to the type and cost of food at Wal-Mart, it also brought about the most criticism. Walmart has a reputation of putting local businesses out of business when it moves into communities. Eddie Gehman Kohan is the author of Obama Foodorama blog. After the campaign began in 2010, Kohan traveled with the campaign for three years. In an interview with Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), Kohan states “Some people say Walmart is using the First Lady, that the company isn't serious about its commitment and is just aligning with the First Lady because they're trying to build more stores” (Kohan). Kohan also relates her interview with Forbes magazine writer, Michael Pollan, who named Michelle Obama the ‘Most powerful foodie in the world.’ Kohan said Pollan was worried “she was being duped by Walmart and that the company's pledge to focus on "better-for-you processed foods" was really not what should be going on within the rubric of the campaign - that it should be a total focus on fresh, unprocessed foods” (Kohan).

While there has been a sizeable amount of negative reaction to the Let’s Move! Campaign, the American people—mainly those directly involved with the campaign’s efforts—have received the campaigns initiatives positively. Teachers, administrators, parents and volunteers in several communities across America are enthused by the support the campaign has provided for school children. In addition to the positive support for the campaign, local communities across the nation have received Obama with warmth and astonishing amounts of encouragement (Let's Move!) (Madison).
Michelle Obama as a Rhetor

As discussed, the First Ladyship has often been attributed with features of the upper middle class white woman. Throughout history, each First Lady has affected the role of First Lady with her personality and preference for embodying the role. Michelle Obama’s assumption of the office of First Lady caused extensive discussion about how she would embody the role, as well as how she would change the institution for future First Ladies. During President Obama’s campaign it became apparent that the organization had a secret weapon in Michelle, who was an exceptional public speaker with the ability to expertly engage her audience and perform flawlessly on stage. One *Time* magazine reporter characterized her public speaking ethos as “off-the-cuff charm” and an “ability to relate to regular people” (White). During the campaign she was able to cultivate an identity that was both intelligible and agreeable to a broad American audience.

First Lady rhetoric has often excluded considerations of race, neglecting whiteness as a defining component of First Lady and presidential identity (Parry-Giles and Blair, The Rise of the Rhetorical First Lady; Politics, Gender Ideology, and Women’s voice, 1798-2002 567). However, with the Obamas this topic was highlighted rather than avoided; so much so, that the discussion surrounding Michelle Obama’s rhetoric has been extensive in relation to race with little said otherwise (McAlister 312). In news reports, writers have frequently highlighted her experience growing up on the south side of Chicago, as a black undergraduate at Princeton and her undergraduate thesis about the way Blacks were marginalized at the university. Media brought great attention to her experiences as a black woman and how these
experiences were more relatable for the black voter than Barack’s (Saulny).

Consequently, Michelle served as his surrogate for Blackness during the campaign.

Commentators have emphasized the rhetorical use of Michelle Obama’s wifely and motherly roles, on her strong female presence and gifted oratory, and how she attempts to identify with her audience by appealing to a shared belief system with her rhetorical persona (White 4-6). The difference between the language she uses based on audience is also extensively discussed. K. L. White discusses the change in language used by Michelle Obama due to the race and gender of the audience. White asserts that she “uses more inclusive language in front of Black women audiences than all others, often using terms such as “we, ours, us” much more frequently (White 6). However, when she spoke at the Democratic National Convention in 2008, her traditional female roles were the central aspects of her identity and her rhetoric.

Throughout the campaign and her years as First Lady, Michelle has made it clear that her primary occupation is motherhood. While her professional experience is apparent in her speaking abilities, she discusses her role as a mother much more extensively. She uses the private sphere as a way to connect with women of all racial backgrounds. By learning from the mistakes of Hillary Clinton, an equally educated and accomplished First Lady, and Eleanor Roosevelt, a very successful rhetor, Michelle Obama, with the help of the Obama campaign, was able to successfully portray herself as a First Lady to the American public.

In a content analysis of media discourse discussing Michelle Obama both during the 2008 presidential campaign and after she became First Lady, Carmen R. Lugo-Lugo and Mary K. Bloodsworth-Lugo identify a “pattern in which historical
images used to describe black women have been merged with contemporary (that is, post-9/11) understandings of threat and danger” (Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo 202). They find a clear pattern and provide a framework for discussing the First Lady, claiming that Michelle Obama has been “uniquely positioned at the intersection between enduring perceptions of black women within the United States and new post-9/11 constructions of threat/danger to the country and its citizenry—rendering her ‘unsafe’” (Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo 202). They present two examples of statements made about Michelle Obama that demonstrate this intersection: Bill O’Reilly asked whether Michelle Obama was ‘an angry black woman’ and Beverly Watson, a Tennessee Republican, commented “I don't much care for her and it has nothing to do with her color or race or anything, she seems to have a big attitude, like she’s just above everyone else” (Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo 212).

Throughout the twentieth century it became increasingly common for First Ladies to speak on behalf of their husbands during campaigns and during the presidency. As this literature review demonstrates, only since Eleanor Roosevelt, have First Ladies spoke on behalf of social campaigns. Michelle Obama has been involved in American politics at a time of heavy media coverage. She has utilized countless media to promote her message in an attempt to influence American lifestyle. She has been criticized for her rhetoric in the Let’s Move! campaign extensively; however, the American public has slowly become increasingly receptive to her efforts to reduce this nation’s childhood obesity levels. This review of the literature surrounding Michelle Obama’s speech at the third anniversary of the Let’s Move! campaign has demonstrated that the study of First Ladies and the social causes
they endorse have been studied at length. However, little has been said about
Michelle Obama as a rhetor or about the Let’s Move! campaign. Therefore,
examination of her campaign and what was said is warranted. I hope, by examining a
First Lady’s discourse enacted in the public sphere, attention can be drawn away from
the private/domestic role of the First Lady, and instead shed light on the public role of
the First Lady. This research will answer the following research question: “How does
Michelle Obama use metaphor to build a relationship and connection with the
audience in order to communicate and promote the importance of the Let’s Move!
campaign?”
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY:

The methodology for this thesis will facilitate a metaphoric analysis of a speech from the Let’s Move! campaign. The following concepts will be discussed in an effort to build a framework for analysis: metaphor and its persuasive nature, Lakoff and Johnson’s theory of metaphor and Kenneth Burke’s theory of substance.

Metaphor, in the field of rhetoric, is an essential trope. The study of metaphor and metaphoric criticism has been extensive, with vast amounts of literature on metaphor. However, the review that follows is a small glance at prominent theorists in order to reflect the importance of metaphor in rhetoric. Notably, Aristotle wrote that metaphor “gives style clearness, charm, and distinction as nothing else can: and it is not a thing whose use can be taught by one man to another” (Aristotle 1405a). For Aristotle, metaphor is difficult to learn and use; it is a skill that for some is inherent, while for others remains absent. Aristotle asserts that speakers who develop a mastery of metaphor use are often seen as influential orators. Throughout history, philosophers have defined metaphor in a variety of ways, however the belief that metaphor is used to shape ideas through the comparison of two things has remained key. Aristotle’s treatment is the earliest extant theoretical discussion of metaphor. He defined metaphor as “giving the thing a name that belongs to something else” (Aristotle 1457b). Kenneth Burke identifies four master tropes, of which metaphor is one. His definition of metaphor “is a device for seeing something in terms of something else. It brings out the thisness of that, or the thatness of this” (Burke 503). Lakoff and Johnson, similarly, define metaphor as “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff and Johnson 5). Sopory and Dillard
This approach: metaphor is “an implied comparison between two dissimilar objects, such that the comparison results in aspects that normally apply to one object being transferred to or carried over to the second object” (Sopory and Dillard 384).

I.A. Richards distinctively defines metaphor as “a borrowing between an intercourse of thoughts, a transaction between contexts” (Richards 94). Osborn and Ehninger extend the conception of metaphor as a kind of linguistic borrowing by treating metaphor in terms of stimulus and response:

Metaphor is both communicative stimulus and mental response. As stimulus, it is the identifying of an idea or object through a sign, which generally denotes an entirely different idea or object. As response, it is an interaction of two thoughts, or interpretants, one of which springs from the stimulus sign’s usual denotation, the other from its special denotation in the given context. This interaction of the interpretants provides the basis for the stimulus-response cycle, which is metaphor (Osborn and Ehninger 223).

Each of the aforementioned philosophers places importance in slightly different functions of metaphor. However, what remains consistent is that metaphor shapes ideas through the comparison and interaction of two unrelated concepts.

In addition, scholars have varying and conflicting conceptions of metaphor’s influence. For Aristotle, metaphor is advantageous to those who utilize it, as it enhances style: “metaphorical terms only can be used with advantage” (Aristotle 1404b). As summarized by Sopory and Dillard, Aristotle believes metaphor is “credited with the capacity to structure, transform, and create new knowledge, as well as evoke emotions, and influence evaluations” (Sopory and Dillard 382). However, contemporaneous authors Lakoff and Johnson do not believe that metaphor is solely a way to enhance language; instead they claim that metaphor is the basis of all language and thought. For Lakoff and Johnson, metaphor is connected intrinsically to language.
They assert “human thought processes are largely metaphorical, [that] metaphor as linguistic expressions are possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person’s conceptual system” (Lakoff and Johnson 6).

Scholars almost entirely agree on the persuasive appeal of the use of metaphors. Rinalducci and Henley address this point, “research has long suggested that metaphors can assist in persuasion...and figurative language has been well documented as a part of political rhetoric” (Rinalducci and Henley 1). Many scholars have acknowledged that style and word choice are vital to a speaker’s success. Figures of speech, or tropes, are considered major components of the effective use of style within any speech. Metaphor shows style and can create connection with the audience through language. In an effort to improve perspective, metaphoric language can be used to create tangible pictures and connections in the mind of the audience.

Lamar Reinsch found that when metaphoric language was utilized, rather than literal, substantial differences in attitudinal changes could be observed (Reinsch 145). While metaphoric language has been studied extensively, a precise accounting of its persuasiveness remains a mystery. Osborn and Ehninger state, “Critics have long been aware of the persuasiveness of metaphor in rhetorical discourse, and intrigued by the mystery of the metaphoric experience” (Osborn and Ehninger 223). Read et. al. see metaphor’s effect as distinctive when employed properly. They conclude their article not by accounting for metaphor’s persuasiveness, but by cataloguing some of the trope’s effects. It can simultaneously “convey an emotional message, evoke a particular experience, provoke admiration in the listener for one’s cleverness, structure and organize information, provide a new perspective on a topic by making
us see it in terms of something else, and do it all so concisely” (Read, Cesa and Jones 146). While accounting for the persuasiveness of metaphor may be elusive, important work has been done in accounting for metaphoric process by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, and Kenneth Burke has done important work on metaphoric framing. These approaches provide important tools for unpacking the metaphoric worlds generated by rhetoric, and are thus appropriate tools for treating the rhetoric of Michelle Obama.

**George Lakoff and Mark Johnson**

For Lakoff and Johnson “human thought processes are largely metaphorical” (Lakoff and Johnson 6). Conceptual systems within human thought are metaphorical in structure and definition. Humans are able to utilize metaphor in linguistic expressions because the metaphors already exist within an individual’s conceptual system. I will address three types of metaphor as well as Lakoff and Johnson’s discussion of conceptual gestalts and the experiential perspective of metaphor. Finally, I will discuss two of Lakoff and Johnson’s major metaphorical groups: the container metaphor and the journey metaphor.

Lakoff and Johnson outline three types of metaphors: orientational, ontological and structural. By using different conceptual gestalts, each type constructs a different meaning and coherence. Orientational metaphors “organize a whole system of concepts with respect to one another…giving a concept a spatial orientation” (Lakoff and Johnson 14). This type of metaphor tends to be based on human experience, with “a basis in our physical and cultural experience” (Lakoff and Johnson 14). The orientation metaphor of up-down illustrates this concept. When we
sleep we lay down, when waking we rise or get up. The nature of these statements is rooted in physical nature, however their use varies based on cultural norms. Moods are often described in the terms of the up-down concept. Positive is often associated with up as erect posture can be associated with a positive emotional state. In opposition, negative feelings such as sadness or depression are often associated with down, as ones posture droops. These human experiences build a coherence by which humans understand and produce meaning of the world. There are numerous other metaphors that connect the up-down concept to our physical basis, such as: more is up; less is down, good is up; bad is down, rational is up; emotional is down etc.

The general orientation of up as positive accounts for a wide range of metaphoric associations for positive experiences, as illustrated by the specific metaphor, Happy is up. “There is an internal systematicity to each spatialization metaphor…happy is up defines a coherent system rather than a number of isolated and random cases” (Lakoff and Johnson 17). In applying orientational metaphors the audience gains a direction when understanding the mood or value of something based on a physically experienced reality. In their discussion of orientational metaphors, Lakoff and Johnson stress the importance of experiential basis, “it is only by means of these experiential bases that the metaphor can serve the purpose of understanding” (Lakoff and Johnson 20). Cultural values have a sizeable impact on the metaphorical concepts utilized. Lakoff and Johnson assert that our “values must form a coherent system with the metaphorical concepts we live by” (Lakoff and Johnson 18). To reference the up-down orientational metaphor, United States culture gives priority to this pairing of opposites, while other cultures may value balance or centrality more.
In addition there are systematic correlates between the emotions we have and our sensory-motor experiences, and this is what forms the basis for orientational metaphoric concepts (Lakoff and Johnson 14).

Ontological metaphors build on orientational metaphors. The spatial element is key with orientational metaphors, but what ontological metaphors see as important is “our experience of physical objects and substances [and how they] provide a further basis for understanding” (Lakoff and Johnson 25). Humans are entities bound by a surface, which causes us to impose artificial boundaries onto physical phenomena, explaining the things around us with the same limitations we experience. Lakoff and Johnson believe this “…allows us to pick out parts of our experience and treat them as discrete entities or substances of a uniform kind” (Lakoff and Johnson 25). Ontological metaphors assist in the organization of human lives; the compartmentalizing of experiences, meanings and understandings of the world in order to understand what is occurring. Ontological metaphors are often glazed over, and assumed to be non-metaphorical; they have a very small range of purposes. Lakoff and Johnson present the metaphor *the mind is an entity* and discuss how it is utilized in our culture. Two simple examples are presented that provide clarity and understanding of how ontological metaphors work: my mind just isn’t operating today and I’m a little rusty today. These two metaphors provide different objects by which to model our understanding of the mind and how we experience its function. Ontological metaphors like the *mind is an entity* and those that build from this basic metaphor are so natural and ubiquitous in our thoughts “that they are usually taken as self-evident, direct descriptions of mental phenomena” (Lakoff and Johnson 28). Just
as orientational metaphors are grounded by systematic correlates within our experiences of the world we live in, ontological metaphors find meaning here. Lakoff and Johnson continue their discussion of how ontological metaphors are based heavily on our experience with the physical environment:

In other words, the structure of our spatial concepts emerges from our constant spatial experience, that is, our interaction with the physical environment. Thus up is not understood purely in its own terms but emerges from the collection of constantly performed motor functions having to do with our erect position relative to the gravitational field we live in. (Lakoff and Johnson 56)

Finally, structural metaphors provide what Lakoff and Johnson refer to as “the richest source of such elaboration…they allow us…to use one highly structured and clearly delineated concept to structure another” (Lakoff and Johnson 61). Just as ontological and orientational metaphors are grounded in systematic correlations within our experience, structural metaphors also begin their footing there. The term conceptual gestalt aids in the understanding of structural metaphors and how we use them. A conceptual gestalt can be defined as the metaphysical and physical grounded experiences triggered in a person’s mind when referencing a specific term. It is a whole that is constructed out of this multidimensional experience. A gestalt is a “complex of properties occurring together [that appears] more basic to our experience than their separate occurrence” (Lakoff and Johnson 81). It is to use a metaphor to describe a metaphor, the building blocks for our symbolic world. The metaphor only occurs between the two conceptual gestalts. Structural metaphors are often times container metaphors, where we fit one concept into another.

Lakoff and Johnson discuss the example rational we fit one concept into another argument-is-war extensively. Animals engage in physical combat to get what
they want—be it food, territory, control, sex etc. However, humans have adapted, evolved, to utilize verbal argument in place of physical confrontation. Nevertheless, human fighting involves the same practices as animal physical combat. Humans verbally fight to gain power and intimidate, to establish stance or defend what is theirs. Our conception of an argument and the way in which we carry it out is grounded in our knowledge and experience of physical combat. Even if an individual has no experience with combat, they will still engage in argument according to this argument-is-war metaphor. The metaphor is built into the cultural system the individual lives in.

In addition, Lakoff and Johnson examine the experientialist perspective as it relates to metaphor. Individuals understand the world around them and create new meaning from their experiences as well as the experiences of people around them. There will be different aspects of importance in each individual’s experiences and meanings. By considering your own experiences, a new meaning is developed and consequently applied on the world. Experiential gestalts are “partially structured concepts that are born from human experience” (Lakoff and Johnson 81). Paired with other partial understandings of the world, the overlap is where understanding of the world is gained—of the people, the experiences and the meanings: “Multidimensional structures characterize experiential gestalts, which are ways of organizing experiences into structured wholes” (Lakoff and Johnson 81). Lakoff and Johnson argue that structuring our experience in terms of these multidimensional gestalts is what makes our experiences coherent. To refer back to the metaphor about argument and war, a
conversation is experienced as an argument when the gestalt of war fits our perception and action within the conversation.

Lakoff and Johnson reject both the objectivist and subjectivist views of truth in their theory of metaphor, as they deny an existence of absolute and unconditional truth as well as truth being obtained only through imagination: “The myths of objectivism and subjectivism both miss the way we understand the world through our interactions with it” (Lakoff and Johnson 198). Metaphor unites reason and imagination; it is ‘imaginative rationality.’ For Lakoff and Johnson truth is always relative to understanding, which is based on a non-universal conceptual system. They explain this system as follows: “the categories of our everyday thoughts are metaphorical and our everyday reasoning involves metaphorical inferences, ordinary rationality is therefore imaginative by its very nature” (Lakoff and Johnson 193). To Lakoff and Johnson truth can be based only on understanding:

Metaphors are basically devices for understanding and have little to do with objective reality, if there is such a thing. The fact that our conceptual system is inherently metaphorical, the fact that we understand the world, think and function in metaphorical terms, and the fact that metaphors can not merely be understood but can be meaningful and true as well—these facts all suggest that an adequate account of meaning and truth can only be based on understanding (Lakoff and Johnson 184).

For Lakoff and Johnson metaphoric action generates a symbolic frame that is essential, and that makes moot any supposed clash between objectivist and subjectivist views of ‘truth.’

The container metaphor and the journey metaphor are both used extensively within our conceptual system. According to Lakoff and Johnson, “containers can be viewed as defining a limited space and as holding a substance” (Lakoff and Johnson
The container metaphor underlines the content. As humans, each of us is a container; because of this we understand other physical objects that are bound by surfaces based on the same in-out orientation. Thus, according to Lakoff and Johnson, “we also view them as containers with an inside and an outside” (Lakoff and Johnson 29). We impose boundaries even if one cannot be pointed to. This defining of territory is an act of quantification. There are two types of container metaphors, container objects and container substances. These ontological metaphors are used to understand events, actions, activities, and states. According to Lakoff and Johnson, “Events and actions are conceptualized metaphorically as objects, and activities as substances, states as containers” (Lakoff and Johnson 30). On the other hand the journey metaphor “highlights both direction and progress toward a goal” (Lakoff and Johnson 95). The beginning, middle and end goals as well as the linear progress down a path are key to the journey metaphor. The journey metaphor, according to Lakoff and Johnson, is used to highlight the goal, direction or progress of something. The purposes of the journey and container metaphors are different, as “they are used to focus on different aspects of an argument, goal and progress versus content,” however, “both metaphors allow us to distinguish the form and content” (Lakoff and Johnson 92).

Lakoff and Johnson’s discussion of the conceptual system with which humans understand the world and its relation to metaphor provides justification for the study of metaphor. Discussing the three types of metaphors, spatial, ontological and orientational, in addition to considering Lakoff and Johnson’s conceptual gestalt and the experiential perspective, followed by an examination of the container and journey
metaphor provide a thorough understanding of metaphor and its function.

*Kenneth Burke*

To Burke, substance is a component derived from the “stance family,” which deals with placement. For Burke, this family is the groundwork for “build[ing] a whole philosophic universe” (Burke 21). According to Burke, the nature of substance can be defined as such “a person’s or a thing’s sub-stance would be something that stands beneath or supports the person or thing” (Burke 22). The goal is to mark its boundaries by telling what a thing is in terms of something else. By grouping simple ideas that belong together, substance can be understood. Each individual idea cannot survive separately, causing them to join together, forming a larger idea or category. This larger idea is to be considered as a type of substance; an abstract idea defined by the simpler ideas of which it is made.

Contextual and familial definitions are key components to Burke’s definition of substance. Concerning context, Burke notes that a thing is defined by the other things that surround it; that by viewing it in terms of what it isn’t, clarity can be found. By doing this, Burke suggests, one is attempting to “mark its boundaries” (Burke 24). Although Burke’s familial definition of substance varies, the two are closely connected. Burke defines familial substance as “any variant of the idea of biological descent, with the substance of the offspring being derived from the substance of the parent or family” (Burke 27). The contextual and familial definitions focus on the interconnectedness and similar origin of the simple ideas. The relationships build upon one another; the closer to the origin you are the stronger the connection and as you move farther out only faint lines connect the simple ideas to
the central substance. Ultimately, both definitions are of equal importance to the nature of substance: defining something contextually stresses its placement, while defining something ancestrally stresses derivation, “but in any sustained discussion of motives, the two become interwoven, as with theologies which treat God both as ‘casual ancestor’ or mankind and as the ultimate ground or context of mankind” (Burke 27).

Burke goes on to define and discuss four types of discernible substance: directional, geometric, dialectic and familial. Each provides a way to group relational metaphorical language. Directional substance is based on human experience and human existence. It concerns the means related to directional movement regarding a certain concept. According to Burke, “the directional stresses the sense of motivation from within [it is] often strongly futuristic” (Burke 31). Geometric substance, involves “an object placed in its setting, existing both in itself and as part of its background” (Burke 29). All aspects of the concept are accessible and know. Dialectical substance regards the being and not-being dialectic, by naming the characteristics that explain a concept as well as those that do not, the concept can be defined.

The last type of substance is familial. Burke states: “in its purity, this concept stresses common ancestry in the strictly biological sense” (Burke 29). However, groups with other similarities are also within this concept; it is “usually ‘spiritualized,’ so that it includes merely social groups, comprising persons of the same nationality or beliefs” (Burke 29). This connection can be made between any groups of people but it must be justified by some common or shared historical act
“from which the consubstantiality of the group is derived” (Burke 29). The components of a certain familial substance will create a system of key elements that help to connect the group and determine boundaries that a particular group of people can identify with.

It is ultimately the goal of this study to use the methodological concepts reviewed in this section to construct a specific framework that will be used to analyze Michelle Obama’s speech. Lakoff and Johnson’s theory of metaphor will be used in conjunction with Burke’s theory of familial substance in order to identify, categorize, and analyze metaphors in Obama’s speech at the third anniversary of the Let’s Move! campaign. The metaphoric analysis to follow will show that Obama’s use of metaphor aided in her identification and connection with the audience as relates to the physical and metaphoric social movement the Let’s Move! campaign strives to achieve. She is able to expand the definition of the “American parent” by extensively using journey, container, and orientational metaphors throughout the speech, coupled with frequent reference to the collective identity built through her use of familial substance.
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS:

This analysis explores the persuasive implications of the stylistic devices used by Michelle Obama in her speech celebrating the third anniversary of the Let’s Move! campaign. By using metaphor, Obama is able to build a relationship with the audience through their personal experiences with physical activity as children. The first portion of the analysis will examine the prevalence of Lakoff and Johnson’s journey and container metaphors. Major examples within the text will be discussed to demonstrate that Obama’s use of metaphor within the speech is significant. Next, I assess the pervasiveness of Burke’s concept of “familial substance” within the speech, identifying examples of particular importance. Finally, I consider Obama’s use of one of Lakoff and Johnson’s three types of metaphor: orientational metaphor. I hope that by studying First Ladies as rhetors we can draw attention to their public roles rather than the private.

The speech, (Appendix A) is easily divided into three distinct sections. In the first section Obama thanks the people and organizations that have assisted in the efforts of the Let’s Move! campaign thus far. This section is brief. The second section provides a personal anecdote or narrative of Obama’s own experiences as a child. She mentions how physical activity played a key role in shaping the person she is today. She also tells portions of her brother Craig’s narrative as relates to physical activity. This section is also brief. The third section is the longest of the three and speaks of what people across the country have done already for the Let’s Move! campaign. She informs of all the ways the Let’s Move! campaign has been beneficial thus far. Obama utilizes metaphor within all three sections, however, the application and
strength behind the metaphors used in each section varies.

The two metaphoric groups discussed prior—journey and container—are each present several times within Obama’s speech. However, the journey metaphor’s use is essential to the connection she builds with the audience. As discussed prior, Lakoff and Johnson define the journey metaphor as a metaphor that “highlights both direction and progress toward a goal” (Lakoff and Johnson 95). The beginning, middle, and end of the journey are brought to attention through the use of the metaphor. Obama uses the journey metaphor frequently to draw attention to the connection between the childhood of the audience (parents, volunteers, teachers, community representatives etc.) and the childhood they wish the children of America to experience. The journey metaphor is the most prevalent in her speech because it draws attention to the future. Obama discusses what is necessary for this generation to better the lives of future generations in regards to physical activity. She draws the audience’s attention to their feelings of nostalgia about their own childhood and the physical activities they engaged in. By highlighting the nostalgic feelings the audience has, she then emphasizes the path toward giving those same experiences to the next generation, to “our kids.”

The following three examples illustrate how Obama’s metaphoric use of time in a journey metaphor tugs at feelings of nostalgia. Within her speech she discusses how “times have changed,” that “we are all grown up [now]” and “where would each of us be” without the lessons we learned from physical activity as a child. When Obama says, “times have changed” she presents a metaphor for things no longer functioning in the same way that they used to, and communicates to the audience that
changes have occurred within our society. When Obama speaks of the audience—she includes herself in this group—being “all grown up” she also draws attention to the years that have passed, to the ways in which today is different than yesterday. When Obama asks where each of us would be without the lessons of physical activity, she again draws the audience’s attention to the nostalgic feelings they have for their own childhood. This time though, she connects the audience’s feelings of nostalgia to the specific experiences they had with physical activity. She brings the audience’s attention to what used to be, what is occurring now in our society, and that there is work to be done for this generation to gain as much from physical activity as the last generation did.

She also employs the time-as-a-journey metaphor to bring out the nostalgic feelings of the audience with her use of phrases like: “think back,” “back then,” and “bring physical education back.” These phrases similarly draw attention to what used to be and what is no longer. By asking the audience to “think back” or look to “back then,” Obama indirectly asks the audience to join her on a journey down memory lane, back to the happiness and joy the audience felt during their involvement in physical activities. These calls to action align with the time-as-a-journey metaphor in drawing attention to the audience’s nostalgic feelings toward childhood. In the first sentence of her speech, Obama asks the audience to “bring physical education back to America’s schools.” When she asks the audience to “bring physical education back” she is employing the time-as-a-journey metaphor by implying that in order to move forward, we must bring back that which was lost. In order for the journey to progress forward in time, America must look to their past in order to implement that which
was effective.

In addition to using the audience’s feelings of nostalgia, Obama parallels a successful journey through life with her brother, Craig Robinson’s experience with basketball and college. Numerous times within the speech she refers to the “launch” of the Let’s Move! campaign and the program’s efforts as “only the beginning.” She subtly informs the audience that the Let’s Move! campaign is the start of a much larger, time consuming initiative to actually impact the lifestyle of the next generation. By using a metaphoric treatment of the campaign’s beginning, Obama is able to draw connection between the journey of Let’s Move! and the individual life experiences of the audience. The word launch is a synonym for “beginning,” which reaffirms her use of the journey metaphor here. Obama also considers the life path each child is on, and how physical activity can impact where a child ends up. She draws attention to the impact physical activity and sports, specifically basketball, had on her brother’s life trajectory. Obama states “Basketball helped my brother develop the discipline and focus that put him on the path to college.” Then she applies this personal anecdote to the children of America: “When kids have early, positive experiences with physical activity, that sets them on the course for life, shaping their habits not just when they’re young, but as adults, as well.” Obama’s use of the journey metaphor in a very blatant way—speaking of a path and being on course—reminds the audience of their childhoods and how throughout the course of their own lives physical activity has guided their journey and helped them grow.

Obama’s use of the journey metaphor for nostalgic effect is the strongest in her efforts to build a connection with the audience. However, in addition to the
journey metaphor, Obama also uses the container metaphor to build this relationship. According to Lakoff and Johnson, humans are containers and thus, understand other physical objects based on the same in-out orientation. We impose boundaries—even if one is not present—in order to quantify the world around us. A container can be defined by a limited space that holds a substance—the content of which is important. Obama utilizes the container metaphor consistently in connection with the parent-child dichotomy. Within the speech Obama speaks of the parent and the child as containers in a variety of ways. Throughout this speech, she indirectly discusses what it means to be a parent in America today. On sixteen separate occasions, Obama discusses the role of the parent. By discussing the actions and responsibilities of the American parent, Obama creates the container of the ‘American parent.’ She implicitly defines the American parent as someone who “works hard on behalf of our children,” “gives our kids opportunities,” “ensures the health and success of kids,” and “shows our kids that being active is fun.” The “American parent” also impacts our children by “shap[ing] their habits,” “gett[ing] them moving,” and provides them with structure and support. According to Obama, the “American parent” is someone who “innovates and experiments,” “organizes programs,” and gives kids something “to strive for, hope for, and somewhere to belong.” The “American parent” also keeps them safe and busy, pushes them “to be active,” “believes in them and teaches them to believe in themselves.” By defining the duties of the American parent through the verbs of their responsibilities, Obama makes parent a container and defines its metaphoric “boundaries.” The noun equivalent of each verb suggests the boundary of the “American parent.” They are workers, givers, leaders, providers, organizers,
show-ers, shapers, keepers, pushers, believers, teachers, nurturers, innovators and experimenters. Once establishing the container, Obama fills the container with these nouns, determining the metaphoric boundaries as well as the content of the “American parent” container. By using the nouns as the content of her definition, Obama does not need to define parent by its strictest of definitions, a person who is a mother or father of a child. Instead she implies that a parent is someone who embodies each of the nouns above in order to better a child’s life.

She also expands her definition of the “American parent” to define America as a parent. Aside from the individual changes each person can make in a child’s life, she subtly discusses the role America can play in shaping the lives of the next generation. She makes only one direct reference to the federal government’s involvement in the Let’s Move! campaign; however, she utilizes collective pronouns like “we” and “our” to refer to everyone who is working together. In the first section of the speech, where she thanks all the actors currently supporting the Let’s Move! campaign, Obama draws attention to the impact “we” can have on the levels of childhood obesity in America and the changes “we” can enact on the next generation if “we” work together. Her subtle approach to discussing what many conservatives refer to as “big government” allows her to maintain a connection with the audience without discussing partisan issues. She lists the organizations and individuals who are working with the President’s Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition to launch and maintain this campaign. Individuals like Secretary Duncan², Mayor Emanuel³, Jim

² Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education
³ Rahm Emanuel, Mayor of Chicago
Gavin\(^4\), and Allyson Felix\(^5\) and organizations like the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD), Child Obesity 180, GenYouth, Kaiser Permanente and Nike are all mentioned as significant actors in the Let’s Move! campaign. Near the end of the speech she states: “They’ve invested their energy and resources and staff to give you the tools you need to make this happen. They’re offering grant money. They’re offering training. They’re offering technical assistance.” She uses similar verbs to describe the actions of the individuals and organizations listed above as she uses to define the “American parent” container. These individuals and organizations are leaders, workers, investors, makers, supporters, and givers. She discusses the roles American parents can fulfill and the roles America-as-a-parent can fulfill. Drawing attention to what can be accomplished together, with the help of American resources.

By drawing attention to the familial substance that already connects the group—what makes each of them an American parent—Obama is also able to strengthen the audience’s connection to each other and to the Let’s Move! campaign. As discussed in chapter three, familial substance stresses common or shared history that consubstantiates the group’s membership. Systems of key elements that help determine the boundaries of the group establish a system of identity (Lakoff and Johnson). Familial substance is apparent within the speech when she refers to the audience collectively as Americans with nostalgic memories of childhood who want to ensure similar experiences for the next generation.

Obama also uses container metaphors and familial substance to redefine what

\(^{4}\) Current Dublin senior football manager  
\(^{5}\) American track and field sprint athlete and Nike sponsored Athlete
it means to be an American parent. Based on her new definition of what it means to be an American parent, she is able to contain the audience within this identity. Throughout the speech, she refers back to what it means to be a parent and how individuals within a community can help American children even if they do not have children of their own. In addition to further defining the American parent, Obama draws the audience together by using collective pronouns—such as “our responsibility,” “our goal,” or “we need to help,”—when discussing the actions that need to be taken in order to eradicate childhood obesity in America. She uses “our” on twenty-nine separate occasions, “we” thirty-three times, and “us” ten times. In contrast, she refers to herself, using “I” or “me” less than ten times each. By continually addressing the audience as members of the group “American parent” she is able to build a stronger connection with the audience based on the expectation to act in protection of ‘our children.’ This also helps place America within the metaphoric boundaries of the “American parent” definition. On four occasions she states that “we” are working together to ensure a better life for “our” children, making it apparent that she does not mean the individuals alone. Instead, she draws attention to the Nation as a family, therefore extending the parent container to include the entire nation.

By discussing “the next generation” twice in the speech Obama is also able to provide connections between the “American parent” and America-as-a-parent. Both usages come in the latter half of the speech, on the first occasion she states: “We’re talking about our responsibility to do all of that for the next generation, our kids” (Appendix A). She employs the container of “American parents” as well as America-
as-a-parent within this sentence. By placing collective ownership—the collective pronoun “our”—on the responsibility of acting with the next generation in mind, Obama adds “doer” to the content of the “American parent” container; while also expanding the definition of parent to include America (i.e. Nation as family) within the content as well. Shortly after the first instance, Obama speaks of “the next generation” again: “It’s how we raise the next generation of workers and innovators and leaders who will continue to make America the greatest nation on earth” (Appendix A). As with the first usage, Obama again uses a collective pronoun to discuss what needs to be done in order to raise the next generation. However, this time Obama draws more attention to America-as-a-parent to future generations, which again attempts to redefine the conservative views on big or nanny government.

Corresponding to the “American parent” container Obama provides some insight into what it means to be an American child today. Children are discussed in the speech in two ways, as those who need to be guided by the American parent in order to succeed, and those whose natural tendency is to play and be active. Obama does not expand the container of the American child as extensively as she did the American parent. However, consistently bringing attention to the child as someone who needs guidance and access to physical activity creates a void that the American parent should fill. Her use of the container metaphor of parent and child is relevant because she is highlighting the “American parent’s” ability to impact and change a child’s life. She uses the word “children” on four occasions, “kid” twenty separate times, and “child” three times. However, of the twenty-seven references to children/child/kid, twenty-three also refer to them as “our” children or “our” kids. By
defining the child container on the contingency of family, attention is drawn to family and familial substance helping to solidify the group’s boundaries.

While Obama discusses the American child extensively within the speech, the focus is on the change of American ideals and the responsibility of the American parent to encourage the American child to engage in physical activity. There is no discussion of blame on the parent for the levels of childhood obesity within America. However, when discussing the American children within the speech, Obama implies that the shift in American society and ideals have impacted the natural tendencies of children today, causing them to succumb to lethargic activities rather than physical activities. In the following quote, Obama asserts that the budget cuts and resource limitations that schools have experienced in recent years are one cause of the limited time being provided for children to play. “Our kids spend about half their waking hours in school. But today, due to budget cuts and limited resources, many schools simply can’t afford the activities we all took for granted when we were growing up.” She also strongly asserts that it is our responsibility to ensure that children get this time, however, today society does not prioritize this task. Obama sees this priority as a responsibility of the “American parent,” as is clear in the following quote: “we are nowhere near giving our kids the opportunities they need to be active.” By defining the boundaries of the metaphoric container of the American child Obama is able to further communicate to the audience the similarities between the role of the American parent and the role of America as a parent (Nation as family).

Corresponding to her use of the journey and container metaphors, Obama employs orientational metaphors extensively in order to ground the speech in the
common experiences of the audience. Orientational metaphors tend to be based in the physical human experience. Humans are able to understand and produce meaning of the world through the coherence created by these experiences. Obama employs two types of orientational metaphors: up/down and in/out. She employs each type of orientational metaphor countless times throughout the Speech. Each allows the audience to gain a direct understanding of the mood or value of something based on their personal, physically-experienced reality.

The orientational metaphor of up/down refers to the erect position in which humans experience the world and how it influences our use of language. Obama discusses the human experience of up/down in three ways. She repeatedly considers “growing up” throughout the speech; she uses her own experience of growing up, the experiences of the audience and the experience we hope to see our children have. The use of “growing up” in her speech brings attention to the human experience of becoming an adult. Humans are born small and grow vertically to become an adult.

The second way she employs the up/down orientational metaphor is by asking kids to “get up and move.” Similarly, she encourages parents to “step up to help.” In both, attention is drawn to how humans engage in activity, by standing erect. The third way she uses the up/down orientational metaphor is when she asks parents to focus their time and energy on “raising a family” and “raising the next generation.” This again refers to the experience of growing into an adult, however it draws attention to the role parents play in a child’s growth. The orientational metaphor of up/down also draws attention to the metaphoric alternatives of being up. If children are not taught to get up and move, to use their bodies, they remain sedentary, or down. Societal
views of being sedentary or down are communicated through our colloquial use of language, leaving a negative connotation attached to words that reference the physical experience of being pulled downward by gravity. If American parents fail to raise children to be active—to be up—the nation will inevitably struggle—fall down. This up/down orientation also applies to the parent’s active involvement in parenting. If a parent is lethargic about raising their children, if America is lethargic about impacting the next generation, the metaphoric alternative is only negative. By discussing the human experience of up/down in each of these examples she is able to further connect with the audience through their life experiences of becoming adults, engaging in physical activity, and rearing a family.

Obama also uses the physical experience of having a body—an in and an out—to connect with her audience. She asks the audience to “reach out” for help, “bring out the very best in all of our young people,” and to “put in the time.” The first two call attention to the experience a person has when going outside their physical being to obtain something. If someone is reaching out to gain help, they are not physically stretching their arm out; rather they are going outside the limits of their body to gain assistance. When she asks the audience to “put in the time” she is again referencing the in/out of their body, and applying it to the usage of time. Each applies the in/out of the human body onto another concept, providing clarity and connection with the human experiences of the audience.

This analysis reveals that Obama was able to build a strong connection with the audience through her use of metaphor and substance to create and redefine what it means to be an American parent. By expanding the definition of parent to include
those who help all children grow, Obama was able to relate to her audience through their preexisting motivation to rid the next generation of childhood obesity. Her use of the orientational metaphor within the journey and container metaphors aided in communicating to the audience that this is only the beginning. Familial substance was also employed alongside these metaphors in an effort to further define the entire group as American parents. The metaphoric language also assisted in defining America-as-a-parent within the boundaries of the container the “American parent.” Obama’s use of metaphor allowed her to present her perspective on the health of the nation through a narrative frame that would not have been possible using literal language alone. I turn next to the implications and limitations of this study, the ever-changing expectations of the First Ladyship, and suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION:

The general objective of this rhetorical analysis is to contribute to the field of rhetorical criticism, particularly in the area of metaphor. Specifically, the goal of this study is to uncover how Michelle Obama uses metaphor to build a connection with her audience and redefine the American parent, by examining her use of metaphor and substance. Metaphor, as discussed by Lakoff and Johnson, and Burke’s theory of substance, provides insight into the metaphoric language within Obama’s February 28th, 2013 speech. Although the focus of the analysis is on Michelle Obama and the Let’s Move! campaign, this thesis also encourages continued focus on First Ladies work relative to the public sphere in order to aid in altering the role and expectation(s) of future First Ladies. Approaching this topic from an interdisciplinary standpoint was vital to understanding the metaphoric language Obama employed within her speech. My exploration of the double bind’s impact on the First Ladyship as well as the history of the rhetorical presidency and press coverage of the First Lady were key to developing an understanding of the role a First Lady plays within American politics. This chapter will discuss the conclusions and implications of the study, the limitations present within this study, and suggestions for future research.

Through the metaphoric language used in this speech, Michelle Obama asserts a stronger place for government to help American children. By expanding the container of the “American parent” to those who can aid and influence a child—rather than just those who biologically parent them—she is then able to enlarge the container to include America. My analysis indicates that Obama is able to subtly counter the conservative fears of big government by suggesting the symbol ‘Nation as
family’ and ‘America as parent’ as an alternate way of approaching government involvement in social issues. This creates a space where state and federal government can help the next generation through legislation, funding, and public service announcements (PSA’s) without stepping on the toes of the American parent(s).

With the help of Lakoff and Johnson’s concepts and delineations of metaphor in *Metaphors We Live By* combined with Burke’s discussion of substance in *A Grammar of Motives* I believe I was able to address my research question adequately. Using orientational, ontological and structural metaphors in combination with journey and container metaphors aided in my analysis of Obama’s ability to build a relationship and connection with the audience. I believe Obama’s use of metaphor and familial substance helped Obama communicate and promote the importance of the Let’s Move! campaign and the rising numbers of childhood obesity in America.

It is evident in much of the literature surrounding First Ladies—especially surrounding the First Ladies who experienced the position during the rise of the rhetorical presidency—that the relationship and partnership between the Office of the First Lady and the West Wing plays a crucial role in how a First Lady is able to enact her role. A positive and professional relationship with the West Wing provides the First Lady with public and private sphere jurisdictions during her tenure. While this relationship could impact the space available to a First Lady when enacting her role, many First Ladies experience extensively more space than the President does. Because the role is not defined as extensively as the President’s, each First Lady is able to shift and redefine the limits of her role. This flexibility creates more rhetorical room in her approach to the social issues she champions. As is evident in the
literature surrounding the double bind and the press’ involvement in the First Ladyship, this flexibility, however, can also be problematic for the First Lady. It can make defining the do’s and don’t’s of the role difficult. The advantage that comes with the flexibility of the First Lady’s Office not only has provided rich material for this study, it also points to avenues for further research. In an effort to discuss the areas where future research is needed, the limitations of this study will be discussed, as they also point to avenues for further research.

While this analysis contributes to a metaphoric analysis of First Lady rhetoric—one that considers First Ladies in the public sphere—there are still limitations to its scope and application. However, the limitations point at areas of importance for further research. One of the inherent limitations of this study comes from rhetorical criticism itself. Rhetorical criticism, as an art rather than a science, grounds conclusions in interpretation of symbols. Although methodology aims to reduce the potential subjectivity of rhetorical criticism, some bias always exists because a critic sees symbols from a perspective. To address the subjectivity of this study I propose that multiple studies using various theories within metaphoric criticism be used to analyze other public sphere rhetoric of not only Michelle Obama and the Let’s Move! Campaign, but also the rhetoric of other First Ladies that addresses public problems. By applying additional metaphoric theory to Obama’s February 2013 Let’s Move! speech, the worth of my conclusions can be tested. Additional metaphoric analysis of this speech could aid in a more holistic view of Obama’s redefining of what it means to be an American parent. Furthermore, because this thesis is a close textual analysis of only one speech from the Let’s Move!
campaign, the scope of this study is severely limited. If I were to suggest a starting point for future research it would be to conduct additional studies of Obama’s other speeches during the Let’s Move! campaign using the same metaphoric theories employed within this thesis. Furthermore, addressing other rhetorical outputs of the Let’s Move! campaign could prove fruitful in an effort to fully understand the influence of the First Lady in this campaign. The campaign utilizes various media to get the word out; therefore, considering the rhetoric of the campaign’s YouTube channel, Facebook page, Twitter and Instagram feeds and numerous blogs would provide a more holistic look at the use of metaphor within the campaign.

The findings of this thesis provide insight into the rhetoric of First Lady Michelle Obama and her strategy to connect with the audience. She champions a domestic issue within the public sphere by using nostalgic feelings and journey metaphors to connect with the audience, while still drawing attention to the growing problem of childhood obesity in America. Regardless of her personal background, Obama is able to connect with audiences of all backgrounds through the common thread of parenthood. This emphasis on motherhood/parenthood is evident in Michelle Obama’s rhetoric outside the Let’s Move! campaign as well. During President Obama’s presidential campaigns and during her time as First Lady, Michelle Obama has self-identified as “America’s First Mom” rather than the First Lady (however she does not do so within the confines of this speech). While this emphasis on motherhood may be due to the double bind and the gendered ideals of the First Ladyship, it has come to define the rhetoric of Michelle Obama and the Let’s Move! campaign. I strongly suggest further study of the rhetoric surrounding
her discussion of being “America’s First Mom.” This is one place where metaphoric examination could provide insight into Obama’s enactment of the First Ladyship.

Another limitation addresses the double bind’s influence on other First Ladies. As the literature discussed in chapter 2 proves, each First Lady experiences her role differently. There is no way to know how future First Ladies will experience the role; consequently, the double bind could be more or less significant in the coming years. I propose other public sphere rhetoric of First Ladies be studied to invite multiple interpretations of the double bind’s influence on First Ladies. This should include the First Ladies discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis as well as those prior to Eleanor Roosevelt. As society inches closer and closer to equality between genders, the role of the First Lady will continue to change, particularly when the United States elects a female president. That event will provide intriguing rhetorical output due to a man fulfilling the duties of a historically gendered role.

The mission and actions of the Let’s Move! campaign also limit the application of this thesis. The Let’s Move! campaign has made progress toward changing the caloric intake and output of children. However, the Let’s Move! campaign is a rhetoric about solutions for a technical, practical and cosmetic issue: obesity. The prevalence of obesity is of great significance to the success of America, but the Let’s Move! campaign does not attempt to place blame for the rise or cause of obesity in America. Instead, the campaign skirts around the issue of blame, attempting to encourage and support both parents and children in their efforts to eat healthy and stay active. By putting the focus on schools, and a collective effort to encourage individual improvement in eating and physical activity, the campaign
neglects the more systemic issues surrounding childhood obesity in America.

Realistically, the issue of obesity in America has been around for decades. In 1953 Dr. Hans Kraus and Bonnie Prudden published an article in the *Journal of the American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation*, title “Muscular Fitness and Health,” that brought attention to the poor state of youth fitness in America. Two years later, Kraus and Prudden published a second article in the *New York State Journal of Medicine* comparing American children’s physical fitness to their European counterparts. The two articles and the rhetoric that followed created widespread concern(s) about the health of American youth (President's Council on Fitness, Sports & Nutrition). Consequently, in June of 1956 President Eisenhower created the President’s Council on Youth Fitness (now known as the President’s Challenge), which concentrated on creating public awareness. Every president since Eisenhower has addressed the fitness and health of America’s youth.

The issue of how to keep America’s youth healthy has been around for 60+ years, yet blame is still not discussed. Instead, First Lady Michelle Obama champions a program to promote physical activity and positive, healthy eating habits among children that is met with extensive negative response from citizens and representatives alike. As is clear in the metaphors employed in the speech, the Let’s Move! campaign focuses on involvement (orientational metaphors) and forward progress (journey metaphors) rather than pointing to the elephant we all see and asking it to produce action and tangible change. This thesis looks at the metaphoric language utilized by Obama to redefine the American parent, however, the elephant we all see is that parents today aren’t doing their job. This is a rhetoric that
circumvents the issue of parents being inactive in promoting physical activity and positive, healthy eating habits by saying that everyone is a parent. Today, successes outside the home are valued more than those achieved inside the home. This leaves children being shipped between school and daycare. Electronic parenting has become a norm within most middle class households. However, parents are not the sole actor in the American obesity epidemic. The culture and societal norms that have been proliferated throughout American history play a large role in the norms of the next generation. Additionally, the state and federal government have substantial influence over the health of the next generation.

Scholarly work currently focuses on the struggle First Ladies experience between the public and private role expectations of the position. I propose future scholarly work focus instead on the public sphere rhetoric of First Ladies. Currently, the research surrounding First Ladies looks more to what has caused and shaped the double bind experienced: How did a public and a private role become so defined? The significance and importance of this research is evident as it provides insight into the impact media and the rhetorical presidency has had on the Office of the First Lady. However, current research on First Ladies in general could benefit from a deeper look at the ways First Ladies are active in the public sphere and the resulting public sphere rhetoric. By drawing attention to the rhetoric of First Ladies, I hope, the research can aid in the normalization of First Ladies acting regularly in the public sphere. There are countless avenues of rhetorical criticism that could provide additional understanding of the public sphere rhetoric of First Ladies. However, examining metaphoric structures of First Lady rhetoric as it frames issues in the public sphere
aids in a better understanding of First Ladies enactment of second wave feminist ideals. Second wave feminism promoted the slogan “personal is political,” which asked women to discuss the private sphere issues they experienced in the public sphere. By doing so, the personal became public and thus political. Considering the metaphoric structures employed by First Ladies within these efforts could increase our understanding of First Lady’s rhetoric as well as women’s public rhetoric.

The finding(s) of this thesis further our understanding of the rhetoric of all First Ladies as well. By studying the metaphoric language utilized by Obama within the Let’s Move! campaign, a better understand of the shifting power of the Office of the First Lady can be established. As discussed in chapters 1 and 2, each First Lady approaches the position differently. The actions of each predecessor play a vital role in the progression of the First Ladyship. I recommend scholars conduct metaphoric analyses of the social campaigns of the First Ladies since Eleanor Roosevelt, as the metaphoric tendencies of each First Lady could provide more insight into the increased persuasive space.
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Appendix A

Transcript of February 28th, 2013 Speech in Chicago, Illinois

Third Anniversary of the Let’s Move! campaign

Delivered by First Lady Michelle Obama

Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you so much. I am thrilled to be here today as we launch Let’s Move! Active Schools — this unprecedented effort to bring physical education back to America’s schools.

And I want to start by recognizing Secretary Duncan, Mayor Emanuel, Jim Gavin, Allyson Felix. I want to thank you all for your extraordinary leadership and for taking the time to join us here today.

I also want to thank the Alliance for a Healthier Generation and the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, who are working with the President’s Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition to launch this new effort. (Applause.) Absolutely. Yay. Well done.

And of course, I want to thank Nike and their CEO Mark Parker for their groundbreaking investments and passionate engagement to make all of this possible. And I also want to recognize Child Obesity 180, GenYouth, and Kaiser Permanente. Thank you all, thank you so much for your tremendous support. This is a groundbreaking, earth-shattering, awesomely inspiring day. (Applause.)

And finally, I want to thank all of you. All of you, yes -- our educators, administrators, community leaders and parents who work hard every day on behalf of our children. You all know better than anyone else just how critical physical activity
is for our children’s health and well-being. And you also know that today, we are nowhere near giving our kids the opportunities they need to be active.

Only one in three of our kids is active every day -- just one in three of our kids. And as Secretary Duncan said, that’s not just bad for their bodies, it’s also bad for their minds, because being less active can actually hurt kids’ academic performance as well.

The other thing we know is that it hasn’t always been this way. Just think back to what things were like when all of us old people were kids. Now, I grew up just a few miles from where we are today, over on the South Side. You guys know my background -- my family certainly wasn’t rich. Our neighborhood was just barely working-class. I attended public schools all through kindergarten all the way up through high school.

But my brother Craig and I, we had countless opportunities to be active every single day. We played freeze tag on the playground before school. I jumped double-dutch -- still can, actually -- at recess. We played softball. My brother played on hoops at a high school, basketball, every day after school.

And during the summer, we were regulars at the Chicago Park District day camp, where the highlight of that summer experience was a big Olympics competition at the end of the summer where we got medals and ribbons. It was amazing.

Back then, being active was a way of life. We were up and moving every single day, throughout the entire day. And the activities we did didn’t just teach us how to shoot or catch or sprint. Basketball helped my brother develop the discipline
and focus that put him on the path to college — a path that I would later follow.

Now, for me, playing sports taught me how to be part of a team, taught me how to be aggressive, how to compete and win — which were important lessons for a young girl, especially back then. So for me and my brother and for so many other young people, being active was important — not just for our health, but for our success in school and in life.

But times have changed. Our kids spend about half their waking hours in school. But today, due to budget cuts and limited resources, many schools simply can’t afford the activities we all took for granted when we were growing up. And I know that with each passing year, it feels like it’s just getting harder to find the time, and the money, and the will to help our kids be active.

But just because it’s hard doesn’t mean we should stop trying — it means we should try harder. It means that all of us — not just educators, but businesses and non-profits and ordinary citizens — we all need to dig a little deeper, start getting even more creative.

And that’s what Let’s Move! Active Schools is all about. It’s about all of us coming together to once again make being active a way of life for our kids. And it’s about showing our kids that being active is fun. How about a little fun? Because when kids have early, positive experiences with physical activity, that sets them on the course for life, shaping their habits not just when they’re young, but as adults, as well. And once we’ve gotten our kids excited about being active, then we need to give them opportunities to be active every day, throughout the day.

Now fortunately, it really doesn’t take much to get our kids moving. See,
that’s the thing. It doesn’t take much. You don’t need to invest tens of thousands of dollars in new sports leagues or fancy equipment. You don’t need to find hours each day for recess and gym if that’s not possible. Quality physical education comes in all different forms, and it doesn’t have to cost a fortune.

But what it does take is leadership. That’s why we want to do everything we can to help leaders like all of you find solutions that work for your students and your communities. Because we know what you all are capable of.

Teachers in Elk Grove Village in Illinois start off every day with 20 minutes of kickboxing or cardio activities. They have regular “brain breaks” where kids get up and they're moving throughout the day.

In Natick, Massachusetts, parents came together and organized a physical activity program that meets in the morning before classes even get started, and teachers support, and also report, that kids in this program are more confident, they're showing that they are more attentive in class, and they have better academic performance.

So whether it’s organizing dance flashmobs between classes, or an afterschool running club, or finding ways to incorporate physical activity into lessons throughout the day, the possibilities here are truly endless. And the need is truly urgent. And that’s something that I really want to emphasize today.

You see, this is about so much more than keeping our kids physically active. And it’s about more than making sure that they do well in school. I mean, this is about giving our kids the structure and support they need to thrive in every single aspect of their lives. It’s about giving them something to strive for, something
to hope for, somewhere to belong. And physical activity is a critical part of that broader effort.

I often ask myself -- I ask myself this all the time -- where would I have been without all those activities that kept me safe and busy and off the streets? Where would my brother have been without the confidence and focus he learned playing basketball? Where would all of us be without the adults in our lives who pushed us, and nurtured us — the folks who gave us opportunities to learn and grow and fulfill every one of our God-given potential?

That’s really what we’re talking about today. We’re talking about our responsibility to do all of that for the next generation, our kids. And that’s why all of you are here today. And make no mistake about it, you all are the ones who will determine whether this new initiative is successful.

And I know you can’t do this all on your own. I know that you all are facing so many constraints and juggling so many demands already, and lots of times there just aren’t enough hours in the day to do everything that needs to be done. But that’s why Nike and all these other organizations here today have stepped up. They know your challenges.

They’ve invested their energy and resources and staff to give you the tools you need to make this happen. They’re offering grant money. They’re offering training. They’re offering technical assistance. So today, anyone in any community can become a champion to bring physical education back to their school.

So if you’re an educator, especially a physical education teacher, we need you to serve as one of those champions and rally support from your community. If you’re
a principal or a superintendent, we need you to spread the word about this program
and support the champions in your schools, encourage them to innovate and
experiment. If you’re a parent, remember, you can serve as a champion
yourself. And even if you don’t, you can play a critical role at home by pushing your
kids to be active.

As you’ve heard, our goal is ambitious -- it’s to reach 50,000 schools all across
this country. So we're going to need everyone on board, because the stakes simply
could not be higher. You see that every day -- all of you see it in your classrooms and
in your communities. I see it everywhere I go, all across the country, every time I
meet with our young people.

Every single one of these kids is special. They're all special. Every child I
meet has the potential to contribute something amazing; to succeed in a job, to raise a
family of their own, to give back to their community and to their country. Every
child has that potential. But the fact is, it’s up to us as the grown-ups in the room to
help them fulfill that potential.

It’s up to us to bring out the very best in all -- do you hear me -- all of our
young people. That is our moral obligation to our children. That’s how we show
them that we believe in them, and that’s how we teach them to believe in themselves.

It's also our patriotic obligation to this country. It’s how we raise the next
generation of workers and innovators and leaders who will continue to make America
the greatest nation on earth. That’s why these companies and organizations have
stepped up to support all of you in this vitally important work.

And now, we need you to commit to making this work in your schools and
communities. And once you do that -- and I know you will, I can feel it -- we need you to use your platforms as education leaders to reach out to other schools and other school districts. Share ideas and best practices, give them the encouragement they need to succeed as well.

And if we all do that, if we put in the time and energy and the imagination, then I am confident that together, we'll be able to give all of our children everything they need to lead the happy, healthy lives they truly deserve.

We are so proud of you all. We are proud of this effort. We are grateful to you all for your work and your focus on our kids. Thank you so much, and God bless.