“IT’S COMPLICATED.” EXPLORING LABOR UNION ATTITUDES, EXPERIENCES, AND PERCEPTIONS AMONG SOCIAL WORKERS

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Millersville University of Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

of Doctor of Social Work

By Erica Maloney

April 1, 2022

This Dissertation for the Doctoral Social Work Degree by
Erica Maloney
has been approved on behalf of the
Graduate School by

Dissertation Committee:

Jennifer M Frank
_____
Dr. Jennifer M. Frank, Committee Chair

Laura Brierton Granruth
_____
Dr. Laura Brierton Granruth, Committee Member

Pamela Twiss
_____
Dr. Pamela Twiss, Committee Member

Date: ___4/19/2022 _____

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Social Workers and Labor Unions…It's Complicated: Exploring Attitudes, Experiences, and Perceptions of Social Workers

By

Erica Maloney

Millersville University, 2022

Millersville, Pennsylvania

Directed by Dr. Jennifer M. Frank, Ph.D.

Social workers have a long and storied history of challenging social injustice since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in America. Social workers successfully worked alongside labor organizers on behalf of working poor people during the late 19th Century and the first half of the 20th Century. These efforts increased workers' rights and narrowed the gap between rich and poor. After the Civil Rights movement, social workers distanced themselves from labor organizers resistant to racial integration and began to focus their efforts on micro practice and professional licensure, as well as on safety net programs. The reasons for this historical departure are unclear, and scant scholarly literature addresses this phenomenon. This qualitative study analyzes social workers' attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of unionization, and the findings suggest that social work may have sacrificed its collective power as the profession became more specialized and fragmented.

Keywords: labor, unions, wages, policy, politics, social work, social workers, collective bargaining, workers, professionalism

Signature of Investigator_____ Date_____

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Ali, who supported me along this challenging three-year journey. Without your help this would never have been more than a daydream. I love you for being the primary caregiver of our children over the last three years, for all of the late nights you spent talking me off of the ledge, your empathy and compassion when things got really hard, and the confidence you had in me when I did not have it in myself. My appreciation and love for you is immeasurable, and although I can never pay you back for all you have done, I will never stop trying.

Acknowledgements

I want to first acknowledge my dissertation committee. Dr. Frank, I will never be able to fully express my appreciation for all your guidance and support. Working with you has made me a better writer and you have prepared me to pursue my own research goals. Most of all, I appreciated your standards of excellence that compelled me to rise to the occasion. Dr. Granruth, I appreciated your practical feedback and the great ideas that you brought to our meetings that helped me along in my dissertation. Your knowledge of policy and organizations was beneficial especially as I completed my literature review. Dr. Twiss, we go way back! Your expansive knowledge of social work and labor history was invaluable as I worked on this project. More importantly, you have provided me with such incredible guidance and support over the last decade. I have admired your brilliance and wide-ranging knowledge ever since I took your Into to Social Work course ten years ago. I do not know that I would have pursued graduate education had you not encouraged me.

I acknowledge the faculty of my alma mater, California University of Pennsylvania's social work department, which well prepared me for graduate education and sparked a fire in me that I did not know I had. Years later, Dr. Sheri Boyle provided me the opportunity to have my first teaching experience at CALU where I was and continue to be provided with incredible support that helped me become a competent instructor. I also acknowledge Dr. Bonnie Laing who gave me the original idea to pursue this area of research. The education and encouragement I received from the faculty at CALU helped me get to where I am today.

Finally, I acknowledge my classmates at Millersville and Kutztown Universities. The mutual support we shared with each other was a compelling example of the spirit of social work. The encouragement, information sharing, and fun that we shared will stay with me always.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem Statement

In 1965, when union membership was near its peak, Chief Executive Officers (CEO) out earned their average employees by a ratio of 20:1 (Mishel & Wolfe, 2019). Today, the typical CEO-to-worker wage ratio is 278:1. To further illustrate this disparity, since 1978, CEO compensation in real dollars has increased by 940%, while their average worker's pay only increased 12% during the same period (Mishel & Wolfe, 2019). Some economists blame income and wealth inequality on regressive taxation policy and loosely regulated capitalism (Piketty, 2014). Others argue that the drop in union membership over the last several decades is a major contributor to this phenomenon (Mishel & Wolfe, 2019). Union density, the proportion of workers who are unionized nationally, decreased from a high of 35% in the mid-20th century to 10.3% in 2021 (Bureau of Labor and Statistics [BLS], 2021). Although union density has dropped, workers still benefit from membership; median earnings for unionized workers are nearly 20% higher than their nonunion peers (BLS, 2021; Bucci, 2019). The nation's overall decline in real wages slopes downward alongside union membership (BLS, 2020).

It is estimated that 20% of social workers belong to a union (BLS, 2021; Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006). This rate of unionization is twice the national average of all workers, which is 10% (BLS, 2019; Scanlon & Harding, 2005). Eighty-nine percent of the unionized social workers are employed by a federal, state, or local government (Karger & Lonne, 2009). Private sector social work unions are less common, representing 11% of unionized social workers nationally (Karger & Lonne, 2009). However, the 20% statistic mentioned is not necessarily accurate, because some states continue to license people as "social workers" who have not

earned social work degrees; social workers also may be grouped in with other occupations or industries (Fink-Samnick, 2016; Karger, 2015; Reisch, 2009; Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006).

This has been a long-standing problem for the profession. Social workers gain a precise set of skills, a strong ethical foundation, and complete hundreds of hours of real-life work experience to earn their degrees (CSWE, 2015). Workers with so-called 'related degrees' do not necessarily have the same skills or training as social workers and are therefore not properly equipped to provide services that meet the profession's standards. This might be compared to the medical field. Doctors and nurses must be licensed to perform their work, and there is no accommodation for 'related degrees.' For example, few would willingly choose to see a doctor who earned their medical degree from a veterinary school. The title of 'social worker' continues to be appropriated by workers without social work degrees, particularly in states without title protection. This appropriation by non-social workers misleads and disserves clients (Karger, 2015), while confusing the public about the nature of the profession (Fink-Samnick, 2016; Karger, 2015).

The country's largest social work organization, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), does not collect union affiliation information when collecting workforce data from its membership, as evidenced by the lack of information on their website and workforce reports (Karger, 2015; NASW, n.d.). Another challenge in collecting this data is that social work union members may be grouped in with other professions (Karger, 2015; Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006). For example, unionized social workers in government, schools, and hospitals are often not members of a social work union; instead, they are members of their workplace union that may organize workers of varied professions under one collective bargaining

agreement (Karger, 2015). Few unions represent social workers exclusively (Bucci, 2019). For this reason, BLS estimates on social worker union membership should be viewed with caution.

Social workers often graduate with burdensome student loan debt while earning salaries lower than peers in related fields (BLS, 2021; NASW, 2017). This debt is even more pervasive among new graduates because tuition and fees at universities across the country have risen rapidly in recent decades (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The median wage of U.S. social workers is $51,750 per year (BLS, 2021). Workers in related fields, such as first responders, nurses, and teachers earn up to 40% more than social workers in median wages (BLS, 2021; NASW, 2017). Each of these professions, in contrast to social work, have high levels of union membership as well as powerful union political participation (BLS, 2021, Bucci, 2019; Karger, 1985).

Current State of Unions in the United States

In the 21st century, large strikes, violent clashes, and mass firings no longer stall union organizing efforts. Instead, anti-union policy towards union labor presents the largest barrier to workers who wish to organize (NLRA, as amended by the Taft-Hartley Amendment, 1947). Union density in the U.S. is approximately 10%; well under half of its mid-20th century level of 35% (BLS, 2022). However, unions have increased in popularity in recent years, and labor organizing efforts are modestly rising (Gallup, 2020; Milkman & Luce, 2017). COVID-19 and the resulting labor shortage has hastened this growth (Kullgren, 2021). Moreover, a well-established body of evidence suggests that union membership drives down income inequality and increases workers' collective political power (Bucci, 2019; Flavin & Shufeldt, 2019).

Labor unionizing began its modest renewal in the wake of the Occupy Movements, which started in 2011 in a Manhattan park with a small group of protesters who demanded a

redistribution of capital from the elite 'so-called' one percent. The one percent refers to the richest members in society, those who own the top one percentile of wealth. Many argue that this group of people wield considerable power and control in society and government (Abulhul, 2021; Gilens & Page, 2014). Similar movements arose in major cities across the country. Their persistence fueled a global conversation that called out the widening income inequality gap and its usurpation of political power by moneyed interests (Levitin, 2019). Arguably, the movements' most memorable achievement is that it gave people a name for this phenomenon of extreme income inequality—the one percent (1%). Despite the movements' popularity and traction, income inequality has only risen since 2011, demonstrating a failure of the movement to produce palpable results (Levitin, 2019).

Barriers to Unionization Today

Neoliberal economic policies promote limited government involvement in the markets, financial deregulation, and regressive taxation, but at the cost of social welfare spending (Day, 2009). These policies are primary drivers in the depression of wages and the reduction of union membership (Mishel & Bivens, 2021; Volscho, 2012). Neoliberal agendas also espouse laissez-faire approaches to financial regulation and anti-labor legislation such as "right-to-work" laws (Kenton, 2020), which now have been passed by twenty-eight states (Workplace Fairness, n.d.).

Despite the name, "right-to-work" laws represent the interests of corporations and leave workers with little in the way of economic and political power (Gould & Kimball, 2015; Wilmers, 2019). Right-to-work laws prohibit labor organizers from negotiating contracts with union security agreements (Kenton, 2020). Union security agreements are a type of contract between unions and employers; an employer agrees only to employ workers who are represented by the union (Gould & Kimball, 2015). In right to work states, workers can choose whether to

join the workplace union because there is no secure contract (NCSL, 2017; Wilmers, 2019). However, the worker gets all the union pay and benefits whether they join or not. This reduces the incentive to join the union, because there is little economic sense in paying (dues) for something (union benefits) they get for free (Gould & Kimball, 2015). However, when union membership declines in a workplace, the power the union exerts in the organization is diluted. A reduction of membership means fewer funds to organize on behalf of more workers and it also implies that a potential strike would not likely result in a total shutdown (Gould & Kimball, 2015; Workplace Fairness, n.d.). Right to work laws weaken unions' power to effectively bargain and lobby (Gould & Kimball, 2015).

Corporations have always wielded significant political power (Day, 2009; Mishel, 2019), however, the disparity between corporate and worker power became even wider (Drutman, 2015) after the 2010 Citizens United Supreme Court decision which gave permission for corporate interests to spend limitless amounts of money on political 'issue' ads (Citizens United v. FEC, 2010; Drutman, 2015; Gilens & Page, 2014). Subsequently, corporate interests outspent workers in the 2010 midterm elections, and have continued to do so (Drutman, 2015). Research suggests that American workers have sustained a loss of political power because of the new spending permitted by the Citizens United decision (Harvard Law Review, 2014).

Rationale and Relevance to Social Work

Social work has a long and storied history with the labor movement. Across the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, social workers were on the front lines of labor battles (Jennissen & Lundy, 2018; Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006). At the turn of the century, Jane Addams and Lillian Ward were architects of the National Women's Trade Union League, the first national association to organize women workers (Jennissen & Lundy, 2017; Rosenberg &

Rosenberg, 2006). The Women's Trade Union League fought for issues such as child labor regulations, minimum wage, and an eight-hour workday (Jennissen & Lundy, 2017). Notably, members from the Women's Trade Union League helped to conduct the investigation of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, which killed 146 garment workers, nearly all of them women in 1911 (Brooks, 2018; OSHA, 2011).

The Civil Rights movement changed the direction of social work's advocacy agenda. The National Association of Social Workers first codified anti-discrimination in the second iteration of its Code of Ethics in 1967 (NASW, 2017) and joined the ranks agitating for racial justice. In turn, they distanced themselves from the labor movement, likely due in part to the overtly racist practices that continued well into the 1960s (Scanlon & Harding, 2005). As the Civil Rights Movement faded into history in the late 1970s and 1980s, the profession turned its attention to licensing and strengthening the social safety net (Karger & Lonne, 2009; Swaggler & Harris, 1977). In the 21st Century, social workers are mostly absent from the labor organizing arena (Farr, 2021; Karger & Lonne, 2009). Given the past experiences that social work has with labor advocacy, and the profession's vulnerability to low wages and poor working conditions, social workers may want to consider ways to better represent themselves.

Social Workers' Contributions to the Labor Movement

During the Great Depression, social worker and labor activist Ernest Rice McKinney worked tirelessly to organize the unemployed in the Appalachian region of the United States (Twiss, 2004). He was inspired by his grandfather, a West Virginia coal miner who participated in organizing efforts during the turn of the century (Twiss, 2004). McKinney organized sharecroppers in the United States South and led unemployment leagues in Pittsburgh (Johnson, 2017). He eventually moved to Pittsburgh, where he met A. Philip Randolph, and served as a

contributing editor to Randolph and Chandler Owen's long-running political and literary magazine, *The Messenger* (Twiss, 2004). Randolph was a powerful Black labor organizer and influencer who was active during the early-to-mid-20th century (Johnson, 2017). He is most known for his leadership in the formation of an all-Black workers' union in 1925, The Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters. Although Black workers' unions were present as early as the mid-19th century, The Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters was the first all-Black workers' union to be nationally recognized. Randolph and McKinney agreed on the importance of organizing workers across racial lines, but this would not come until later.

Nannie Helen Burroughs was a little-known, but formidable Black women's labor organizer, educator, and suffragist. She founded the National Training School for Women and Girls, was a member of the National Association of Colored Women, and in 1921, organized the National Association of Wage Earners (Thomas, 1998). The labor movement is often associated with white male industrial workers, but it was Black female organizers who believed that the best way to improve labor conditions was access to the voting box. Since the end of slavery, Black women have had tremendous difficulty in the U.S. labor market (Schaller, 2021). The intersecting barriers of class, gender, and race (Crenshaw, 1999) greatly restricted Black women's opportunities in the job market. Black women still earn only 63 cents on every dollar a white non-Hispanic man earns at work, and white women out earn Black women, earning 25% more per year (Schaller, 2021).

Bertha Reynolds, a Marx-influenced social work educator and organizer was often considered the 'mother of strength based social work' (NASW Foundation, 2004). Reynolds fiercely advocated for unionization and labor rights and encouraged the formation of unions for social workers (NASW Foundation, 2004). She was a highly regarded academic and activist

during the first half of the 20th century; however, she was essentially expelled from the social work community in the wake of McCarthy's Cold War 'red scare.' Nonetheless, she continued her work as an author and activist until near the time of her death (NASW Foundation, 2004).

Frances Perkins, the first woman and social worker ever appointed to a cabinet position in the United States, served as Labor Secretary during the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration. Before she joined the labor movement, she was associated with an organization of other well-to-do women advocating to end child labor. When asked about her position as Secretary of Labor, she remarked, "I came to work for God, FDR, and the millions of forgotten, plain, common working men." She was a major architect of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) of 1938, one of the most important pieces of labor legislation in U.S. history. The FLSA mandated a 40-hour workweek, minimum wage, overtime pay, and stricter child labor laws (Day, 2009). Perkins also led numerous other legislative efforts such as The Industrial Recovery Act of 1933, The Social Security Act of 1935, and The National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (Day, 2009; Brooks, 2018).

Role of Social Work Organizations

The NASW does not give a clear message about its support for social worker unionization. The organization lacks an energized movement on labor-related issues and uses ambiguous language in the Code of Ethics regarding union decision-making (NASW, 2017). As further evidence, a search of "unions" and "unionizing" on the NASW website produced less than ten relevant matches.

The NASW has not invested much financially in lobbying for professional concerns such as work conditions and salaries, but the organization has advocated fiercely and successfully for title protection and licensure across the country (Gray, 1990; Scanlon & Harding, 2005; Swagler & Harris, 1977; Vinton & White, 1995). The NASW is a 501c (6) organization, which means

they have no lobbying restrictions (Reilly & Allen, 2003). In its most recently available tax documents, NASW reported $37 million in revenue in tax year 2017 (IRS, 2018). NASW spent $700,000 on lobbying in 2017, which is less than it spent on accounting services in the same year (IRS, 2018). However, the NASW also has an advocacy arm, Political Action for Candidate Election (PACE). In 2020, PACE donated $65,000 to political candidates and in 2021, $96,000. PACE raised $200,000 in revenue in each of those years, spending $68,000 in operating expenses in 2020 and $150,000 in 2021 (Federal Election Commission, 2022).

The fields of nursing and teaching, the sister professions of social work, formed professional unions rather than separate professional organizations or unions alone. This hybrid model provides the support, guidance, and education that a professional organization offers in addition to union protections, bargaining, and political power that is bolstered by millions of dues paying members (Reisch, 2009; Scanlon, 1999). The NASW has chosen to remain a professional association rather than migrating towards a hybrid professional union model similar to those formed by their interdisciplinary peers (Reisch, 2009, Scanlon, 1999; nasw.org, 2021).

The National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) was formed by a group of Black social workers in California in 1968 with a goal of advocating for social issues that most affect the Black Community (History, n.d.). NABSW's Code of Ethics is grounded in social change, and, according to their website, primarily focused on advocating for social issues. The NABSW's financial power is limited; in 2018 the organization raised $600,000 in revenue, just a fraction of the dollars raised by the NASW (NABSW Annual Report, 2018). Neither group refers to labor unions on their websites or in their position papers (NABSW.org, 2022; nasw.org, 2022). Other social work professional organizations are primarily focused on practice specialty.

Labor organizing is not explicitly represented in any of the reviewed subgroups of social workers (Writers, 2019).

Study Purpose and Rationale

Social work contributed greatly to the labor movement for nearly 100 years, and social workers had a significant role in the development of the worker protections Americans enjoy today (Day, 2009). However, social workers in the 21st Century are relatively uninvolved in the modest resurgence of the labor movement and have not attempted to organize into unions (Karger & Lonne, 2009; Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006; Scanlon & Harding, 2005). Studying social workers' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences with unionizing can provide a direction for further social work research. Given the shortage of relevant research on this topic, an examination of the intersection of social work and collective bargaining is needed.

Theoretical Framework

As the problem statement illustrates, there is a significant power disparity between worker and capital interests. It is necessary to discuss worker-employer relations with an eye toward this disparity. Conflict and critical theories are transformational and emancipatory; both focused on large-scale change aimed at disrupting a society's balance of power. These theories point to uneven power dynamics as a root cause of most social problems, including those of workers and capitalists.

Conflict and critical theories endeavor to raise a collective consciousness that will promote social, political, and economic justice. These theories challenge social workers to advocate for a more just balance of power among a society's members (Payne, 2010). The theoretical framework presented here is transformational and emancipatory; it seeks to examine

the power dynamics between employers and workers. Each of the theories described in this paper carries a common thread of addressing social inequity.

Marx and Engels

"The history hitherto of existing society is the history of class struggles," (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 4). Marx and Engels argued that history was defined by the struggle between capitalists and workers, and that this entwined resistance would create a collective and intentional identity among laborers (1848). Marx and Engels argued that workers had become disassociated from both their labor and each other as industrialism spread and feudal bonds dissolved. As a result of the Industrial Revolution, the capitalist supplanted the feudal lord, and new technologies made workers more replaceable (Marx & Engels, 1848). Wealthy industrialists became extremely powerful and dictated the terms of the political economy.

Marx and Engels asserted that humans are historically cooperative by nature in their work and search for resources. Yet capitalism, like a fire, must constantly consume more fuel to survive, and the amount of consumption is inflated by the expense of profit. To satisfy the need for profit and passive incomes, capitalism requires constant growth, even at the cost of others' comfort and livelihood (Piketty, 2014). Marx and Engels assert that capitalism replaces egalitarian cooperation with class conflict and struggle, and that this conflict is unnatural, going against the grain of human cooperation (1848).

Through a Marxist lens, social work might be considered as an ally to capitalist society, by performing social control functions that prevent politically disruptive activity that can result from extreme poverty and oppression (Somavia, 2009). From that angle, social workers help to ensure a stable social order by acting as a gatekeeper to resources (Abulhul, 2021). Bhushan and Sachdeva argued, "Social control is the sum of those methods by which a society tries to

influence human's behavior to maintain a given order" (2012, p. 158). Social workers, who mostly work at the individual level, primarily relieve symptoms of social problems rather than address widespread structural and racial inequality (Salsburg, et. al.; 2017).

Operationalizing Marxism

Marx argued that workers are disempowered when they are alienated from the products of their labor. The division of labor (specialization) prohibits workers from seeing the profits of their work (1848). The Industrial Revolution divorced workers from their craft, since it became rare to create a product from beginning to completion; instead, workers only produced parts of a product. Repetitive and standardized, the worker completed their singular task and might never see the finished good.

Social work has similarly become a specialized, atomized profession. The position of family social worker once encompassed a broad set of roles, fulfilling individual families' needs in near totality in the 19th century (Lubove, 1965). Twenty-first century casework looks much different (Day, 2009). Although the child welfare worker looks after the provision of a family's needs, they do not provide all their services. For example, child welfare workers have many roles, all serving different and specialized family needs. County employees fill some roles, while private organizations (both for and non-profit) fill others (U.S. Children's Bureau, 2020). Workers manage unpredictable schedules, low pay, long and unpredictable hours, as well as external pressures of productivity (Allegheny County Department of Human Services, n.d; Reisch, 2019).

These labor conditions estrange the worker from their client, ultimately disassociating the worker and doing the client a disservice. Social workers, by training, have a developed understanding of class consciousness (Payne, 2010), yet social workers are disempowered in

their positions, working at the whim of changing agency priorities, driven by the latest political shifts (Payne, 2010). Furthermore, they often earn significantly lower wages than their similarly trained (and more frequently unionized) peers in similar 'helping' disciplines (BLS, 2021; NASW, 2017).

Social Work Implications

A Marxist approach suggests that social workers could choose to organize collectively to advocate for better working conditions for themselves and other tradespeople. Social workers are primed to lead the charge in translating workplace power into political power, through lobbying and political action, including bloc voting (Karger, 1985, Aleks, 2018). Although Marx sought out widespread, radical change that would upend capitalism (1848), he also saw value in the era's early attempts to unionize workers, and he wrote about them. Marx thought that unions provided at least some necessary protection for workers. Marx said that unions "protect their [workers'] daily interests" and argued that "trade unions are necessary" (1847). Later, during the American Civil War, Marx wrote about the plight of those who simultaneously experienced racial and socio-economic inequities (Anderson, 2017).

Although Marx wrote sympathetically about the injustices experienced by non-whites, he held an optimistic and perhaps selective view of man's morality. His ideas were predicated on faith in human cooperation and eagerness to share resources (1848). However, there is an irony here: Marx was writing his *Manifesto* as European colonialism was sweeping the southern hemisphere, oppressing and subjugating millions of Black, Brown, and Indigenous peoples. Marx's Eurocentric, communist utopian vision has never become a reality. When communism took hold in Europe, it led to autocratic leadership and the oppression of millions, which led to violence, social unrest, and upheaval (Jiang, et. al., 2017; University of North Carolina, n.d.).

Durkheim

Durkheim remarked in 1897, “No human being can be happy or exist unless needs are proportioned to their means.” He argued that unfettered consumption and wealth accumulation drive humanity’s unrealistic ideals of what ‘could be’ (1897). Capitalism has become the ends and the means; the government rather than its keeper has become its servant (1897). Those who have economic means are accustomed to operating with impunity and restricting their ‘liberties’ is difficult to enforce because capital is powerful. It buys campaign ads, lobbyists, bailouts, and anti-union legislation (Gilens & Page, 2014; Harvard Law Review, 2014). Large imbalances of power are dangerous and lead to social unrest (Durkheim, 1897).

Operationalizing Durkheim

Egalitarianism is essential to peaceful living, but unevenly balanced power dynamics present a challenge to social stability (Durkheim, 1897). Durkheim discusses the connection between suicidal ideation and the human lack of power and resources. Power dynamics that create stressful working conditions can lead to ‘suicidal ideation.’ Durkheim believed that the stress from living in oppressive conditions can contribute to suicidal ideation as well as other self-destructive behaviors. An abstract conceptualization of suicidality might be analogous to a loss of hope, such as the resignation workers experience when faced with an endless cycle of dependence and oppression. Despite Durkheim’s writing about egalitarianism, he was reluctant to call for destabilizing social change. Instead, he focused on the internalization (suicide) of the more significant issue of capital control.

Social Work Implications

Durkheim helps to explain the problem of modern industrial power and its subsequent oppression of workers but stops short of a clear call to action. Social workers should consider the

power and control that capitalist interests hold over them and their clients. Social workers might consider their work in a wider context than serving individuals and think critically about how the profession can make widespread change. They may also need an understanding of the profession's relationship to capitalist interests, including the use of capitalist foundation dollars to run their programs. Finally, Durkheim warned about the risks of isolation, identifying that social cohesion is important to life satisfaction (1897). Unionization could be a vehicle for increasing the social cohesion of workers.

Weber

Weber's seminal work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), warned of capitalism's constant growth model and the religious beliefs that underpinned the largely unregulated capitalism occurring in the West. Weber's idea emerged from his study of 16th and 17th century Protestant (Calvinist) beliefs, including the idea that vocation serves as a measure of worth and adherence to moral obligation (Segalman, 1968; Weber, 1905). This phenomenon is referred to as the Protestant Work Ethic. Reformed Protestant followers in the 16th and 17th centuries believed that work and industry were signs of God's grace (Weber, 1905). Weber argued that the 'Spirit of Capitalism' started with Protestant religious teachings during the Reformation (Segalman, 1968). Hard work was to be revered, and the fruits of that labor should be reinvested and grow as economic output. Self-discipline and asceticism rather than lavish spending were expected. Work was an opportunity to serve god (Weber, 1905).

Americans have internalized these beliefs for hundreds of years (Weber, 1905). Weber argued that as society became more secular, the remnants of the Protestant Work Ethic remained because it underpinned capitalism. Furthermore, Weber warned that the constant need for accumulation of wealth and 'worldly' possessions would eventually become all-consuming and

that the relationship between workers and management is transactional rather than godly (Weber, 1968). He used the metaphor of an iron cage to explain the influence that would come from consumption of material goods: “The care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment. But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage” (Weber, 1905, p. 123).

Weber first mentioned the notion of ‘practical rationality’ (one of four types of rational action) in his 1905 essay, *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber further developed this idea positing that people made decisions by intentionally calculating how to achieve the best possible outcome for themselves (1946). His later writings further developed and organized his ideas on rational action. In Part III of, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology,* Weber made direct statements about the phenomenon of weighing costs and benefits to make decisions (1946, p.2 293). These writings explicitly communicated that people make choices to meet their own needs or desires (1968). This idea closely resembles rational choice theory which Adam Smith introduced in his 1776 essay, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations.* Pathak (2020) and others have made connections between Smith and Weber’s ideas. The basic shared premise is that people make decisions using a cost-benefit calculation (Pathak, 2020). An example of this connection is illustrated in Weber’s writing: “Practical ends are attained by carefully weighing an increasingly precise calculation of the most adequate means” (1946, p.293).

Operationalizing Weber

Weber argued that the “Spirit of Protestantism” escaped the iron cage, leaving a spirit of capitalism in its wake” (Weber, 1905, p. 124). As the world became more secularized, the belief in hard work and the pursuit of wealth became ends unto themselves: “Specialists without spirit,

sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved" (p. 167). Weber argued that the endless work of pursuing material wealth would come to define human nature and that work was no longer a calling but a transaction between capitalists and workers (1905).

Although society continues to become more secular, the Protestant Work Ethic became the foundation of America's attitudes about work; industry and prosperity make a worthy person, whereas poverty is a mark of shame or a personal defect (Day, 2009; Weber, 1905). The punitive regulations of safety net programs illustrate this phenomenon. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), passed in 1996, made it clear in the name itself that those in power treated poverty as an individual issue. PRWORA instituted strict eligibility requirements which purged millions from the cash assistance program. The law also instituted lifetime time limits to receive benefits, and it capped the cash assistance program to a $16-billion block grant. A family of three receives an average of $400 a month in cash assistance (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2018).

Federal cash transfer programs that serve Americans with a prior work history such as Unemployment Insurance, Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), and Social Security Retirement (SS) provide significantly more generous benefits than cash programs that serve non-working adults. These programs also have far fewer requirements and rules to follow (Social Security Administration [SSA], 2009). Cash transfer programs that serve poor people such as Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) pay much lower monthly allowances and have more eligibility restrictions than SSDI, Unemployment Insurance, and SS programs where work is a requirement (Amadeo, 2021).

Decisions are made by a careful weighing and increasingly precise calculation of the best possible outcome (1946). In his essay *Great Religions of the World,* Weber suggested the ascetism and hard work that characterized Reformist followers was more about gaining favors from God than deep religious conviction. Weber posits that strict religious adherence is a rational action that brings about a desired outcome:

> The alert self-control of the Puritan flowed from the necessity of his subjugating all creaturely impulses to a rational and methodical plan of conduct, so that he might secure his certainty of his own salvation (Weber, 1968, p. 619).

Social Work Implications

Weber's writings present an important lens to understanding social work unionization. Weber argued in his 1905 essay that Reformed Protestants were once 'called' to work by God, and that vocation was a measure of moral adherence. However, moral adherence was really a manifestation of self-interest; following religious rules could earn them 'favors' from God. (Weber, 1968). Social work is a field that requires a great deal of expensive college training, yet its workers earn a median salary which is less than other related professions (NASW, 2017). Given the secularization of society, the 'ends' for these social workers may be to help others. Social workers might feel "called" to work in the service of others even if it means limiting personal financial gain.

Critical Race and Intersectional Theory

Non-white people have been historically 'locked out' of labor unions and the financial and political benefits that union membership provides. This discrimination prevented most Black people from learning trades through the union apprenticeship model which provided a pathway to a lifetime career. However, in 2020, Black workers were unionized at a marginally higher rate

than white workers (12% and 10%, respectively), representing a significant shift in membership demographics from previous decades (BLS, 2021). However, Black workers' earnings still lag behind those of their white peers (BLS, 2021).

Critical Race Theory (CRT), a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw is a lens for viewing historically marginalized populations and, specifically, the subjugation of racial and ethnic minorities. Its strength is the aspiration to lift marginalized voices and the challenge to view social problems within the contexts of racism, power, and oppression (Daftary, 2020). Kimberlé Crenshaw also coined the term "intersectionality" in her 1989 paper, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.* Intersectionality posits that group membership creates unique experiences prescriptive to the individual. Crenshaw used a traffic analogy to illustrate her theory: people with multiple oppressed cultural identities become caught into an intersection where the axes of power, class, privilege, and oppression converge, undeniably causing injury. Intersectionality theory espouses the idea that experiences are specific and driven by the differing group memberships among individuals (1999).

Operationalizing CRIT

Critical Race and Intersectional Theory addresses what the previously discussed frameworks do not: the role of race and marginalized identities in the class struggle experience. While this theory may not explicitly describe the labor/capital situation, it explains labor conflict struggles in social work and across the workforce. Economics, labor history, and social theory, all essential to understanding worker experiences, are dominated by white and privileged group experiences and perceptions (Lee & Tapia, 2021). Much of western history ignores the intersections along the axes of power: race, gender, class (Crenshaw, 2000). These interlocking

barriers have made it much harder for minorities to enter the middle class, largely because they were unable to gain access to union labor (Mishel, 2019).

Social Work Implications

Social workers, in the early days of the profession, were not dependable allies to Black people and other racial minorities. The early mainstream settlement house movement did not assist Black people in their organizations, instead focusing on European immigrants and white rural migrants who were rejected by mainstream society (Hounmenou, 2012). Charity Organizing Societies primarily helped white people (Day, 2009). This led to the creation of Black settlement houses in major cities around the United States (Hounmenou, 2012). Black activists created their own settlements with a focus on equity and civil rights. Mainstream white settlements that did help people of color often did so at a segregated location (Hounmenou, 2012).

Racism and white supremacy negatively impact the experiences of minority social workers by way of workplace discrimination and the racial wage gap (Gould, 2020). It is difficult to fully explore the phenomenon of wage disparity without discussing racial wage inequality. Moreover, the core value of social justice compels social workers to advocate for the profession as well as for members of a group that has been targeted and/or oppressed (NASW, 2017). This principle also includes workers, especially those from marginalized groups.

Synthesis

Framing the Problem

Marx and Engels argue that society is defined by class struggles, and the growing gap between rich and poor is at near-historic rates with no signs of slowing (DeSilver, 2018; Piketty, 2014). Neoliberal economic policies have deregulated industry which contributes to the growth

of the wealth gap (Mishel, 2021). Durkheim framed this phenomenon about the wealth and power of industry, stating that "government has become its servant" (1897). Marx and Durkheim's theories illustrate the power dynamics that contribute to the inequitable capitalist economic structure of Western society. Durkheim's theory suggests that the status quo remains unchanged because social workers have resigned themselves to lower-paying jobs than their peers (1897; NASW, 2017). Marx argued that class struggles, and worker disempowerment are inherent parts of society, which illustrates the need for large scale change (1847).

Social workers do not unionize as a profession, which dilutes their political power. Moreover, they work for low wages despite years of advanced education. Private nonprofits are constantly working in flux because their programs depend on the 'good will' and interests of capitalist funders, which in turn influences the salaries and working conditions of nonprofit organizations (Manzo, 2004; Timm, 2016). Nonprofits and governmental organizations employ 75% of social workers (BLS, 2021). Both are controlled by those with greatest wealth and influence (Gilens & Page, 2014). The role of social workers acting as change agents in a capitalist economy is unclear. Do social workers affect change to empower the poor, or are they agents of social control and perhaps even their own oppressor?

Understanding the Problem

Weber's theory helps to explain the struggle social work has with its own identity. Social workers have an opportunity to challenge oppressive institutions and in fact have a history of success in doing so. But in the United States, they work overwhelmingly in micro-level practices, and more and more are moving to better-paying positions in private practice. Is this a measure of capitalist influence? Perhaps social worker-client interactions become transactional rather than relational.

Conversely, many other social workers are employed by private nonprofits, where they earn low salaries and work for long hours (Manzo, 2004; Timm, 2016). Agencies are limited in their budgets on how much they can pay employees because funding for nonprofit programming is competitive and restrictive (Manzo, 2004; Timm, 2016). Nonprofit employers admit that their agencies rely on unpaid overtime from poorly paid salaried workers. Weber's theory might suggest that social workers may be undeterred by low wages because they are called to their profession by something other than financial gain.

Exploring the Problem

Collins visits Weber's characterization of bureaucratic organizations when she describes them as functioning to control and organize human behavior but takes the idea one step further by illuminating how this "Matrix of domination is expressed through organizational protocol that hides the effects of racism and sexism under the canopy of efficiency, rationality, and equal treatment" (2006, p. 8). These structures reinforce the oppression of social workers as well as the individuals, families, and communities they serve. Phenomenology provides an opportunity for a researcher to interview respondents and explore questions relating to their lived experiences. Phenomenological questioning, furthermore, provides an opportunity to explore social workers' vocational experiences and identity as well as their perceptions of the profession overall. See Appendix A for a visual of the theoretical framework.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Little information exists about social workers' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences with collective bargaining. Academic journal queries returned few relevant results, most of them from more than 20 years ago (Bucci, 2019). In fact, this scarcity of relevant literature is not new; social work researchers were calling for more studies on labor organizing nearly four decades ago (Straussner & Phillips, 1988). The United States does have a rich and evolving relationship with unions, as does the field of social work. The history of unionization in the United States, and social work in particular, can indicate much about how attitudes toward, and perceptions of, collective bargaining have shifted over the years. A further exploration of attitudes, perceptions, and experiences provides a practical framework, defining these often-ambiguous terms for use in this research.

A variety of search methods were employed to find whatever literature might exist on these interrelated topics. An EBSCO One search was completed using the Millersville University of Pennsylvania and California University of Pennsylvania databases; additionally, the University of Pittsburgh's PittCat search engine was employed. The search terms included: "social work" and "unions," "social work" and "labor," "social work" and "labor organizing," and "social work" and "collective bargaining." Approximately 25 relevant scholarly articles resulted from these searches. Most of these articles were more than ten years old. Subsequently, a broader search was conducted using Google Scholar with the same search terms, and several more relevant sources were located. Google search was also used to locate think tank and government resources. Additional sources were found using the reference lists of available literature.

History of Labor Organizing

The organized labor movement in the United States has a 200-year history (Dubofsky, et. al., 2017). The first documented attempts at collective bargaining in the United States occurred in 1794, when shoemakers organized in Philadelphia (Domhoff, 2012). This early iteration of labor organizing was short lived. By 1837 the country had experienced its first industrial depression, which halted labor organizing efforts (Domhoff, 2012). Scarcity in the job market makes unionizing difficult because workers become easily replaceable. Concerted efforts to organize workers did not resume until after the Civil War.

Throughout the labor movement's history, federal and state governments have been unreliable allies to workers. Former President Andrew Jackson acted as a strikebreaker in 1834 during a conflict at the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. Immigrant workers were deceived into signing up to work for an oppressive company where they faced brutal and unsafe work, and subsequently organized a strike. Jackson sent Federal troops to the job site to force strikers back to work (Dubofsky, et. al., 2017). In 1892, The Governor of Pennsylvania sent thousands of National Guard troops to the Monongahela Valley town of Homestead, to break a strike at a Carnegie steel plant that persisted even after the company sent hundreds of armed guards to try to end the work stoppage (Domhoff, 2012; Dubofsky, et. al., 2017). Thousands of Guardsmen protected the plant from worker protests as strikebreakers arrived to work in the mill. In 1981, President Reagan fired and then permanently banned from public service 12,000 air traffic controllers who refused to leave the picket line (AFL-CIO, 2019).

The Federal government has also supported worker's rights through legislation, especially during the FDR Presidency. New Deal Era legislation such as the Fair Labor Standards Act and the National Labor Relations Act greatly helped strengthen workers'

collective power (1935). The Fair Labor Standards Act (1938) codified the 40-hour workweek, overtime pay, and child labor laws, among other protections (Fair Labor Standards Act, 1935). More recently, states have begun to pass anti-labor legislation called 'right-to-work' laws that were made legal by the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act (A revision of the Wagner Act of 1935). Right to work laws make labor organizing more difficult and less effective (Domhoff, 2012; Dubofsky, et. al., 2017; Mishel, 2019).

Early Organizing: Late Eighteenth- through Early Twentieth Centuries

Early on, craft guilds organized with little friction or fanfare because businesses were small, and craftsmen were often in short supply (Domhoff, 2012). The Industrial Revolution caused tradesmen to see manufacturing as a threat to their livelihoods (Dubofsky, et. al., 2017), so skilled craftsmen began to organize in local labor organizations to mitigate pay cuts and work-hour increases pressed by employers (Domhoff, 2012). Union leaders across cities were loosely affiliated with one another under the auspices of the "General Trades Union." However, these unions had little bargaining power and were dissolved at the start of the first industrial depression in the United States during the 1830s (Dubofsky, et. al., 2017). Concerted labor organizing efforts did not resurge until after the Civil War (Domhoff, 2012; Straussner & Phillips, 1988).

Between the Reconstruction Era and World War I, the United States experienced rapid economic growth, resulting in a 250% increase in domestic output (Piketty, 2015). Notably, much of the economic expansion's wealth did not flow to the workers (Reisch, 2009). In fact, 80% of male workers in the United States did not earn enough money to live above the poverty line (Reisch, 2009). The Commission on Industrial Relations reported that between half and two-

thirds of working-class families lived in poverty; reports by settlement house workers at the time made similar conclusions (Reisch, 2009).

After the Civil War, attempts to unionize workers resumed with more support than earlier efforts. The Noble Order of the Knights of Labor was one of the most influential organizations representing workers in the late 1800s (Dubofsky, et. al., 2017). The Knights worked to secure laborers higher wages and better working conditions. Notably, the Knights welcomed all workers, regardless of gender or race, a radical proposition during this period (Straussner & Phillips, 1988). The Knights led a strike of railroad workers in 1883 and 1884 (Domhoff, 2012). Although the gains were modest, this action opened the door to the notion that labor strikes could help workers gain benefits such as safer working conditions and higher wages (Dubofsky, et al., 2017).

In Chicago, labor organizing turned violent in 1886. More than 1500 workers from McCormick Harvesting Machine Company engaged in union action to advocate for an eight-hour workday on May 3rd, 1886 (Dubofsky, et. al., 2017). During the demonstration, strikebreakers killed a demonstrator. The next day, the protest ensued mostly peacefully, but when police arrived to end the demonstration an individual (never identified) threw a bomb into the crowd and police officers responded with indiscriminate gunfire. More than ten people were killed and dozens were wounded (Dubofsky, et. al., 2017). This deadly incident became fodder for anti-union capitalists who characterized all labor organizers as dangerous and violent (Domhoff, 2012). Overall, labor organizing in the nineteenth century produced few tangible results for workers (Domhoff, 2012). However, these organizers laid the foundations for labor advocacy which twentieth-century organizers would build on. Their efforts planted a seed that workers in the coming decades would cultivate.

Early Twentieth Century Organizing

The economy's downturn in the 1890s was painful for workers as thousands of businesses and farms closed, the unemployment rate spiked, and the social safety net was virtually nonexistent. People were desperate to feed their families (Domhoff, 2012). Public opinion agreed for the first time that unfair business practices were at least partly at fault (Whitten, n.d.). Boom-and-bust cycles left workers in constant flux, with no job or income security (Dubofsky, et. al., 2017). Subsequently, interest in organizing labor started to increase. Union membership grew steadily early in the 20th century (Gallup, 2020). World War I brought the labor movement some early success; wartime economies benefit workers because there is an increase in the demand for both products and workers (Dubofsky, et. al., 2017).

Employer opposition to organized workers increased after the end of World War I. An adequate labor supply due to returning veterans and a reduced need for manufacturing output tipped the scales out of workers' favor (Dubofsky, et. al., 2017). Subsequently, strikers lost to industrialists almost universally throughout the 1920s (Domhoff, 2012). A significant contributor to this trend was the National Association of Manufacturers' funding of the anti-union efforts; union membership dropped nearly in half between 1920-1933 (Domhoff, 2012).

Union organizers finally found a victory in the passage of the 1926 Railway Labor Act, which was a building block for the eventual passage of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (National Labor Relations Act, 1935). Their organizing effort mostly succeeded because there was skilled labor at stake, replacing these workers would have been challenging. Railroad management was forced to accept collective bargaining and government oversight (Domhoff, 2012). Another victory for the labor movement came in 1932 with the Norris-LaGuardia Act (Norris-LaGuardia Act, 1932). This act prohibited employers from forcing employees out of

unions, supported collective bargaining, and instituted rules that restricted employers from overusing court injunctions (Dubofsky, et. al., 2017; Norris-LaGuardia Act, 1932).

Employee Representation Plans were a labor practice that emerged during the early 20th century, and the scheme was promoted by the richest man during this era, John D. Rockefeller (Domhoff, 2012). These plans provided workers an opportunity to have some voice in the shop's working conditions and wages. Employers and employees participated in joint committees to discuss work-related matters. The company paid for all costs of the program. Employee Representation Plans were designed as an alternative to the labor union, which employers wanted to avoid. However, worker power in these plans was limited, mainly because the employer had the final say if there was a disagreement, and there were no clauses for outside mediation (Domhoff, 2012). This scheme was outlawed with the passage of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935.

Union Organizing, 1935-1950

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his administration were advocates for workers' rights, particularly in promoting collective bargaining (Dubofsky, et. al., 2017). The American Federation of Labor, founded in 1886, represented the country's largest unions, and lobbied the new administration to pass labor reform laws and social welfare benefits that would help poor workers (Domhoff, 2012).

In 1933, the National Industrial Recovery Act was passed into law. This law gave employees the right to organize and collectively bargain (U.S. National Archives, 2022). Two years later the National Labor Relations Act (Wagner) was passed, giving workers far more power to organize into unions and collectively bargain with their employees. The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) of 1935 established the National Labor Relations Board; the Board's role

was to function as the final judge in unresolved labor disputes (Public Law 74-198, 1935). The NLRA outlawed Employee Representation Plans and other management practices that limited workers' rights (Public Law 74-198, 1935). This policy led to widespread labor organizing and a successful string of strikes that won workers better working conditions and wages over the next decade.

During World War II both the AFL and CIO agreed to a no-strike pledge to provide stability in production supporting war efforts. However, more than eight million workers went on strike during the war, representing one quarter of the nation's workforce at the time (Atkins, 2022). Many of these workers were participating in widespread 'wildcat' strikes, which are strikes that are not authorized by the union. The excessive strikes during the war years brought about a resurgence in business and political interests to limit union organizing. Subsequently, a new anti-labor policy was created, the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947. This policy outlawed striking tactics such as mass picketing and secondary boycotts. It also gave the president the power to delay striking for up to 60 days to preserve public interest and to end strikes when deemed in the national interest (Public Law 80-101, 1947). In addition, the law furthermore required labor organizers to sign affidavits confirming that they were not a part of the Communist Party (NLRA, Amended by Taft-Hartley Act, Public Law 80-101, 1947). Taft-Hartley even prevented labor unions from pooling their dollars into benefit funds that assisted workers with medical or other related issues.

Arguably, the most damaging piece of this legislation was the permission it gave states to enact "right-to-work" laws. Right-to-work laws are present in 28 states as of January 2022 (Workplace Fairness, n.d.). Right-to-work laws allow workers to opt out of union membership in a unionized workplace. However, this permission dilutes union labor's power, leaving the union

with fewer funds but organizing more people (Mishel, 2021). Although certain employees may opt out of joining a union, they continue to receive union membership benefits under a collective bargaining agreement without paying dues (Domhoff, 2012, National Conference of State Legislatures, 2017).

Union Organizing, 1955-1990

By the mid-1950s, 35% of the nation's workforce were union members (BLS, 2019). Income inequality was at one of the lowest levels on record (Piketty, 2015). The period between World War II and the mid-1960s in the United States was unique because incomes grew rapidly and at the same pace as the larger economy, increasing the wealth of most white middle class Americans (Piketty, 2015). Moreover, the gap between the highest earners and middle-income workers held steady (Stone, et. al., 2020). A middle class was emerging as white workers accumulated wealth through good paying jobs and homeownership supported by federally backed mortgages, a benefit not available to Black Americans until 1967 when the Fair Housing Act was passed into law (Milkman & Luce, 2017; Smith & Duxbury, 2019).

The American Federation of Labor (AFL), founded by Samuel Gompers in 1886, and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), founded by John L Lewis in 1932, merged in 1955 to become (and remains) the largest federation of unions in the United States (Erhart, 2016). Before the merger, the two entities differed in who they allowed to join. The CIO welcomed skilled and semi-skilled workers while the AFL only accepted skilled craftsmen into its ranks. In addition, the CIO welcomed Black workers while the AFL barred them and other nonwhites from membership (Erhart, 2016).

Upon completion of the merger, George Meany became the AFL-CIOs first president and led the organization until 1979 (Erhart, 2016). As part of the new agreement, AFL-CIO created

an anti-discrimination policy that required member unions to organize across racial lines; women were not included in the anti-discrimination policy (CQ Researcher, 1961). Unions that did not follow the anti-discrimination policy were to be expelled from the AFL-CIO. However, Meany did not strictly enforce this policy, which incensed Black labor organizers, particularly A. Philip Randolph, a powerful Black labor organizer and civil rights leader who railed against the organization's lackadaisical approach to addressing racial discrimination (CQ Researcher, 1961).

AFL-CIO member unions continued to discriminate against Black workers well into the 1960s (CQ Researcher, 1961). The legacy of this discrimination has prevented many Black workers from joining skilled unions or joining as an apprentice; Blacks are still underrepresented in skilled union jobs (Watson, 2021). Starting in 1956, rumblings of an increased rate of inflation began to concern the Eisenhower administration (Domhoff, 2012). Union labor was identified as the cause due to higher wages increasing product costs. Manufacturers were especially opposed to cost-of-living adjustments (COLA), which gave employees a modest raise each year to match the increased costs of living. COLA clauses are common in union contracts. As inflation continued into 1958, the Eisenhower administration created a committee to investigate. Future president Richard Nixon chaired the committee, which pointed at union labor as the primary cause (Domhoff, 2012). Union and labor advocates pushed back on claims that union contracts cause inflation and argued that price-fixing and other unfair business practices were responsible. They argued that modest inflation levels were normal, and that the government's focus should be on lowering unemployment levels (Domhoff, 2012). This trend of blaming union labor costs for rising inflation, though, would continue well into the 1970s (Kramer, 2020; Nguyen, 2019). The 1960s brought conflict and change to the nation, with a focus on Civil Rights. Unions, since their inception, had been exclusionary in their membership practices. People of color were locked out

of unionizing until after the Civil Rights movement (Domhoff, 2012). Nationally, support for unions began to wane (Gallup, 2020).

The 1970s brought about an onslaught on trade unions as the manufacturing industry began a steep decline due to a recession and new international competition arose from countries that finally emerged from World War II's wake (Piketty, 2015). Steel dumping from Japan dealt a lethal blow to the steel industry in the United States, from which it has never recovered. Additionally, advances in automation began to greatly impact the job market. Moreover, the Nixon administration's National Labor Relations Board made union organizing more difficult (Domhoff, 2012). Outsourcing labor became more prevalent, while the Nixon administration began to encourage non-union work for infrastructure projects (Domhoff, 2012). As a result, half of all new construction jobs by 1975 were non-union (Domhoff, 2012). Union membership began to decline during this era, dropping four points by 1980 (Mayer, 2004). This decline, however, would have been steeper had it not been for public sector unions proliferating. These union efforts were largely fueled by the increase of federally employed workers due to the expanding social welfare programs such as FDR's New Deal and Johnson's 'Great Society' endeavor (Kramer, 2020; Rosenburg & Rosenburg, 2006).

When Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980, addressing union labor was on his agenda to mediate inflation and economic instability (Dubofsky, et. al., 2017). Just eight months into his first term, 12,000 members of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) went on strike. They walked off the job after negotiations on a new contract with the F.A.A. failed. Reagan gave notice that the strikers would have 48 hours to return to work or else they would be terminated. He followed through on his threat. He fired more than 11,000 air traffic controllers and permanently barred them from public service (Schalch, 2006). This action sent

shockwaves across the labor organizing community. Before this move, most companies with union shops did not hire replacement workers during the time of a strike, even though the law allowed them to (Domhoff, 2012). Reagan's action emboldened management at companies across the nation (Schalch, 2006). Management began to refuse all concessions and started arbitrary layoffs (Schalch, 2006). American union density dropped more than five percent during the Reagan years (Mayer, 2004).

Twenty-First Century Labor Organizing

In 2021, overall union density held steady at 10.3%, down from 20% in 1983 and 1% from 2010 (BLS, 2022). However, unions were winning at the National Labor Relations Board ballot box. When forming a union, the organizers must hold an election in conjunction with the NLRB. If the union wins the election, they may enter collective bargaining protected by the National Labor Relations Act (NLRB, n.d.). Although there are fewer votes today than in decades past, unions' win rate has increased significantly over the last decade (Bloomberg Law, 2021).

Benefits of Labor Organizing

Union Membership and Quality of Life

Union members regularly earn up to 25% more than their non-union peers (Wilmers, 2019). Union membership is an essential ingredient in creating a robust middle class and a more egalitarian diffusion of wealth and political power (Flavin & Shufeldt, 2019; Mishel, 2019). Unions promote safer and more equitable workplaces and drive down income inequality (Bucci, 2019; Flavin & Shufeldt, 2019). Finally, union membership can even improve indicators of quality of life, such as healthy living and access to healthcare (Hagedorn et al., 2016).

Unions are a mitigator of wage inequality between workers and management as well as among similar workers. When workers unionize, non-union workers are advantaged as well by "standardizing" wages across different employers. When union membership reaches a critical mass, wages become more stable (Mishel, 2021). Working class people are the biggest beneficiaries of collective bargaining, and, ironically, women and people of color benefit the most from union membership even though they face more barriers to union jobs (Domhoff, 2012; Donovan, et. al.; Mishel, 2021).

Union Membership and Political Power

Union membership increases workers' political power through dues collected to support lobbying efforts as well as the actual increased political participation of members (Scanlon & Harding, 2005). There is a positive correlation between union spending on political campaigning and union member wages (Wilmers, 2019). As union political spending goes up, applying pressure to employers, wages increase. Union members are significantly more likely to vote than non-union workers (Scanlon & Harding, 2005). Union organizing can influence election outcomes at the local, state, and national levels. Furthermore, this political power helps to increase wages for all workers, not just union members (Nussbaum, 2019).

Unions can have some influence in elections because union endorsements bring their voters out in force. Unions can also engage in political action and lobbying in part through their collection of membership dues. Union members are significantly more likely to vote than nonunion workers, and their union dues collectively support a formidable lobbying effort in Washington DC. Union organizing influences the outcomes of elections at the local, state, and national levels (Nussbaum, 2019). A recent study (Becher & Stegmuller) found that local labor unions increase the responsiveness of their legislators. In fact, they found that in regions with

strong union membership, political representatives act on their behalf about as often as they do for moneyed interests (2020). The decline in the size of union membership over the last several decades has resulted in less political power for working people (Bucci, 2019; Mishel, 2019). This decline of unionization has allowed corporate interests to have more leverage in political decision-making (Becher & Stegmuller, 2020). The interests of corporations and capital leave workers with little in the way of economic and political power (Wilmers, 2019).

Shortcomings of Labor Organizing

For some Americans, unions have become synonymous with scandal and racism (Scheiber & Boudette, 2019). Labor unions prevented Black people from joining their ranks for decades, preventing them from accessing living wage jobs. In 2020, powerful New York union leader James Cahill (representing 200,000 unionized workers) and ten of his union associates were accused of accepting bribes to withhold employment opportunities from their union's own members (Weiser & McKinley, 2020). The president of the United Auto Workers, Gary Jones, resigned in 2015 after getting caught spending tens of thousands of dollars of union funds to buy personal luxuries such as cigars and travel (Scheiber & Boudette, 2019). A subsequent federal probe revealed rampant criminal behavior. Jones eventually pled guilty to embezzlement, racketeering, and tax evasion (United States Department of Justice, 2020).

Recent research has suggested that public support for unionization wanes when workers do not see benefits of the union extending beyond those who belong to one (Fiorito & Padavic, 2020). This research implies that unions need to both address widespread social injustice as well as supply value for their own members (Fiorito & Padavic, 2020). Union membership requires that workers pay dues for operation of the union's activities and political contributions; however, workers are no longer required to pay into political action undertaken by the union. Workers pay

a median of $535 per year in compulsory union dues, compared to $366 in states with right-to-work laws (Sherk, 2015). This is an added expense to workers that could have inconsistent value in the eyes of union members; the dues are only considered to be valuable if the member perceives that they get back more than they put in. The Heritage Foundation, a right-leaning think tank, found that union leaders in non-right-to-work states make an average of $20,000 more per year in salaries. Union dues are higher in states with compulsory dues (Sherk, 2015). This data suggests that union membership costs more for workers in states where labor regulation favors unions (Sherk, 2015).

Barriers to Unionizing

Workers enjoyed a period of relative prosperity during the post-World War II era, earning the highest real dollar wage in modern U.S. history. However, during the 1970s corporate interests again began lobbying more concertedly for anti-union policies (Mishel, 2021). The rate of labor unionization, measured by the number of private sector National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) elections, fell by 90% between 1960 and the early 2000s (Mishel, 2021). Neoliberal economic policies and loosely regulated capitalism continue to depress wages and union membership (Mishel, 2019). This problem is exacerbated for people of color, who were historically barred from unions. Although no longer codified, this trend still exists today and contributes to the racial wage gap (Wood, 2019). Powerful business interests lobby states to pass anti-labor legislation, using veiled terms such as right-to-work laws. The deterioration of unions has hastened the flattening of wages, including the minimum wage. The minimum wage in 2020 is less in real dollars than it was in 1968 (Mishel, 2021). Wage growth has been stifled by the erosion of collective bargaining and workers' rights (Mishel, 2019).

Unlawful attempts to influence union elections are frequently reported by the National

Labor Relations Board. Twenty percent of union elections document a report in which a worker was fired illegally for union organizing. Forty percent of NLRB unionization campaigns filed a charge of unlawful anti-union antagonization by employers (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). Commonly used tactics by corporations wishing to prevent workers from unionizing include interrogation, firings, surveillance, and threats to cut wages or jobs (Bronfenbrenner, 2009).

Professional Connection

Social workers have struggled to create an identity for themselves, due in part to the wildly different experiences across the profession in vastly different work settings. Social workers have been negatively impacted by bureaucracy, unfair working conditions, low pay, and a lack of anyone to advocate on *their* behalf. Social workers, especially new graduates, earn very low salaries; the bottom rung of earners' median income is a little over $30,000 (BLS, 2021). Substance abuse counselors, community mental health workers, and child and family workers earn a median wage of less than $40,000 per year (BLS, 2021). Social workers are caught in a difficult situation as professionals. Many social workers are busy advocating at the micro level for their clients, yet do not think to advocate for themselves. They are called to the profession by the desire to be of assistance to oppressed people, yet many social workers are oppressed themselves by challenging working conditions and low pay.

Foundation funding determines the fate of many community-based nonprofit organizations (Ford Foundation, 2022; Smith, 2015). To survive financially, these organizations must align their work and culture to meet the priorities of foundation funders (Ford Foundation, 2022; Smith, 2015). Foundation funders may be regarded as benevolent, but they set the agenda for nonprofit work, and that agenda has not been one of large-scale wealth redistribution or other structural issues (Ford Foundation, 2022; Smith, 2015). Social workers have also shown

reluctance to organize because they are concerned about how it would impact their clients. Others believe that social workers, as professionals, are not in need of union protections.

Social workers endeavor to address social justice concerns, which can put them at odds with mainstream society and their employers. Social workers may find themselves functioning as agents of (institutional) control rather than of change. The conflict and critical theories introduced earlier shine a light on the inequities that social workers face both as employees (who are overworked and underpaid) and as change agents.

Social Work Wages

Social work salaries are significantly lower than salaries in related professions (BLS, 2021), as illustrated in Table 2.1 below. In fact, these salaries do not reflect the robust benefit packages of unionized teachers, nurses, or police officers. These professions often offer extensive benefits as well as pension opportunities (Mishel, 2021).

Table 2.1

Wage comparisons to other similar careers in 2020 (BLS, 2021)

Occupation	Required Years of education	Median Salary	Social Worker Median Salary	Difference Percent
Registered Nurse	2-4- or 4-year degree	$75,330	$51,750	31%
K-12 Teacher	4-year degree or graduate degree	$60,810	$51,750	15%
Police Officer	HS or some college/tech training	$67,290	$51,750	23%

Social Work Professional Organizations

During the 1960s and 1970s, social workers often agitated for civil rights efforts. In fact, the NASW was formed in 1957 with a goal of increasing the profession's political power (Scanlon & Harding, 2005). Unlike comparable occupations of teaching and nursing, however, the National Association of Social Workers did not elect to create a hybrid organization that functions as both a professional organization and a labor union (Reisch, 2009; Scanlon & Harding, 2005). A hybrid model of labor organizing for teachers and nurses led to the development of some of the most powerful unions in the country (Scanlon & Harding, 2005). This hybrid model allows workers to bargain collectively with employers and other stakeholders while maintaining their distinct professional identity. Unionization can provide social workers with a political platform for systems level change (La Rose, 2009). Furthermore, Scanlon (1999) argues that labor organizing can provide financial resources and collective influence on progressive political movements and increased levels of funding to social service programs.

A search of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) website using the terms: 'union,' 'collective bargain,' and 'labor' returned only one relevant match linked to an externally reported news story of a Chicago public school workers' strike (NASW.org). A similar search found zero results on the National Association of Black Social Workers website (NABSW.org). A search of the International Federation of Social Workers web page did result in some articles encouraging advocacy of the labor movement. However, most of these articles were not specific to the United States.

Prevailing Attitudes Toward Unionization

Recent research has suggested that public support for unions wanes when workers do not see benefits of the union extending beyond those who belong to one (Fiorito & Padavic, 2020).

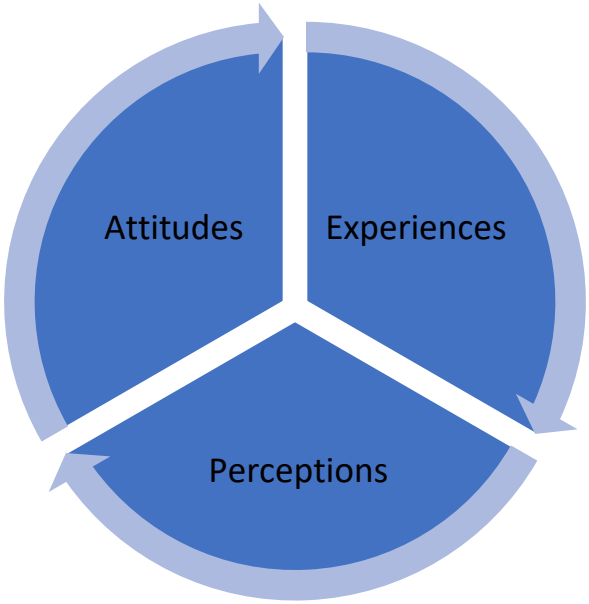
Public support for collective bargaining increases when they believe unions benefit all workers. This belief even affects workers' own decisions about whether to join a union (Fiorito & Padavic, 2020). Other researchers also argue that unions need to both address widespread social injustice as well as supply value for their own members because social workers are compelled to act in the service of others (Fiorito & Padavic, 2020; NASW, 2017). Although "right-to-work" laws exist in 28 states, American attitudes toward union membership have been primarily positive, with more than 65% of Americans supporting labor unions. This number was at its highest (75%) during the post-World War II era (Gallup, 2020).

Attitudes, Perceptions, and Experiences

Attitudes, perceptions, and experiences are distinct, but interrelated constructs. Experiences influence both attitudes and perceptions (Munhall, 2008). Pickens (2005) linked the concept of attitude with perception, the process in which an individual interprets and organizes feelings to create a meaningful experience of the world. In other words, the person interprets the stimuli based on previous experiences and socialization. Experiences influence both attitudes and perceptions (Munhall, 2008). These components are interrelated and interdependent; as a person experiences new phenomena, their attitudes and perceptions will change. Those attitudes and perceptions influence the types of experiences an individual engages in as well as how they engage in them.

Figure 2.1

Attitudes, Experiences, and Perceptions, Adapted from Pickens, 2005



Operationalizing Attitudes

Attitudes refer to how people "feel" about a phenomenon. Attitudes influence behavior, because actions are guided by internal feelings about a situation (Olson & Stone, 2005). Attitudes are formed by social learning as well as by way of experiences with people or phenomena. Attitudes are not simply dichotomous beliefs; they are experienced in different variations and intensities (Olson & Stone, 2005).

Simonson and Maushak (2001) outline four components to attitudes which contribute to the disposition of a person's attitude toward a phenomenon.

1. Affect: A person's emotive reaction to a phenomenon
2. Cognition: A person's empirical understanding about a topic
3. Behavior: How a person reacts or acts toward some phenomenon

4. Behavioral Intention: A person's idea of how they will behave in some situation. This behavioral 'scheme' may or may not be carried out.

These components do not exist in a vacuum, but rather, are entwined, and provide a person with a mental model of how they feel about a situation.

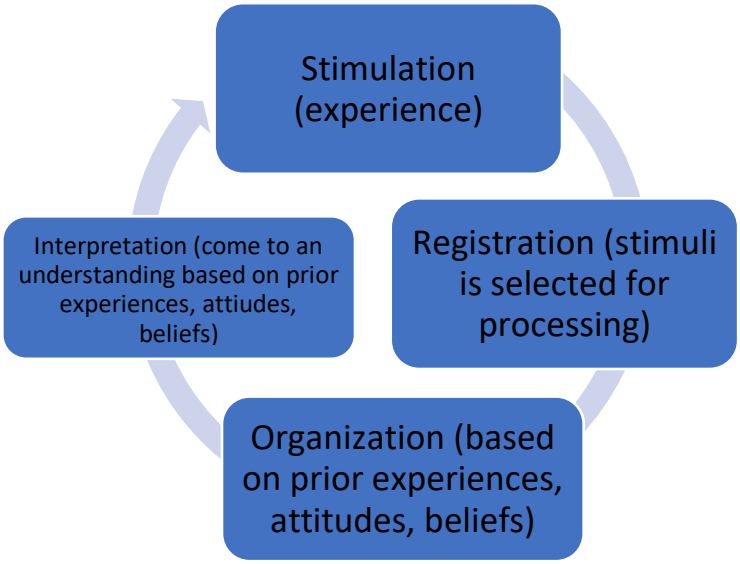
Operationalizing Perceptions

When a person is confronted with stimuli, they interpret them into something meaningful based on prior encounters. Perceptions have a close relationship with attitudes, but they are distinct constructs. Perceptions describe how a person "sees" their reality, which is subjective. Perceptions are how we process, or think about stimuli—in this case, unionization (Pickens, 2005). What a person interprets as reality may be significantly different from the commonly shared social reality, and this is heavily influenced by individual attitudes and personal disposition (Pickens, 2005), as well as context or environment (Munhall, 2008). Furthermore, individuals may be selective in choosing the stimuli they want to process: If stimuli cause discomfort, they may choose to avoid it entirely.

The perception process follows four stages: stimulation, registration, organization, and interpretation (Pickens, 2005). This process is cyclical and is reinforced by the type of feedback one receives from processing. Positive feedback reinforces interpretation of reality; negative feedback may cause internal dissonance and force a review for future exposures.

Figure 2.2

Perception Process (Adapted from Pickens, 2005)



Operationalizing Experiences

Experiences are encounters with a particular phenomenon. Exploring the experiences American social workers have with collective bargaining is important to holistically understanding their relationship with the concept of unionization. Work is one of the most important values in American society. Noting the sheer amount of time, effort, and energy social workers put into their careers, and the American tendency to define oneself by occupation, commonalities among these experiences will necessarily surface (Butina, 2015; (Padgett, 2016).

Social Work's Experiences with Unionization

Social work had differing roles in the labor movement during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Straussner & Phillips, 1988; Reisch, 2009). At this time, two distinct approaches to addressing poverty and social injustice emerged as the original "tracks" of social work: Charity Organizing and Settlement Houses (Day, 2009). Today social workers are not well known for organizing workers, but nearly 20% of social workers belong to a union (BLS, 2019).

Late Nineteenth Century

Charity Organizing Societies appeared in the mid-nineteenth century to address the "worthy" poor (defined loosely by the Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1601). Friendly visitors visited the homes of widows or injured war veterans and provided tangible aid such as food, household items, and clothing (Day, 2009). Over time, the Charity Organizing movement sought to become "scientific" in their practice and systematically developed casework "principles and guidelines on performing work" (Day, 2009). Charity Organizing social workers were opposed to workers' labor strikes (Straussner & Phillips, 1988). Strikers were not eligible to receive outdoor relief from Charity Organizing Societies. Straussner and Phillips cite a passage taken from the New York Association of the Poor's publication from 1883 which states that strikers were "neither entitled to sympathy nor aid" (1988, p. 108). Settlement House workers aligned themselves with social justice and with mitigating the conditions that cause poverty. Settlement houses opened in many major cities in the U.S. around the turn of the twentieth century. Settlement House workers often lived 'alongside the poor' to galvanize genuine solidarity (Day, 2009). They would later go on to support union efforts.

Early Twentieth Century

Progressive Era social workers, particularly Settlement House workers, began to support labor organizing as part of their social justice agenda. Jane Addams and Lillian Wald helped develop the National Women's Trade Union League and took part in other worker organizing efforts. Settlement house workers fought for labor legislation and viewed the creation of labor unions as integral to improving the lives of working-class people (Reisch, 2009). Bertha Reynolds encouraged social workers to join unions and agitated for worker's rights (Kaplan, 2002). During this time social workers also took on a new, but short-lived, role in industry shops.

Management hired “welfare workers” to assist rank and file laborers with socioeconomic needs. These early industrial social workers brokered services, supplied resources, and provided other supports. They also completed duties similar to a modern human resource professional (Straussner & Phillips, 1988). Employers found that their service was valuable in maintaining workforce productivity, and by 1919, 30% of the nation’s largest companies had at least one social worker on staff (Straussner & Phillips, 1988). This may have structurally influenced these social workers against unionization, since they worked on behalf of the industries, perhaps compensating for their lack of pay and poor labor conditions with external resources that could prevent conditions that might lead to a strike.

The Triangle Factory Fire in New York City in 1911 resulted in the horrific deaths of 146 (mostly) women working in a factory, and further reinforced social work’s commitment to workers’ rights. Frances Perkins, a 31-year-old social worker, was having tea in Greenwich with friends and heard loud noises coming from the factory. She ran over to help and then witnessed one of the largest and most gruesome workplace tragedies in the nation’s history. Perkins was incensed by the conditions that led to the deaths of so many workers. Perkins and many others railed against the company’s policy to lock workers into the factory. Management defended this policy by stating that it prevented theft and unauthorized breaks (OSHA, 2011), however, those locked doors prevented 146 workers from escaping the fire. Victims were left with two choices, either jump to their certain death from a 10-story building or succumb to the flames. Witnessing this horrific tragedy led to the transformation of Perkins from a well to do socialite ‘do gooder’ to a fierce and powerful labor activist (Brooks, 2015).

As the Great Depression took hold, workers faced high unemployment levels, which diluted union membership power. Ernest McKinney, a radical social worker and labor supporter,

began to organize the unemployed in Pittsburgh under the Unemployed Citizens League (Twiss, 2004). McKinney was notable in his effort to organize across racial lines, which had been previously uncommon (Twiss, 2004). Black union workers found themselves caught in the intersection (Crenshaw, 1999) of race and class which excluded them from most union membership. Unemployment Leagues became widespread across the country. The leagues fought for cash assistance and assisted unemployed workers with tangible needs such as food and utilities, all while fighting for systemic change (Twiss, 2004).

Across the 1930s, even with union membership in decline overall, social workers became more closely aligned with organized labor ideals than in previous decades. Social workers were unionized in the public sector and belonged to six different unions representing government workers. It is unclear how many social workers belonged to these unions, but the unions were credited for improvements in social workers' salaries (Straussner & Phillips, 1988). Social workers in the New Deal era were substantial contributors to the labor movement and the legislation created during this time, all as part of government-sponsored and federally employed, organized labor operations.

Mid-to-Late Twentieth Century

Social work's influence on and participation in the labor movement began to decline after World War II. The Settlement House movement had dissipated, and casework became the primary activity of social workers. Child welfare workers, influenced by their predecessors, resembled charity society organizers, and subscribed to an individualistic view of poverty. Moreover, the psychoanalytic work of Freud and others formed a new knowledge path for the profession. The alignment of social work with the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, and an increased focus on social problems such as poverty and child welfare, shifted the profession

toward non-clinical work (Scanlon & Harding, 2005). In the 1970s and 80s, clinical licensure became a focal point in NASW's organizing and advocacy platform, as it remains today (Scanlon & Harding, 2005).

Social Workers and Labor Organizing in the Twenty-First Century

It is difficult to estimate the number of unionized social workers in the United States. The BLS groups social workers with other professions (BLS; 2019, Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006). Social workers in the twenty-first century are mostly absent from labor organizing (Reisch, 2009). This trend is illustrated by the small number of specific social work unions. Social work's professional benchmarks and norms do little to mitigate minimum wage concerns and do not inherently imply engagement with unionization (Reisch, 2009). Over the last several decades, meanwhile, social work has focused its advocacy on anti-poverty programming (Reisch, 2009; Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006).

Social work and labor unions have cooperated with one another, however, in modern times. During the mid-1980s, a school of social work and a labor union in New York City partnered to provide services to union members who were low-paid home health workers. Most of these workers lived under or near the poverty line, many with stress-related illnesses. The school of social work established a "member assistance program" that assisted workers with social service support. During this time, data was collected from union members regarding the challenges they faced meeting basic needs. This information was subsequently used in a successful collective bargaining effort to increase wages and benefits for its membership (Donovan, et. al., 1993). In California, the Service Employees International Union effectively lobbied for higher wages, smaller caseloads, and better working conditions (Scanlon & Harding,

2005). Research also suggests that union membership is more effective than professional organizations in lobbying for political reasons (Scanlon & Harding, 2005).

Social workers in New York City are currently (as of August 2021) advocating alongside other social service providers for a path to unionize 125,000 social service workers. A bill aimed at nonprofits that receive money from the city would require "laborpeace" agreements that essentially preclude the organizations from anti-union efforts (Blau, 2021). This organizing has come in part as a response to the low wages earned by nonprofit employees when compared to their unionized, city-employed peers. One advocate pointed to a job advertisement that a nonprofit had circulated: The organization required an MSW candidate for a position that only paid $35,000 per year in New York City, where cost of living is the highest in the United States (Blau, 2021). If the bill passes, it will provide thousands of social workers an opportunity to unionize collectively among many nonprofit organizations (Blau, 2021). Many nonprofit organizations, however, have rallied against the bill, arguing that they do not have money to enter into collective bargaining agreements that would pay workers higher wages.

Social Work Licensure

Since the turn of the twentieth century, social workers have been focused on becoming credentialed professionals. Social work's roots of vocational style (fieldwork) education, similar to the type of education provided to union apprentices, was eschewed for a more traditional classroom pedagogy (Lubove, 1965). This trend toward clinical licensure sheds light on how they perceive themselves as workers. In 1971, the NASW voted to pursue licensure to ensure better and more consistent quality of service provision. This would also, presumably, bolster wages by providing a space for social work in private clinical practice (Gray, 1990; Swagler & Harris, 1977). Swagler and Harris (1977) predicted that enabling social workers to enter private

practice, which primarily serves middle- and upper-income populations, could create a workforce vacuum in programs that serve poor people.

The NASW was successful at advocating for clinical licensure, and it is available for social workers in all 50 U.S. states (NASW.org, n.d.). Some historians of social work described this shift as pivotal: "the preoccupation with psychological and therapeutic issues transformed the profession from one oriented to social action to one oriented to personal change and growth" (Specht & Courtney, 1994, as cited by Scanlon, 1999, p. 2). Licensure and specialization hastened social work's drift from its social action roots (Vinton & White, 1995).

Social Workers' Attitudes Toward Unionization

Social work's ambivalence toward unionization could stem from the fact that social workers do not see the potential value of union organizing (Farr, 2021). Some worry about the risks that striking could bring to clients. This dual focus—both on the workers themselves and their clients—is unique to the helping professions and distinguishes them from both traditional white-collar workers and union workers (Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006).

White collar workers tend to have different attitudes toward unions than those of traditional blue-collar trades (Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006). White collar workers unionize to "achieve greater participation in the workplace" as well as to improve their wages and working conditions (Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006, p. 299). However, Rosenberg and Rosenberg go on to say that social workers are likely more concerned with the quality of their work rather than their salaries (2005). A 2020 study found that workers have positive attitudes toward unions when they believe that the union is acting in the interest of a "common good" (Fiorito & Padavic). Although this study was not specific to social workers, it may be suggestive of their attitudes toward unionization and how it can influence their clients.

Social Workers' Perceptions of Unionization

Social workers tend to perceive some utility in collectively bargaining to improve the lives of their clients, thus alleviating the latter half of the concern expressed above (La Rose, 2016). But many social workers do not have knowledge of how the collective bargaining process functions. (Reisch, 2009; Scanlon & Harding, 2005). A study of MSW and BSW level workers who belonged to a large private sector union in New York City found that social workers had positive ideological views of unionization and felt connected to the union's cause. Yet they were much less likely to perceive the union as having an impact on their wages and working conditions (Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006). This study also found that master's level social workers and white social workers were less likely to have positive perceptions of their unions, whereas minority and older social workers were more likely to have positive perceptions of their unions (Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006).

More than 80% of social workers in the United States identify as women (BLS, 2021). This trend has been consistent since the emergence of the profession. Women have traditionally been paid less and are much less likely to belong to labor unions than men (Mishel, 2021). It is not coincidental that the wages in a female-dominated profession are lower in comparison to professions occupied primarily by men. Political economy theory posits that the institutions of labor are gendered, with a history of patriarchy, discrimination, and dismissiveness of women workers (Walker, 2020). Women, who were locked out of many male-dominated unions, may not perceive them as allies and advocates for their cause.

Gaps in Literature

A considerable amount of research was done on labor organizing in the early 1980s, but the pace of scholarly literature on this topic has seen a sharp decrease since. This may be due to

the decline of unions, for the reasons mentioned above (Karger, 1985, Farmer & Noonan, 2019; Reisch, 2009). The rise of neoliberalism and social work professionalization may have also negatively influenced the study of labor unions in social work (Lubove, 1965; Reisch, 2009; Straussner & Phillips, 1988).

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study examined the attitudes, experiences, and perceptions that social workers have toward unionization. A qualitative design was employed, collecting data through interviews with social workers using a semi-structured guide. Qualitative data was then examined for common understandings that social workers have toward labor organizing and unions. Qualitative designs are helpful when studying an under-explored phenomenon because they elicit a more comprehensive understanding of the topic (Rubin & Babbie, 2016). Open-ended questions allow respondents to give answers that provide more qualitative detail and depth than closed questions (Dillman, et al, 2014). The variables in this study include the respondents' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences with unionization as well as their demographic variables. As a qualitative, exploratory study, a hypothesis was not appropriate.

Qualitatively Exploring Experiences

Phenomenology, or the study of lived experiences and the meaning that people give to them, provides a lens for analyzing a person's experiences. Transcendental phenomenology challenges researchers to divorce their own perceptions from their analysis of data collection (Padgett, 2016). Data are grouped by common findings in lived experiences, where researchers look for an "essential invariant structure, or essence" (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 80). With roots in philosophy, psychology, and education, phenomenology attempts to extract the clearest data that accurately capture the meaning of what the participant has shared during the interviews.

Qualitatively Exploring Perceptions

Qualitative research (Munhall, 2008) is specifically concerned with individuals' perceptions as a means to interpret their experiences. Individuals share their perceptions in a variety of ways: storytelling, narratives, and behaviors regarding a particular phenomenon

(Munhall, 2008). Perceptions are usually measured by qualitative methods such as interviewing, focus groups, and observations (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In the case of qualitative research studies, perception also includes the researcher. The researcher's perceptions of what the respondent reports may alter their findings (Munhall, 2008). It is imperative for the researcher to examine their internal biases, perceptions, and attitudes before embarking on qualitative inquiry. Bracketing, or separating personal attitudes and perceptions from the information being collected, is required to prevent contamination of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Munhall, 2008).

Qualitatively Exploring Attitudes

Attitudes can be measured in a variety of ways (Simonson & Maushak, 2001). Self-reports allow respondents to give direct feedback about their attitudes through interviews, focus groups, or surveys. Some common means of attaining this information include:

1. Interviews: These explore attitudes of individuals and provide more in-depth data than surveys or focus groups (Grossoehme, 2014). However, the interviewer, particularly if they have bias on a certain topic, can influence the answers of the respondent (Simonson & Maushak, 2001).
2. Reports of others: These describe situations where collateral contacts give information about others.
3. Records: Here, documentation such as journals, case notes, or written reports might be reviewed. Records can also take the form of video or other media.
4. Observations: In this instance, the researcher observes a person (or people) in their usual setting for a period of time.

Qualitative Design

This qualitative study employed elements from both grounded and phenomenological inquiry. Qualitative sampling, questioning, and interviewing relied on the phenomenological approach of inquiring about workers' lived experiences of unionizing as well as their perceptions and attitudes of collective bargaining (Padgett, 2016). Phenomenological inquiry can be defined simply as the "search for meaning" (Grossoehme, 2014). The early-twentieth-century work of philosophers Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger underpin this mode of analysis. During this period in philosophical inquiry, phenomenological study was a bedrock of the discipline. Phenomenological inquiry is predicated on six assumptions (Grossoehme, 2014):

1. Meaning and knowing are constructs of an individual's reality, which is always changing.
2. The researcher is a part of what is being studied and their values, attitudes, and perceptions are part of the investigative process.
3. There is some bias in all research, and this bias should be addressed early in the process.
4. Research respondents and the investigator are partners in the qualitative process.
5. The words and language people use to describe their experiences are important.
6. Attitudes and perceptions of the same phenomenon are different for everyone.

Grounded theory is an approach developed by Glaser and Strass in *Awareness of Dying* (1965), their seminal qualitative study with terminally ill patients (Chun Tie, et al., 2019). At the time, quantitative research was regarded as the only research approach that could result in theoretical inquiry. Grounded theory challenged that notion, with an inductive approach to theory development (Chun Tie, et. al., 2019). For the purposes of this study, elements from grounded

theory will guide the coding and analysis process— specifically, its iterative and recursive methodology.

Basic Procedures

The data collection procedure consisted of individual, semi-structured interviews. Respondents were given the opportunity to sign up to be interviewed through the completion of a webform. This webform enabled the respondents to give consent to participate in the study and collected background information from the respondents.

Phenomenological inquiry techniques were used to inform qualitative question formulation and interview style, which required probing and allowed participants to give detailed information on their attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of unionization. Phenomenological inquiry examines the lived experience as well as environmental context and perceptions of those lived experiences (Padgett, 2016).

The data analysis procedure employed a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory guided how the data was coded using open/initial, axial, and focused coding strategies, and the data was subsequently analyzed to identify common threads among respondents (Padgett, 2016). Qualitative review and analysis of interview transcripts was conducted using NVivo 12. These three stages of coding were designed to aid in the development of a final list of codes which were used to capture important themes and shared meanings of unionization among participants.

Justification of the Study Design

Although the exploration of union attitudes, perceptions, and experiences is not entirely new, exploration of this phenomenon relative to social workers has not been addressed in the current body of literature. This lack of evidence necessitated an exploratory study. As noted by

Creswell & Clark (2018), qualitative approaches are an effective way to learn about unexplored phenomena.

Qualitative inquiry can capture a depth in the data that quantitative research cannot (Padgett, 2016). Interviews were conducted until data reached a point of saturation, or when no new codes or themes were emerging from new cases of data. In other words, saturation occurs when the same themes and/or concepts begin to arise from continued interviewing.

Sampling

A non-theoretical, purposive sampling strategy (Rubin & Babbie, 2016) was employed to recruit appropriate respondents for the study; purposive sampling is common in phenomenological inquiry. Social workers were recruited to participate in the study. Eligibility for participation was defined as social workers who possess a CSWE-accredited bachelor's or master's level social work degree and who were employed/self-employed as a social worker. It was initially estimated that 15-20 interviews would be conducted. The final count of interviews was 15.

Several professional associations and social media professional groups were contacted about approaching study participants; this represented the sampling frame. The approved groups are listed below. Please see Appendix B for screenshots of the approvals. Each of these groups was approached and asked for permission to share the webform with their respective networks.

- Facebook Group: Social Work and the Social Worker - (approval screenshot)
- National Rural Social Work Caucus - (approval email)
- Facebook Group: Network for MSW and LMSW Social Work - (approval screenshot)
- Facebook Group: Westmoreland County Community College Social Work - (approval email)

- Facebook Group: Social Workers of Lancaster County - (approval screenshot)
- Facebook Group: School Social Workers and Mental Health Providers - (approval screenshot)
- Facebook Group: The Social Work Toolbox Social Work - (approval screenshot)
- Facebook Group: Social work student advice - (approval screenshot)
- Reddit: Social Workers - (approval screenshot)

These organizations represent a varied population of workers and were chosen to increase the likelihood of a diverse sample population. Other social work organizations were contacted both on Facebook and via email/phone but did not respond as of the time of this writing. Membership associations may be cost prohibitive or unattractive to social workers, particularly those who are working for low wages and cannot afford the yearly dues which cost between $158 and $236, depending on the social worker's educational attainment (BSW vs. MSW) (NASW, 2021). Many professionals use social media to connect with one another due to its low-barrier access, which is why social media groups were included in the recruitment strategy (Ventola, 2014).

Recruitment Strategy

Respondents were recruited with posts to ten different social media pages. See Appendix D for the precise messaging that was sent out to potential study participants. Respondents were recruited into the study using a Qualtrics web survey form (see Appendix E for the link to this form). This method was selected for its efficiency in gathering both consent and data from those interested in participating. Interested participants completed the webform to confirm their eligibility for the study as well as provide consent to participate. This webform also captured demographic variables that provided an overarching profile of the study participants. The

enrollment period lasted until saturation was reached, meaning that respondents were recruited until no new themes or codes emerged from the interview transcripts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews were scheduled on a rolling basis as webforms were completed. The 15 who were chosen to participate received an email request to schedule an interview time convenient for the respondent. All respondents who participated were entered for a chance to win a $25 Amazon gift card.

In sum, the recruitment strategy employed the following steps:

1. An initial "ask" email/Facebook posting (see appendix D) was emailed out to the appropriate listserv (as in the case of the Rural Social Work Caucus) and/or posted to the Facebook group.
2. Interested participants completed a Qualtrics webform prompting them to complete the consent for participation in the study. This webform captured consent, background, and demographic variables as well as contact information needed to set up an interview.
3. As participants completed the form, the researcher contacted the interested and eligible respondents to set up their interviews.
4. This process was continued until saturation was reached via the interview process and data analysis.

Setting for Data Collection

The study took place completely online, allowing for geographical diversity in responses from social workers. This was notable, because the research was being conducted in Pittsburgh, PA; a region with a union density of 15%, significantly higher than the national average of 10% (University of Pittsburgh Center for Social and Urban Research, 2019). This increased union presence could have an impact on union attitudes and perceptions, so wider geographical

participation was ideal. Upon reviewing the interviews, multiple states were represented but just over half or the respondents (8 of 15) were from Pennsylvania. None were from Pittsburgh.

Zoom® conferencing was used to conduct interviews. Zoom® conferencing provided the researcher with some specific advantages. First, Zoom® allowed participation from anywhere that a respondent was most comfortable conducting the interview. Video conferencing could be done from a phone, tablet, or PC, which allowed the participant a lot of flexibility in how they chose to participate. In addition, Zoom® records and transcribes interviews. This automatic transcription was more efficacious than hand transcription. One limitation was that automatic transcribing is not always completely accurate, so cross-referencing with the videos was helpful. Once the interview was complete, the researcher reviewed transcripts in detail after the interviews were recorded and carefully removed all the identifying data.

Data Collection

Qualitative data was collected by interviewing respondents using a semi-structured interview guide. A flexible interview guide was used to assist in mitigating researcher bias during the interview process and also provided the opportunity to ask follow-up or probing questions (Padgett, 2016). The interview questions were crafted to elicit a rich understanding of respondents' attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of unionization. See Appendix C for a listing of the interview questions.

The background and demographic information collected is listed below. Demographic and background data was collected on the initial Qualtrics webform survey that respondents completed to express interest in study participation. Background and demographic data of interview participants was disaggregated and presented in the final iteration of the study.

- Gender [self-describe] (Background/Demographic data)

- Educational level [BSW, MSW] (Background/Demographic data)
- Age [numeric entry] (Background/Demographic data)
- Current state of residence [Self Describe] (Background/Demographic data)
- Are you a member of a union? [yes, currently; no, formerly; no, never] (experiences).
- How long (in years) have you been at your place of employment? [Numeric Entry] (experiences)
- Area of Practice [see below for multi-select choices] (experiences). List was generated from a national workforce study commissioned by the Council on Social Work Education (Salsberg, et. al., 2017).
    - Social Assistance: Individual and family services
    - Community food and housing and emergency services
    - Vocational rehabilitation services
    - Child day care services
    - Administration of human resource programs
    - Justice, public order, and safety activities
    - Executive offices and legislative bodies
    - Medical Hospitals
    - Outpatient care centers
    - Residential care facilities, except skilled nursing facilities
    - Nursing care facilities (skilled nursing facilities)
    - Home health care services
    - Other health care services
    - Offices of physicians

- Education Elementary and secondary schools
- Colleges, universities, and professional schools, including junior colleges
- Service Civic, social, advocacy organizations, and grant-making and giving services
- Other, Please Describe

Data Analysis

Grounded theory guided the data analysis procedures for this study. Grounded theory presents a three-step approach to coding data: initial or open coding, axial coding, and focused coding (Chun Tie, 2019). Initial coding is the process by which similar data is "coded" into categories for further inquiry. Initial coding used the participants' language as much as possible, similar to the process that phenomenological inquiry requires, a process known as in vivo coding (Padgett, 2016). Axial coding was completed after initial coding, with the goal of identifying relationships among the categories that were developed during the initial coding. Focused coding followed axial coding, with the purpose of completing a final code list (Chun Tie, 2019; DeCarlo, 2018). An iterative three-step process of reading the transcripts, reviewing the findings, and then writing up the findings, was therefore repeated several times, and five themes and multiple subthemes emerged.

Memo writing is a process in which the researcher writes "notes" to reflect on the examination of the data. Memos can look like "theoretical notes" that explain or detail the process of data analysis. It is also a way to permit the researcher to reflect on any feelings that may come up during data collection and analysis (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Some memoing was done in NVivo, but that was not found to be very helpful. Instead, paper (no identifying data) spreadsheets were used to make notes and to mark patterns that were emerging from respondents. Using

spreadsheets allowed the researcher to make insights visually about patterns that emerged through the data. For example, when analyzing social workers' interest in joining a union, a spreadsheet was used to mark who was willing to join a union and who was not. Another column was used to identify individual incongruence between perceptions and experiences. This process was repeated for several interview questions.

Efforts were made to mitigate bias during data analysis. An objective interrater was sought out to review four randomly selected transcripts to establish reliability in the findings (Rubin & Babbie, 2016). Four transcripts (25%) were chosen to meet the guidelines proposed by Lombard (2002). This approach was less time consuming and required less resources than a full interrater review. An independent intercoder with professional research assistance (M.A.) reviewed four (deidentified) transcripts from the interviews. They were provided with the codebook and a brief explanation of each code. They were then asked to code transcripts using the provided codebook. The interrater was also invited to create new codes if deemed necessary. The intercoder was able to code 87% of the transcripts using the researcher's codebook. The interrater did not identify any new codes, but did suggest the merging of two codes, combining "union voices" with "advocate for themselves."

The researcher also used bracketing to mitigate the subjectivity. Bracketing is an ongoing process whereby the researcher continuously becomes aware of their own perceptions and attitudes toward a phenomenon. This process is often used in phenomenological studies, to ensure that the participants' responses and meanings are being captured accurately. The researcher's opinions, beliefs, and experiences are "set aside" to allow the researcher to conduct data collection and analysis more objectively (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

The process for coding and developing themes from the interviews consisted of the following steps (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Grossoehme, 2014; (Padgett, 2016):

1. Reviewed the transcripts carefully for errors, removed names and replaced with pseudonyms, and made corrections as needed. Clarified ambiguity in the language of the transcript with respondents.
2. Uploaded the interview transcripts from Zoom® using NVivo 12 software.
3. Read and listened to each transcript to get a sense of the entire data set.
4. Began initial open coding and memo writing. Coded using grounded theory methodology, in this instance, was an inductive process. Coding data began the analysis and required the categorization of data based on patterns that emerged. Inductive coding used the participants' language to the greatest extent possible.
5. Used axial coding to identify connections among codes following the completion of initial coding.
6. Used focused coding following the completion of axial coding. Focused coding required the researcher to review the data and update codes until a final code list was completed. This process was completed three times until the final list emerged.
7. An independent intercoder with professional research assistance (M.A.) reviewed four, randomly selected, deidentified transcripts from the interviews. The intercoder was able to code 87% of the transcripts using the researcher's codebook, but did suggest the merging of two codes, "union voices" and "advocate for themselves."
8. Once coding was complete, created thematic statements to capture common "meanings" of the final code list. These thematic statements were supported with verbatim excerpts from the transcript.

Reflexivity Statement

My beliefs about union membership are influenced by my own attitudes, perceptions, and life experiences. I am a proponent of unions because I believe they increase the quality of life for workers and give them some control over their own working conditions. I have experienced much higher wages in my union position in comparison to similar non-union jobs that I have or had. My wife's union health insurance is a benefit for our family. I grew up in a "working poor" household in an old mill town near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. My parents worked unpredictably at a string of low-paying jobs as I was growing up, and it was difficult for everyone in the home. I worked low-quality jobs as a young adult, with no recourse for employment grievance whatsoever. Workers need protection from oppressive capitalists and the government that enables their behavior.

I know that my experience is not the case for all workers, and especially workers of color. I recognize my privilege as a white person, and I acknowledge the shamefully racist history of labor unions, as demonstrated by the treatment and exclusion of people of color from their membership. Moreover, I recognize the challenges that people of color face in the workforce, and that a racial wage gap persists in 2022. All of this has galvanized my support for unions. Given this reality, it is critically important that I separate my personal experiences, perceptions, and attitudes from my research. I am writing a dissertation rather than an advocacy piece and my goal in completing this study is to genuinely answer my research questions.

Consent and Confidentiality

Ensuring confidentiality is critical to a successful research study. The researcher took careful steps to keep all information confidential. Interviews were conducted using secure Zoom® video conferencing software. Only one interview was collected at a time, so there was

no communication or information sharing among participants. The researcher held the Zoom interviews from a secure home office. The interviews were recorded, and the interviewees were informed of this prior to participation. The consent form contained language detailing this procedure to ensure transparency from the beginning.

All records, including transcripts, memos, and NVivo files are stored in a locked office on a password-protected computer and will be held for three years as required by the Millersville University Institutional Review Board. Participants were asked to consent to the study and were provided with an electronic copy of their consent form that appeared automatically when they completed the form. Participants were provided with the opportunity to opt out of the study at any time.

Chapter 4: Findings

Turning Codes into Findings

Identifying themes in the data required an iterative coding process that was completed in many stages. First, a read through was done while listening to the interviews to get an initial impression of the data. No coding was done in this step, but notes were made through the process. The second round of coding was completed using an open approach; no preformed codes were created. Because the author has a proclivity to support unions, open coding guided by grounded theory was done to mitigate the bias that preformed categories can cause. Open coding turned out to be an effective approach to analyzing the data and the researcher was surprised at what was revealed in the interviews. Using preformed codes may have prevented the discovery of unexpected findings, because it is probably tempting for researchers to 'make the data fit' within an existing code.

The third step was to go through the transcripts again and code excerpts that may have been missed on the first run. During the next step, axial coding was conducted to identify connections among the codes, then they were combined with similar codes. After axial coding was complete, an interrater reviewed four (deidentified) transcripts using the codebook. Next, transcripts were coded again using the codes derived from the previous processes to ensure that the transcripts could all be coded using the codebook. It was identified that there were more codes needed. This process happened three times. After three rounds of focused coding, the entire transcript was coded successfully. The final code list was now complete, and analysis was ready to begin.

Although grounded theory informed the data analysis process, phenomenological theory was applied in how the codes were named and how these findings are presented, using the respondents' words as much as possible. Personal experiences were brought up in every interview,

and hearing these experiences provided an understanding of respondents' perceptions and attitudes towards unions, while providing a window to learn about the experiences of union membership. This proved to be a successful technique because the respondents shared rich data and powerful statements in their interviews. Using their words whenever possible not only ensured the preservation of the respondents' message, it also led to a stronger set of findings because they are underpinned by respondents' lived experiences.

Memo writing is essential when conducting qualitative research, as it helps the researcher make sense of the data, as well as to organize thoughts the researcher has about the data and to also reflect on any potential biases they have towards their findings. The researcher completed some memoing in NVivo, but that did not prove to be very helpful. Instead, written spreadsheets helped to make sense of the data. All information that was printed was deidentified. The spreadsheets helped to identify patterns in the data visually. For example, when analyzing social workers' interest in joining a union a spreadsheet was used to mark who were willing to join a union and who were not, then the researcher recorded individual incongruence between perceptions and experiences, etc. This process was repeated for several interview questions to get a more holistic picture of the findings. The spreadsheets allowed the findings and demographic characteristics to form a collective picture of the data.

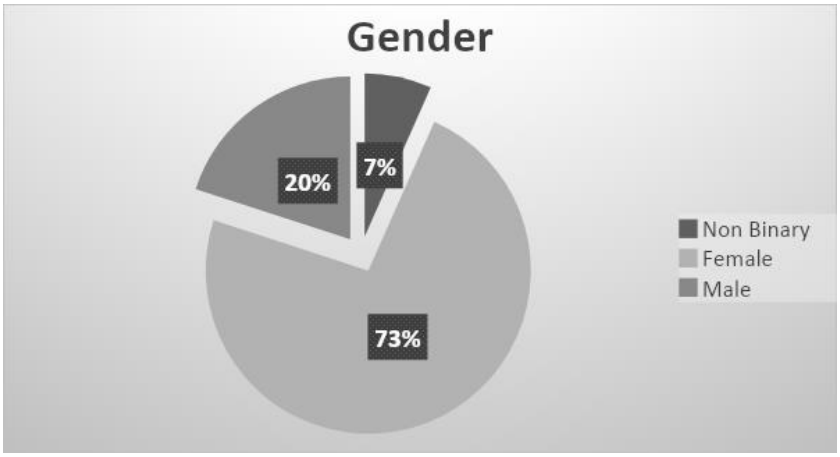
Background Information

Fifteen social workers in total were interviewed for this study (n=15). Although the sample size was small, there was diversity in the geographical locations, job positions, and length of tenure represented within the group. There were similarities in area of practice; nine of 15 (60%) worked in a role related to health care. Ten of 15 (66%) had past or current union membership. Table 4.1 provides a complete overview of the respondents' demographic

information. The social workers interviewed for this study had a median age of 34. This is younger than the median age, 43, of social workers nationwide (U.S. BLS, 2022)**.** Eleven of the respondents were women (73%), which aligns with the gender makeup of social workers nationally (Salsberg et al., 2017), one (7%) was nonbinary, and three (20%) were male. See Figure 4.1 for a breakdown of gender.

Figure 4.1

Gender of respondents



Most of the respondents had a master's degree in social work (MSW); two respondents held just a bachelor's in social work (BSW). This study was conducted in Pennsylvania, and just over half (8) of the respondents were Pennsylvanians. The primary reason for the large number of Pennsylvanians in the sample is that five respondents who signed up found the study on the Lancaster County Social Workers Facebook group, which is made up of Pennsylvania social workers. The other states represented were California, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, New York, and Oregon. Although most of the social workers interviewed were healthcare workers, they practiced in several different positions and settings: nursing centers, home health care, outpatient clinics, addiction centers, and governmental agencies. Three other respondents were county child welfare workers, practicing in family services and/or child welfare. One respondent was a school

social worker, and another was a residential treatment center social worker. All respondents practiced at the micro level. Nine of the fifteen (60%) social workers interviewed had been working in their current positions for three years or less. Just two, (13%) of the respondents had a ten year or longer tenure in their present role. See Figure 4.2 for a visualization of the respondents' practice settings and Figure 4.3 for worker tenure.

Figure 4.2

Practice Settings of Respondents

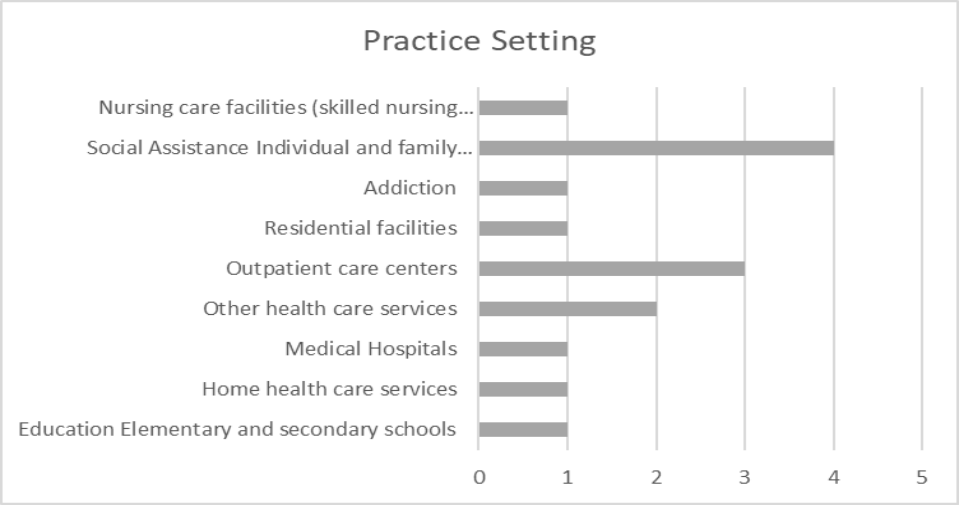


Figure 4.3

Tenure at Current Employer

Table 4.1

Participant General Demographics

Category	Characteristic	N=15	% Of Total
Educational Level	Bachelor of Social Work	2	13%
	Both Bachelor and Master of Social Work	4	26.6%
	Master of Social Work	9	60%
Gender	Non-Binary	1	7%
	Female	11	73.3%
	Male	3	20%
Age	Average 37.7 years		
	Median 34 years		
State of Residence	California	1	7%
	Florida	1	7%
	Illinois	1	7%
	Kansas	1	7%
	New York	1	7%
	Oregon	1	7%
	Pennsylvania	9	60%
Tenure at Current Employer	Less than one year	5	33.3%
	1-3 years	4	26.6%
	4-6 years	1	7%
	7-10 years	2	13.3%
	More than 10 but less than 20 years	2	13.3%
	Not currently employed as a social worker	1	7%
Field of Practice	Education Elementary and secondary schools	1	7%
	Home health care services	1	7%
	Medical Hospitals	1	7%
	Retired health care social worker	1	7%
	Other health care services	1	7%
	Outpatient care centers	3	20%
	Residential facilities	1	7%
	Addiction	1	7%
	Social Assistance Individual and family services	4	26.6%
	Nursing care facilities (skilled nursing facilities)	1	7%

Attitudes, Perceptions, and Experiences

Attitudes are formed by experiences with people and phenomena and refer to how individuals 'feel' about them. More than simply entrenched beliefs, attitudes are shaped by both experiences and feelings, and manifest in different variations and intensities (Olson & Stone, 2005; Pickens, 2005). Because actions are guided by internal feelings about a situation, attitudes are capable of influencing behavior (Olson & Stone, 2005). Attitudes were captured from participants by examining the transcripts for feeling words/phrases and initial thoughts.

In addition to asking how respondents *feel* to collect attitudes, perceptions were gathered from participants by asking how they *thought* about different union topics. Exploring the perceptions social workers have with collective bargaining helps examine their understandings of unionization. Perception and experience theory, as outlined above, are crucial here (Pickens, 2005). A full-time worker is on the job 2,000 hours per year. This time equates to experiences, and over years and years they help to shape a person's identity. Respondents in this study shared unique experiences they had as union members. These *insiders* provided key insights about the differing realities of union membership.

Attitudes, perceptions, and experiences varied widely among respondents. Experiences, perceptions, and attitudes, of course, do not exist in a vacuum, but interact with and influence one another. This interconnected relationship contributes to the contrasting, sometimes contradictory understandings of unions that respondents share in this study.

Initial Thoughts on Unions

During the interview, each participant was first asked the question: "What first comes to mind when thinking of unions?" Eliciting the initial thought promotes a visceral response that

can indicate both perceptions and attitudes. Table 4.2[1] shows patterns that are present among the responses. Concepts such as protection, support, and the preservation of workers' rights were most often mentioned. Six respondents specifically mentioned "protection" in their initial thoughts. Twelve of fifteen respondents shared either positive associations with labor organizing or benefits that they think unions provide. No respondent shared a negative response about labor organizing. Table 4.2 lists the individual responses to this question, paired with the practice setting of each respondent.

Table 4.2

Initial Thoughts

Participant	Practice Setting	First thought when hearing 'labor union'
RTX	Social Assistance Individual and family services	"I've never belonged to one, but I understand the basic concept of it, and I think that it's something that's lacking in our country."
RZR	Retired health care social worker	"An alliance with other workers to, you know, have fair employment and also to have recourse and backup if there's difficulty with management."
XRT	Medical hospitals/Outpatient care center	"Definitely protecting workers rights."
RRK	Home health services	"I think fair pay is what I think when you hear union."
ZZT	Outpatient care centers	"Employee protections, being able to advocate for employees, and just, you know, better working conditions for people."
LZZ	Other health care services	"I guess excitement for that to be a possibility."

TZY	Social Assistance/Individual and Family services	“An organized group that protects workers’ rights.”
LLK	Early Intervention-Supervisor	“I would say rules … and I hate to say this, but discipline, like it's like protection if you're being disciplined.”
TMI	Social Assistance Individual and family services (intern)	“I guess, maybe people going on strike.”
QRP	Private practice therapist	“Dolores Huerta.”
HZS	Social Assistance Individual and family services	“An organization that assists workers.”
QTQ	Outpatient therapist	“I think my grandfather, actually he was an arbitrator.”
KLZ	Social Assistance Individual and family services (child welfare)	“Advocates, Dues, Protector.”
KTR	Addiction	“People who feel as if they need extra support outside of the workplace.”
HTZ	School social worker	“Protecting teachers, that's what I often associate it with.”

[1] ***The identifiers used in the study are a set of 3 random consonants, participants’ initials were not used.**

Identified Themes

After examining all the collected data five major patterns emerged. These themes are explored in the remainder of this chapter.

Theme #1: Social Workers are Vulnerable to Low Wages and Poor Working Conditions

Social workers have a unique identity as “professional helpers.” Most of the respondents in this study reported that “helping” is why they became a social worker. Nine of the 15

respondents brought up poor wages and/or working conditions. Some respondents thought that their employers took advantage of their helping nature. Residential worker (RTX) illustrated this when she said, “I think that it exploits people's passions, especially in certain professions.” Home health worker (RRK) remarked, “I think that there’s a misconception just in general that social workers have always been a giving type people and I don’t think social workers always advocate best for their salary” (RRK).

A non-union hospital social worker (XRT) discussed how employers rationalized poor pay and working conditions. She said, “Oftentimes we are given the short end of the stick and, like, told, well you know, this is a helping profession, like, you signed up for this.” A school social worker (HTZ) recalled poor working conditions at a prior non-union job, but was ultimately concerned for her clients:

> I worked as a school-based therapist and I literally worked in a closet in the basement, and they told me not to close the door because it wasn't ventilated, and like, there was a cockroach … in the closet there with me doing school-based therapy. The problem with that is that it’s not honoring of my client (HTZ)

“Overworked and underpaid,” quipped healthcare worker (XRT). Graduate intern (MMZ) reiterated that response, saying, “Just interning and within the field so far, I can see how much burnout there is and how much how much they’re overworked and underpaid, and I don’t know, I think it’s bad.” Union healthcare worker (HZS) shared that she experienced “abuse and neglect from the upper management.” A mental health worker in California reported that their former employer would not grant accommodations for their disability: “My employer did not want to give me accommodations.” They also recalled that their employer wanted them to work more

hours than their doctor permitted. Echoing their boss they said, “You have to come back full time, even though your doctor says you have to work part time.” (QRP)

Some respondents stated that they thought they were underpaid for the level of work and/or education expected of them. Health care worker (LZZ) reported that her employer denied her a raise after she achieved clinical licensure. She said, “I recently got my clinical licensure about a year and a half ago, and with that I was expecting a wage increase, and I didn't get that.” A county child welfare worker in Pennsylvania, (KLZ) said, “In this profession, the salary is just so low. … I mean, it’s barely livable wages.” Residential social worker (RTX) raised concerns about low wages for a profession with rigorous educational requirements: “The pay that they’re paying… I have my bachelor’s degree. I make more than most of the people there, and if I didn’t have supplemental income, I couldn’t live a comfortable life.” Graduate intern (MMZ) also questioned why social worker pay is so low while the educational and work requirements are rigorous:

> We’re overworked and underpaid… Especially when they are requiring them to have, like, masters, like, currently I’m going for my master’s degree and trying to get license and all this stuff that I have to jump through. It’s kind of ridiculous what they want to pay me. (MMZ)

Theme #2: Unions Protect Workers

Eight respondents (n=15), 53% of those interviewed, brought up that they thought unions could deliver them protections like backup, power, strength, or support. Union veteran of 13 years (HZS) said, “Inside work I feel more protected.” Mental health worker and former union member (QRP), from California, discussed the effect that union support can have on morale as

well as productivity: “When you have employees who are in better health or better supported, you have employees who can do their job better.”

Protection From Employers

Florida health care worker (XRT), says that the union provides “a sense of backup.” A retired healthcare social worker (RZR) exclaimed “Oh, my god, I think, if there is no union membership, we wouldn’t have what we have.” School social worker (HTZ) said that unions protect their members, but at the expense of students: “A lot of times I see it (union) protecting teachers over students.” A Pennsylvania healthcare worker, (LZZ), said that unions provide “the opportunity to have some backing.” Graduate intern (MMZ), said that unions “would help the workers…and give them strength and empower the workforce.” An early intervention supervisor who regularly interacts with the union at her agency (LLK) said she felt like the union supported employees when discussing delicate topics:

> Employees get really flustered really quickly when you’re talking about their employment, obviously, or something that they did that’s kind of against the rules…is always, you know, a very touchy subject, so I feel like the union is really able to assist those employees and advocating for them. (LLK)

Ostensibly, unions exist to balance the unequal distribution of power between workers and employers. Most of those interviewed thought that unions protected social workers and provided them with support in dealing with their employers. County child welfare worker (KLZ) remarked that the power imbalance between workers and management may be bigger in social services than in other types of organizations, “I think it’s important that workers have a say and have a voice, and I do think there is a big disparity between workers and maybe upper management, especially like in social services, even.” Outpatient care worker (RTX) said, “I feel

like in order to advocate for yourselves you can't depend on the people who already have the power to because they're not doing the same job as you." A VA outpatient therapist (QTQ) suggested that unions tip the scales in the favor of the worker, "Kind of provide a counterpoint to like employer power, which, you know, is certainly greater than the work or individual worker." A healthcare social worker (LZZ) thought that collective bargaining was more powerful than individual negotiation: "Having an organization versus a single person definitely has some additional benefits and more power behind that." A Pennsylvania healthcare worker (LZZ) said she thinks the union can provide support and backup to workers:

> The opportunity to have some backing when you're looking at salary, job security. The importance of our role and fields that might not, you know, have a clear understanding of the role of social work and just having someone having an organization to back you up. (LZZ)

Other interviewees discussed the recourse they have when management refuses to follow the union contract or fails to negotiate contracts fairly. Social workers found this backup to be reassuring. A retired health care worker (RZR) said, "An alliance with other workers, to have fair employment and also to have recourse and backup if there's difficulty with management." One social service/healthcare social worker (HZS) felt protected by learning about her rights as a worker from the union that she had not learned elsewhere, "you know, things that you aren't taught as a social worker." A hospital social worker (XRT) remarked that union membership may increase a worker's ability to approach management with issues, "to help you kind of be able to approach your boss in a more kind of productive way and to have, like, a sense of backup." Social service and healthcare worker (HZS) remarked that social workers have a special need for union representation, particularly during difficult conversations with employers:

> As social workers, you know we have a lot of feelings and empathy. We feel things really, really passionately, so I think it's helpful to have somebody there as your advisor. The union as your advisor instead of your adversary, which is the upper management, like they might not be as caring (HZS)

An outpatient care worker (ZZT) said that unions are beneficial because they are effective advocates: "I feel that … being able to better advocate for the employees like as far as you know, like wages healthcare working hours, working conditions … can go ahead and be very beneficial."

Unions Help Social Workers Protect their Identity and Status

Social workers have battled numerous assaults on their identity and professional status from the media, the public, academia, and even untrained social workers working under those auspices. The findings suggest that five (33%) social workers believed that unions could protect their professional identities. A school social worker (HTZ) wondered if a union could improve the image of social workers to the public. She went on to say that social workers do not necessarily have a reputation for being effective at their jobs, since people may be confusing social workers with other types of workers. She thought that having a union might protect social workers' professional identity:

> Social workers, because we are we're already scrutinized, you know, basically, you know, terrible to begin with, like our portrayal is never good, you know, so in some ways, having a union would create a standard, if we're held to a standard…performance standard, you know that we are following, you know, evidence-based practice that we are, you know, falling in line with our code of ethics. ... A lot of times we're confused

> with child welfare workers, etc., so I could see the value (of) unionizing so that way there's a standard and a quality that we are known for. (HTZ)

Enhancing the status of the social work profession was also discussed by several social workers. Some respondents thought that a union could help to increase the profession's visibility. A home health social worker (RRK) remarked, "I think that [unionizing] might make employers nationally, regionally, and locally more aware of the value that social workers play every day." Elevating the status of the social work profession was another goal that some respondents thought a union might help to achieve. A health care social worker (LZZ) discussed this idea:

> I think they could definitely be beneficial in furthering our field and coming up to par with other fields that have had more growth recently. Being in healthcare, I work with a lot of physicians and nurses, and they have a lot of benefits that social work doesn't in many areas, one of them being clinical ladders (LZZ).

Another respondent, a retired social worker (RZR), believed that unions help social workers preserve their standing as professionals. She argued that unions help to preserve social work's standing as professionals:

> I think most of us have a sense of our vocation, we don't do it for money, you know, we do it for our own personal sense of purpose, you know, maybe some people think like they're a sacrificial lamb in service to the world, I don't know, but I think as a professional body of people that unions have been you know, (been) helping to hold that standing.

Unions Protect Wages and Benefits

Wages and salary were mentioned often during the interviews, with eight respondents (n=15) believing that the unions protect wages and benefits for workers. Many said that union

membership increases worker wages. The eight social workers identified varied practice settings and had varying lengths of tenure in the field. Five of the eight had been or are current union members themselves. Former county social worker (QRP) discussed a union-backed pay scheme which they thought ensured that their employer would act fairly:

> My union also made it that we had a very, very fair contract in terms of… how promotions worked, how like promotions and raises worked. I like how the whole structure of everything worked. It was very, very, like, regulated. …You're getting your quarterly raises, you're getting your cost of living raises…like we (the employer) can't pull any hijinks about our raises.

Interestingly, VA outpatient worker (QTQ), who was quite outspoken in his opposition to social worker unions, agreed with the idea that unions are associated with increased wages. When asked to compare his wages to that of non-union social workers, he admitted, "I think they're probably significantly higher." Healthcare worker (HZS) discussed the importance of having backup when working within interdisciplinary teams who do not always understand the role of social work. She thought that a union would help support her salaries and job security:

> The opportunity to have some backing when you're looking at salary, job security. The importance of our role and fields that might not, you know, have a clear understanding of the role of social work and just having someone having an organization to back you up.

Similarly, a home health worker (RRK) mentioned that he thought unions could have prevented national wage immobility. "I like to think that unions would have prevented [the] stagnated wages that we see today sort of across the board, at least that's my perception." A health care social worker (LZZ) responded when asked how she thought social worker wages were impacted by union membership: "Positively. … Having union support in doing some of that background

research to support, you know, wage increases or rate wage reevaluation across the board." When asked how she thought her wages were impacted by union membership, retired county health worker (RZR) remarked, "Absolutely. I don't think you know as a county professional where I would be without a union."

A residential social worker (RTX) considered how a union could impact her job: "I feel like it would turn it more towards benefiting the workers, like either compensation their pay—they could negotiate, they would have a stronger, more solidified approach to asking for things." A graduate level intern (MMZ) said that improving pay and benefits is part of the value of union membership: "The benefits, … obviously improving work environment for pay, and work benefits." A former county child welfare worker (QRP) spoke highly of the fringe benefit package that they received as part of their union employment. When asked about their thoughts on benefits as a union member, they enthusiastically said:

> Amazing, … here's money, … you get some plans like that you can choose from, and you can buy any of them, and basically it costs like nothing. And dental and vision normally, like, when you pay health insurance there's a certain amount, like maybe an employer backs like 75%, 20%, but now, its fully paid for. (QRP)

Alternative Perspectives of Union Protection

An alternative perception of the subtheme protection from employers emerged from three current union members (N=15). They believed that unions protect the lowest performing workers from being subject to corrective action or termination of employment. Although only a few voiced this concern, they did so emotionally, demonstrating strong adverse feelings on the topic. Their responses indicated both negative attitudes and perceptions towards their unions,

evidenced by the respondents' emotional and derogatory responses about their unions and coworkers.

School social worker (HTZ) expressed annoyance about low-performing teachers in her district who, in her opinion, do not serve the best interest of students. She reported that there were no accountability measures in place for employee performance at the school, and that staff took advantage of the situation. She sarcastically said, "When they [the worker] should be cut, like, seriously … I really need to start … being worse at my job because there's times, where I see people who consistently are underperforming but they're maintained because they're part of the union."

Another respondent (QTQ) who opposed unionization for social workers on the whole stated that he did not need union protection, and that only low skilled and/or poorly performing workers need support from unions. A social worker for the Veteran's Administration, he was adamant that unions stifle competition in his workplace, and that high performing workers are dragged down by low performing workers. In an expression of frustration about this, he stated:

> I think they protect the worst employees…We [social workers] just don't need this protection, and I think it really stymies people who want to be stellar individuals. I think that unions are great for protecting, like the people at the bottom, and the people at the top get pulled down by them (QTQ).

A union child welfare worker's (TZY) primary concern was that her workload was higher because low-performing employees were protected by the union. She reported that workers take advantage of union protections to avoid being reprimanded for poor performance and absenteeism, describing instances of egregious behavior such as workers taking gross advantage

of sick leave policies, leaving others to pick up the slack. She described the intractability of the situation:

> You're making everybody else suffer or you can just quit, and we can replace your position, but this particular employee will not quit, and the union is protecting him. Everybody else at the job is suffering because we are getting a lot more cases … It's annoying, it keeps a lot of incompetent people… that my job can't do anything to get rid of them because the union protects them.

Two of the respondents who thought unions "protect low performing workers" also thought that unions protected salaries for these workers. They thought that employers should not base pay raises simply on time in service. Instead, they thought individual workers should earn salaries based on their performance, and that high performing workers should earn more than less productive employees. Both thought that pay should be based on performance rather than seniority and that high performing employees should be paid more than those they perceive as lower performing workers. VA social worker (QTQ) quipped, "I think [being paid according] to the amount of time you've been on a job is absolutely garbage." He went on to say:

> I think about my work for the government, where it's based on, like, these rigid pay scales based on seniority of time, and has nothing to do with our ability, so I think about [how] I'm a step one, which is like the newest … into the role and then, I have a coworker who's a step nine, same job she gets paid like probably $20,000 more than me, and I know for a fact she brings a lot less to the table (QTQ).

A school social worker, (HTZ), complained that salaries were not based on merit or performance. Although she is the school's social worker, her position fell under the teacher's

collective bargaining agreement. She says that her pay raises come as scheduled regardless of performance:

> The problem with that is that there's nothing that's done, based on my merit. So, I follow a teacher scale, you know, a contracted pay scale and there is literally no evaluation, even though I'm evaluated every year that's not incorporated into my pay raise. I literally just move up the steps of the scale (HTZ).

Theme #3: Social Workers Encounter Many Barriers to Unionizing

Diversity of the Profession

Social workers have special barriers to organizing in unions. A primary challenge that social workers in the study cited is the diversity of the profession. Some respondents were concerned that it would be too complicated to organize social workers across so many settings and organizations. One child welfare worker (TZY) said, "I know it's kind of hard because social work isn't really like a black and white job. … It's a lot easier for them [trade unions] because of the way their business is laid out." Early intervention supervisor (LLK) said, "The problem is that there's so many different people from different backgrounds." She went on to say, "It really couldn't be a social worker union because we're all from a different, you know, education backgrounds." A small practice social worker (XRT) also reported that the diversity of practice settings may impede organizing:

> I think since social work is so diverse it might make it more challenging because it's like, I've gone from working in a hospital, to private practice, … then there's also a child welfare, you know, we're in so many different sectors that I don't know exactly what unionizing would look like as a profession as a whole, but I think it would be helpful.

A union child welfare case worker (KLZ) also spoke to turnover challenges as a barrier to recruitment. Her agency, like many other child welfare agencies has very high staff turnover. A constant rotation of new staff made recruitment difficult: “We have extreme turnover so we're constantly getting new workers and just when we can get to them in time to explain everything they're gone.” Another respondent (RRK), who works in home health, discussed his experiences as a worker at the agency that he “loves,” but wishes he were paid more, and he believes that a union could assist in that. His primary concern was that union organizing could cause financial distress to nonprofit organizations with limited resources:

> I’d hate to see a nonprofit organization be forced to close because they couldn’t pay for their employees and then meet their mission, but when I look at it, it is a catch-22. I’d hate to see labor unions run out wonderful private agencies that provide services.

Gaps in Union Knowledge

Half of those interviewed (N=15) cited a personal lack of knowledge regarding unions or thought that their peers needed more education about union topics. The respondents said that misunderstandings about unions make it difficult to organize workers. Healthcare social worker (XRT) thinks that although unions are helpful, people do not really understand them, and that this misunderstanding negatively impacts society’s perception of unions. When asked about the topic of labor unions she said, “I think that they're helpful and I wish there was more, I think they're generally pretty misunderstood and have gotten kind of more of a bad rap.” Health care social worker (LZZ) felt that her peers would benefit from learning more about unions and how they could impact their jobs. She said, “There’s room for a lot of education. To help people understand, you know, the possibilities revolving around unions and social work.”

When retired healthcare worker (RZR) asked what she thought of the union decline, she wondered to herself why participation was so low, and after a couple of seconds said, “maybe people don’t understand, unions, and what they do, and so they don’t sign up.” A residential social worker (RTX) said that there needs to be more education on labor organizing, because he thinks that education can help people to understand the utility of unions and said, “I think it would be really beneficial if there was like, more education on it starting from younger ages. I don’t know that we understood.”

A medical social worker (XRT) indicated that she thinks misinformation is a factor in union decline and said, “so I think kind of seeing that misinformation firsthand and really just seeing it as the numbers decline, then the number of unions decline and it kind of becomes there’s just less opportunity to join even.” A social services case worker (HZS) thinks that unions are on the decline because “workers don’t know they have a choice.” Former union member (ZZT) admitted that he was not very knowledgeable about unions: “To be honest I’m not entirely sure you know how unions are set up in the first place, or how like essentially the construction of them are.” One observation made was that a child welfare worker (KLZ) who was also her agency’s union steward could not recall the full name of her union during the interview

.***Employer-Backed Anti-Union Tactics***

Participants had concerns that employers use anti-union tactics to prevent workers from organizing. A health care worker, (LZZ) thought that employers took some of the blame for union decline, noting that “it might be a lack of understanding and then also some organizational [anti-union] pressure.” One former county child welfare worker (QRP) simply said, “I know union busting still goes on.” Another respondent raised a concern about employer retaliation,

healthcare worker (XRT) was afraid that starting a union could put her job at risk. This risk prevents people from wanting to join unions, she said:

> I think the risks are like having to put yourself out there in order to even start a union, you know, and kind of having to see who's willing to join and that kind of stuff. I think the risks are that employers, I mean, even though it's illegal and they're not supposed to, can become upset by it and try to retaliate or try to you know work around and get other non-union members. (XRT)

Graduate MSW intern (MMZ) said that forming a union could cause friction between employees and management: "I would think it would impact… maybe breed some hostility a little bit." A VA social worker (QTQ) brought up employers relocating to states with weak labor laws to mitigate the risk that their employees will try to unionize. He said, "It's resulting from companies moving to states where the union has limited ability to organize."

Union Representatives are Not Communicative

Union members expect union representatives to keep them informed about both their workplaces and what their union is doing for them. Five social workers (N=15) brought up communication with the union, and four of those five reported problems with their union. Those four reported that their union representatives were not communicative and did not provide information or regular updates, which presented a challenge to unionizing. Effective communication is necessary to navigate multilateral relationships among workers, unions, and employees. Social worker (QTQ) said that after working at the VA for over two months, he still has "no idea what they [the union] do." (KLZ), a county child welfare worker, discussed not receiving regular updates from the union or management. This lack of communication made workers feel like they were not being represented:

> We are supposed to get information from management to be able to like pass down and we're supposed to work closely with our management, but I feel that's not always the case, and then we don't really have any updates and so workers feel like the union doesn't really advocate for them or do anything.

Another respondent, a child welfare worker (TZY), expressed that the union did not provide adequate communication or representation and that there was no clear way to contact a union representative saying, "So, we don't really know, like, there's no contact person so there's no way to, like, if I needed the union to help me with something, it's like I'm emailing a general email." She also reported that the union meetings were not held during convenient times, making it hard for her to attend. Former union worker (ZZT) found communicating with his union representatives difficult because they were so unresponsive, and when he did reach them they usually did not provide much assistance: "Anytime that we would try to get in contact with this steward there was a lack of responsiveness, and it would take several weeks to get some kind of response, which was usually not helpful."

Union healthcare worker (HZS) reported a different experience and felt that the union provided a line of communication between workers and management that would not exist otherwise. She distrusted her employer because, she said, the union shared information from the administrators that was not previously shared with them. She said that the union was able to leverage its authority to ensure workers received important information that they may not learn about otherwise:

> Some things are also brought up that the union found out that the workers, had no knowledge of, so that [the union] was the only way you know. I think there were things

> shared with us that the agency upper management didn't share with us, so I feel like they [the union] were trustworthy versus upper management. (HZS)

Union Dues are Unpopular

Workers' reluctance to pay union dues presents another barrier to building union membership. Several respondents with union experience mentioned union dues; all but one of them had negative perceptions of this requirement. One reason that they were unpopular is a perception that union dues eroded the otherwise higher wages of their paychecks. The other reason cited for opposition to union dues is that unions make political contributions with which the members may not agree. Outpatient VA therapist (QTQ) thought that the political activity conducted with union dues may not represent all the workers' political positions, saying: "I think the mandatory dues are the problem, people are mandated to contribute to or had been mandated to contribute to union dues, which may [be spent to] represent beliefs that they are not in favor of." A medical social worker with union membership experience (ZZT) also expressed concerns that union dollars were being used for political influence. He reported that he and his coworkers felt disconnected from the political advocacy that was funded by their union contributions. He said that the union members should have more of a say regarding how political dollars are spent:

> People really weren't happy about that because there are union dues that were, you know, essentially being used for [political influence] and we want to have a say where that money would go. ... If we would be able to have the option of saying where money could be going, I think, you know, would be a nice thing but that could also be a pipe dream (ZZT).

A few respondents thought that union dues eroded the higher wages negotiated in the collective bargaining agreement, or, conversely, that they could not pay union dues because

salaries were too low. An early intervention supervisor (LLK) said that union members "have to pay into the union … so maybe some of the wages that they do earn may go towards being part of … that union membership." A union child welfare worker (KLZ) was concerned that her colleagues' salary was so low that they are reluctant to give it away to the union, especially when workers do not feel supported by their union. (KLZ) said frustratedly, "Like, if people don't make enough money, then, why would they want to give some of it away to a union that they don't feel is helping them?" Medical social worker (ZZT) also remarked,

> I know, for me, with my experience in being in a union for four years, and my pay was neutral with the union, because any kind of pay increase that I might have gotten the union dues also increased. So, while they were there, like the higher pay was there, it was also almost like taken over by the union and I didn't see any of the extra income because of the having to pay the union dues. (ZZT)

Theme #4: Little Consensus in how Social Workers Respond to Unions

A major theme that emerged was that respondents shared differing, and often contrary, attitudes, perceptions, and experiences with unions. The respondents rarely came to a consensus about any union topic that was discussed.

Varied Union Attitudes

The respondents' attitudes towards unions fell into three groups: those who were uncertain, those with positive attitudes, and a group with negative attitudes (N=15). Two respondents conveyed uncertainty in their union attitudes. Child welfare worker and union member (TZY) responded to the question, "How do you feel about social workers being in unions?" with the answer "I honestly don't know." Addiction professional (KTR) said "Yeah, I don't, I don't have any really strong opinions about them."

Other respondents shared that they had positive attitudes towards unions, (ZZT), an outpatient therapist said that he feels unions can be useful saying, “I feel like that they can be beneficial, I think if they're set up in such a way that it actually benefits us to give us a voice.” Retired union member (RZR) said that she felt less endangered by her employer in comparison to her mother, who was a non-union laundry worker; she said, “I did not feel as vulnerable as she felt, so I really value the role of unions.” Union healthcare worker (HZS), felt like the union provided her support, saying “Inside work, I feel more protected.”

Other respondents had negative attitudes towards unions, but generally the negative attitudes were directed at the union they work(ed) in. One respondent, (QTQ), had negative attitudes towards unions for social workers, “Government workers, social workers…I feel like they do not need union protections.” He expressed that professional workers who stay in the same job/position for more than a few years are probably incompetent, saying, “part of me feels like that, if somebody's been in the same job for 10 years they probably suck at their job.” Child welfare child welfare worker (KLZ) said she felt that union dues did not materialize into benefits for workers. She said, “So, why would you want to have to pay dues for a service that you don't really feel is necessary?” (ZZT) reported that his union was unresponsive when he needed help, and said, “When I actually took things to the union … nothing really happened, and it just made me feel defeated.”

One respondent demonstrated mostly negative attitudes towards her union, but also communicated that under the right circumstances, her feelings about union membership would change. School social worker (HTZ) mostly spoke poorly of unions but said that she would feel more positive about union membership if it were aligned with her ethical standards. She said, “I

would feel [union membership] was different if it [the union] was aligned with my values as a social worker. It would be a different story."

Social Workers Are Divided on Union Membership

Social workers are varied in their assessments of union membership. Of the 15 respondents, there were three groups: six who said they were open to union membership but stated that they wanted to research the particular union to ensure that it would benefit them before deciding to join; six who were generally amenable to union membership; and three who said they do not want to be in a union. Ten out of fifteen participants had union membership experience, and four of those ten were willing to rejoin a union.

Need More Information. Six social workers reported that they would need to do research on the specific union before deciding to join. They wanted to know that the representation would be effective, the dues fair, and that they would derive a benefit. The union's alignment with social work values was also mentioned as a deciding factor. Most of those who were adamant about doing research before joining were current or former union members; four out of the six in this group had union membership experience. Curiously, all six lived in Pennsylvania; eight of fifteen respondents lived in Pennsylvania in total. Graduate MSW intern (MMZ) said she thinks union membership helps workers but would first need to make sure the union met her "stipulations." She wanted to make sure the union both protected clients and advocated for reasonable caseloads and working hours. If the union could deliver this, (MMZ) said, "I think that would be awesome because, then I would be able to spend more quality time with my family instead of having to take on too many clients and worry about them constantly." (LZZ), a health care worker said about joining a union, "I'd definitely look into it, [but] I'd need more information before that decision would be made." School social worker

(HTZ) said that she would consider a union as long as it was aligned with social work values, and particularly the protection of clients. She said that "It would be a different story" if the union was aligned with social work values. Home health worker (RRK) mentioned that before joining, he would make sure that the union aligned with social work values:

> You know I'd really have to research, and I think I'd want to know something about the labor union itself what their goals were how they align with social work values, and I'd certainly look into it, but that doesn't mean that I would join it necessarily (RRK).

An outpatient worker, (ZZT) said he would need all the details:

> I would want to have all the information in front of me as far as, you know, what the dues are, what the protections are, what would be expected of me. I would essentially want to know you know all the details, I want to have all the facts in front of me and be able to you know, make an informed decision based on what's presented (ZZT).

Amenable to Union Membership. Six social workers communicated their overall support of union membership. They believed that a union could deliver protection, a better working environment, and higher salaries. Healthcare worker (XRT) expressed enthusiasm at the prospect of joining a union saying, "I would be excited; I would definitely want to join," and "I think it would be really helpful if we were able to unionize." Healthcare worker (HZS) is thankful for her union membership saying, "As a union worker, I really appreciate them." She went on to say that "I definitely see a positive impact of the union." Retired health care worker (RZR) thought that union membership was essential, "Absolutely, I don't think you know as a county professional where we would be without a union." Residential worker (RTX) said that union membership would improve the lives of her and her coworkers. She said:

> I think it would influence my life inside of work, because if (starting a union) is successful, it would dramatically improve the lives of the people who I spend the most amount of time with. ... At least enjoy home when I'm home because things have changed in the way enough that it, it was better at work. (RTX)

No Interest in Joining a Union. Three social workers were not interested in joining a union. When asked if she would join a union if given the choice, (KTR), practicing in addiction treatment said, "No, I'm very … thankful for where I'm at. I feel like I wouldn't want to make any changes." A union county child welfare worker (TZY) reported that she did not think she derived any benefit from membership and said, "If I had the choice to be any union or not, I would probably say no, and that's because I think all of the benefits that come from the union [I'm] already getting outside of the union." A VA social worker supported unions for unskilled and trade workers, but not for "white collar" or professional workers. (QTQ) thought that unions were effective at protecting vulnerable, low-skilled workers. He went on to say that social workers, being professionals, did not need such protections:

> The answer's no, like straight up, we don't need to be in unions. We're skilled professional with … high barriers to entry. Where there's a shortage of jobs, I think that's traditionally been the case, I don't think that we need union protections to the same extent that unskilled worker does of negotiating on their own. (QTQ)

Union Members Share Contrasting Experiences

Ten out of the fifteen social workers interviewed have union membership experience. Six of them talked about the ineffectiveness of unions. They reported negative experiences because their union was ineffective at supporting or representing them. Four of ten respondents reported positive experiences, and that unions were effective at improving their workplaces.

Negative Experiences. Two of six respondents shared their negative experiences with unions, which led them to feel like unions are pursuing other interests instead of assisting their members. Outpatient worker (ZZT) said his old union protected his employer rather than the workers "I just felt like my being in a union before I was just basically protecting the employer." When asked about his experience as a union member he said, "To be honest, it did not benefit me whatsoever." VA social worker's (QTQ) experience has made him feel like the union acts in its own best interest rather than serving the workers' needs:

> I feel like our union doesn't have a purpose beyond protecting the interests of the union and that doesn't even mean protect the interests of workers. The union sustains itself and collects fees to have influence in policy and legislation. And I don't think that's essentially for the benefit of the worker. (QTQ)

School social worker (HTZ) has had eight years of union membership. Her experiences have been negative, reporting that the union did not provide her any palpable support and that she constantly witnessed staff underperformance go unchecked. She recalls going to her union for advice on an HR matter, but that did not receive helpful assistance, she said "it wasn't necessarily very fruitful." Ultimately, her complaint was that students were not getting the education and safe environment that they deserve. She went on to tell an account of a teacher who physically "gripped up" a student and was able to keep his job due to union intervention. She was infuriated as she told the story:

> For example, last year we had a teacher who gripped up a student. And they initially let him go, but then the union fought for him and threatened to sue the school district, and so they brought him back (HTZ).

Other respondents with union membership experience also reported that the union did not benefit or represent them well. A county child welfare worker (TZY) conveyed annoyance and frustration when she discussed the lack of support from her union. She said that there was not even a way to ask for assistance: “There’s no contact person so there’s no way to, like, really like ask for anything in the union.” Child welfare worker and union steward (KLZ) expressed frustration with the union “not following up” on its responsibilities:

> In social work, and especially in child welfare, like, child welfare workers are already drowning and so having a union that doesn’t follow up with things, you know, isn’t proactive, constant turnover, things like that, it just makes it even more frustrating. (KLZ)

Positive Experiences. Conversely, four respondents (N=15) shared positive experiences with union membership. They cited better working conditions, as well as increased wages and benefits. One respondent, (LLK), shared unique experiences because she worked both as a union child welfare worker and now works as a supervisor who oversees union case workers. She said, “I’ve had a positive experience in the past [when] I was part of a union. When I became a supervisor, we no longer were able to be a part of the union, but, overall … I’ve had positive experiences.” Now, as a supervisor working with the union, she believes that they have been helpful in clearing up misunderstandings between workers and supervisors. (LLK) says, “I appreciate the union. … I feel like at times there have been situations where they have been really helpful where maybe something was a misunderstanding.”

A retired mental health worker with 28 years of membership, (RZR), expressed only positive experiences about her time with the union. She shared that the union made her workplace safer and gave workers a voice on issues such as “working conditions, working hours, benefits.” When asked if she thought unions had a positive impact on wages, she said,

"Absolutely! I don't think you know as a county professional where we would be without a union." A California private practice therapist (QRP) spent six years as a county union member and shared that the union was effective at bargaining for increased wages and benefits. They also shared that the union came to their defense when they needed it. They (QRP) needed assistance in advocating for accommodations for their disability and said that "my employer did not want to give me accommodations, … but in all these meetings I was able to have a union representative, I didn't have to sit there with like an HR Rep kind of bullying me." (HZS), a union social worker for 13 years, shared a similar experience with the previous workers regarding increased salary and benefits. She also said that her union was available when she needed it and that they were responsive. She also said her union liaison made her feel heard, "I feel listened to, especially with our current union liaison. He's very knowledgeable so he's able to tell you, you know, on the spot."

Theme #5: Incongruence in Attitudes, Perceptions, and Experiences

Six respondents (n=15), mostly current/former union members, demonstrated incongruence in their attitudes, experiences, and perceptions. The overall pattern for most in this group was that they were in favor of union organizing in principle, but they expressed dissatisfaction with their own union experiences. School social worker (HTZ) disclosed negative experiences, calling the union out of line with her values as a social worker which led her revoke her membership and noting, "I actually emailed our union and said I want out." However, she also shared that she believes unionizing can benefit social workers:

> You know it sets a standard point like if it's about setting a floor you know of income, then, in the same way there's a floor of you know, our work environments, then as well, and that would be beneficial, I mean, certainly as a social worker (HTZ).

Child welfare worker and union steward (KLZ) shared negative experiences with her own union: “We spend weeks, months in negotiations and we barely get anything.” She went on to say that her union does not have adequate power to affect change and yet “we get shut down a lot.” However, she also said that she perceived unions as a necessity for social workers saying, “I think it is it’s necessary … for social workers to have advocates like in the avenue of a union.” Child welfare worker (TZY) shared negative experiences; she said her union did not benefit her at all, and that she did not even know who her union representative is. When asked about her experience in the union she said, “it’s kind of annoying,” and “for us in particular, at my particular job, it is not that great.” Despite these experiences, she still shared that she thought unions are helpful on the whole, “I understand why they’re beneficial.”

VA social worker (QTQ) is a current union member and he shared negative experiences and attitudes with his union; he said the union does nothing for him. He also asserted that his perceptions of unions were different based on the worker’s vocation. He was diametrically opposed to unionizing for professionals and railed against his own union. He believed that professionals do not need union protections, “I would say, like anybody with a master’s degree does not need to be in a union.”

Conversely (QTQ) voiced support for blue collar unions, and said that unions were “great” for low skilled workers:

> Amazon workers, great, I even know other teamsters, like people who have bad working conditions, who can easily be replaced, who can easily be put in a job where they don't have any control of their wages, because they don't offer anything special. (QTQ)

Later in the interview, (QTQ) shows further disdain for unions that appear to negate the previous, positive perceptions he shared about blue collar workers in unions. He said that

workers who rely on the union probably do so because they are underperforming: “If I’m a trustworthy employee like I don’t need a union to protect me.” His statement suggests that he thinks only dishonest workers need union protections. He went on to share an indicative negative sentiment: “I think they protect the worst employees; I think they that’s their main job, is how I feel.”

Former union member and outpatient therapist (ZZT) said that his union membership was not beneficial at all. He noted great dissatisfaction with his former union, and said his experiences explain why unions are on the decline: “Given my personal experience with being in a union, I can understand why it’s on the decline, because I saw no benefit in it.” On the other hand, (ZZT) went on to say that he said he was still willing to join a union because he believed they offered protections, and that they are “able to better advocate…for like wages, healthcare, working hours, working conditions, … can go ahead and be very beneficial.”

Addiction professional (KTR) added that she is not interested in joining a union. She says that she thinks it would cause a rift between workers and management. When she was asked how she felt about joining a union, she said, “No I’m very I’m very thankful for where I’m at. I feel like I wouldn't want to make any changes.” Nonetheless, (KTR) still shared positive perceptions of unions: “I think that, if they (unions) are something that exists it’s for positive rather than negative.” She also expressed that she feels like the union could be beneficial saying, “I feel like it [union] could be good depending on where you work, because I know that in the world of social work supportive employers are not always supportive.”

Chapter 5: Discussion

Three research questions were posed by this study:

"What are the attitudes of social workers regarding unionization?"

"What are the perceptions of social workers regarding unionization?"

"What are the experiences of social workers regarding unionization?"

Attitudes, perceptions, and experiences varied among the participant group, as demonstrated within individual respondents. The study findings and examined literature imply that attitudes, perceptions, and experiences are interrelated and difficult to understand in isolation (Munhall, 2008; Pickens, 2005). To answer the research questions, all three constructs were examined together. This provided an opportunity to learn how the social workers in this study understand labor organizing.

Overall, the participants showed little consensus on the topics discussed. For example, study participants were asked about their desire to join a union, because the primary indicator of person's behavior is their expressed behavioral intention (Olson, 1993). The 15 responses fell into three categories: "yes" (6), "no" (3), and "'unsure, would need to investigate the union before deciding" (6). The respondents' lack of consensus aligns with the conclusions among the limited existing literature on the topic (Farr, 2021; Karger & Lonne, 2009; La Rose, 2016; Rosenburg & Rosenburg, 2005).

Attitudes and Perceptions Are Interrelated

During the interviews, perceptions were discussed more often than attitudes; the word "think/ing" was used 416 times, whereas the word "feel/ing" only appeared 137 times. Attitudes are related to personality and feeling, and they usually communicate favorable or unfavorable messages (Pickens, 2005). Perceptions indicate how people think about and interpret stimuli, in

this case unionization. (Pickens, 2005). Researchers argue that both predict future behavior (Bahamonde-Birke 2015; Reibstein, et. al., 1980).

A deeper analysis of the transcripts revealed the interconnectedness of attitudes and perceptions and the difficulty of distinguishing between the two. Attitudes are usually indicated by feeling words (Stangor, 2014), but many of the interviewees' "feeling" statements were more accurately characterized as perceptions than attitudes. This may be because over the last decade the phrase "I feel" has emerged as a weaker form of "I think" (Worthen, 2016). This tentative expression is more often used by women than men (Worthen, 2016). Several respondents demonstrated this phenomenon. For example, graduate intern (MMZ) said about her agency, "I do feel like we have a unit meeting once a month." She does not "feel" the meeting; she is trying to communicate that she either perceives that there will be, or has experienced having, a unit meeting once per month (or both).

Union Attitudes/Perceptions Are Incongruent with Personal Experiences

Half the union members interviewed demonstrated incongruence between how they perceived their experiences as union members and their attitudes/perceptions of labor organizing in general. Although lived experiences are often cited as a primary driver of attitudes and perceptions (Trafton, 2019), several participants did not demonstrate this phenomenon in their responses. These individuals expressed positive attitudes and perceptions of unions overall, while characterizing their personal experiences as negative. For example, child welfare child welfare worker (KLZ) reported poor experiences as a union member, saying, "We spend weeks, months in negotiations, and we barely get anything," but remained an ardent supporter of labor organizing: "I think it is it's necessary, very necessary, for social workers to have advocates like in the avenue of a union."

School social worker (HTZ) described negative experiences of working with colleagues who received union protection after displaying actions she considered to be abhorrent. She was also concerned for her students. Her experience was so bad that she said she told her union "I want out." It may appear that (HTZ) is anti-union; however, she was also adamant that unions are beneficial for social workers in terms of establishing minimum standards for compensation and working conditions. Child welfare child welfare worker (TZY) shared negative experiences with her union while expressing positive regard for unions and their associated benefits. VA social worker (QTQ) expressed almost entirely negative union perceptions, attitudes, and experiences and strongly opposed unionization for social workers. However, he also endorsed unionization for blue-collar workers. For the five participants who shared negative experiences with unions, these experiences did not appear to be the primary determining factor in the formation of their attitudes and perceptions about unionization.

A study of private sector social workers in New York City produced a relatively similar finding. The social workers in the study had primarily positive perceptions of labor organizing but were much less likely to perceive their unions as positively influencing their own wages and working conditions (Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006). A possible explanation for the incongruence between perceptions of union experience and perceptions of labor organizing overall is that respondents may have been drawn to their conclusions by other beliefs or experiences, such as political affiliation or family history.

Role of Social Work's Ethical Responsibilities

Social workers' commitment to service and concern for client well-being may negatively affect their intentions to join a union, even when they perceive them as valuable. Graduate intern (MMZ) was interested in union membership but noted that clients must be considered: "I think

having a union would be good, and I think you got to make sure we're taking care of the clients too. I can't just like go on strike and leave a client." (MMZ). Social workers' concern for clients over personal gain may be understood by examining the profession's ethical code, written and revised by the National Association of Social Workers, the country's largest and most influential authority on social work practice[1] (NASW, 2017). The NASW Ethical Code is a blueprint for professional decision making and mandates that "social workers elevate service to others above self-interest" (NASW, 2017, p.12). Similarly, prior studies have underscored the importance of unions addressing the needs of social work clients (Fiorito & Padavic, 2020; Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006).

While the NASW Ethical Code may impact social workers' decisions about organizing, the NASW's lack of direct guidance on the topic of unionization may also be a factor of influence. The NASW Ethical Code mentions, but provides no clear direction on, labor organizing (Morgan & Polowy, 2013; NASW, 2017; see Appendix F). For decades, social workers have asked NASW for guidance on unionizing. In 1960, the profession's leading journal, *Social Work,* called for the profession to produce guidance on what to do in a strike "situation" (Fisher, 1987). In 1987, *Social Work* published another call to come up with a decision-making model that guides social workers during disputes with management (Fisher). Those calls were never answered.

Social Workers Are Undervalued

Social work is undervalued as a profession, generally speaking (Farr, 2021; Lewis, 2018; Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006), and NASW's mandate to serve others over self may exacerbate this situation. Social workers may resign themselves to poor working conditions and low salaries instead of advocating for change because of their commitment to serve clients. Nine respondents

shared examples of the undervaluation of social workers primarily citing low wages, mistreatment by management, and poor working conditions. Social worker (HKR) shared that she worked in a closet and that there were cockroaches in it. Licensed clinical social worker (QRP) in California reported that her former employer “did not want to give me accommodations” for her disability. Some respondents thought that their employers took advantage of their helping nature. Residential worker (RTX) illustrated this when she said, “I think that it exploits people's passions, especially in certain professions." Health care worker (LZZ) said she was denied a raise even after receiving her clinical licensure. Child welfare worker (KLZ) referred to the low salaries social workers often receive: “In this profession the salary is just so low, I mean it’s barely livable wages." Her statement follows an overall trend and the patterns cited above: social work salaries are significantly lower than wages in related professions (NASW, 2017; BLS, 2021; Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006). Compounding this issue is the large amount of student debt that students accumulate during their education (NASW, 2017).

Society’s tendency to undervalue social work may be related to the fact that it is a female-dominated profession (Harkness, 2019; NASW, 2017). Modern social work was developed and expanded under female direction and leadership (Day, 2009; Richmond, 1917). Female-dominated fields often pay lower wages because labor that is considered “feminine” is not valued as much as fields dominated by men, such as the tech industry, where yearly median salaries are 80% higher than that of social workers, despite similar degree requirements. Both fields also have similar growth rates, which suggests equivalent workforce demand (BLS, 2021; Harkness, 2019). However, it could also be that men chose not to enter the field because it is undervalued. Since women often fill the jobs men do not want, it is possible that women were drawn to the

profession because it was one career opportunity where there were few. Moreover, social work gave women an opportunity to have some societal influence in a patriarchal environment (Abrams & Curran, 2004).

Another likely factor is the ubiquitous mission of social work to assist those whom society deems as undeserving of help (Katz, 2013; Olin, 2019). However, it is important to note that social workers have a historical role of being a 'decider' of who should get help. Social workers often excluded people using the same 'worthy' and 'unworthy' principles from hundreds of years ago (Day, 2009; Richmond, 1917). Until the success of the welfare rights movement was realized, social workers were a part of a system that refused aid to people of color. Social workers also inspected the homes of cash assistance recipients, and if the home did not meet the subjective standards of the social worker, they would be denied benefits. Social work has a history of contributing to the control of the poor (Gordon, L. & Batlan, 2011).

Today, social workers assist people who are marginalized and oppressed, and advocate for a stronger safety net. Many people perceive poor people as responsible for their own situation in poverty, and that they should 'pull themselves up by their bootstraps.' These attitudes towards the poor may influence society's perception of social workers, and their work may be considered as inconsequential or even adversarial (Olin, 2013). People living in poverty have faced discrimination and injustice in the United States for hundreds of years. This discrimination has roots in the (British) Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1601, which divided poor people into two groups: worthy and unworthy (Day, 2009). War widows, children, seniors, and people with disabilities were generally labeled as "worthy" poor and were given support to stay in their homes and care for their children (Day, 2009). Those labeled as unworthy poor were usually out-of-wedlock mothers and "able-bodied" people (a person whom authorities believe should be working) were

placed into workhouses and their children were generally moved into orphanages (Day, 2009; Katz, 2013). The term “unworthy poor” has fallen out of favor. However, this notion is still communicated, insidiously, by societal stigma and punishing public assistance programs for the “unworthy” that millions of poor people need to survive.

Weber’s work, 300 years later, offers a twentieth century (1905) explanation of society’s negative attitudes towards poor people. He cites the primary cause as Calvinist doctrine, which spread rapidly during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries across much of Europe and to the English colonies. Calvin’s ideas were also adopted by other reformed religions: Pietism, Methodism, and many Baptists throughout much of Europe and to the English colonies (Weber, 1905). Calvin’s teachings were largely centered on his concept of predestination; all events on earth are willed by God, and a person’s afterlife is determined even before birth (Weber, 1905). Followers of Calvin’s doctrine believed they could discern who was going to heaven based on their industry and prosperity. Conversely, living in poverty indicated individual failure and an afterlife of damnation (Day, 2009; Popple & Leighninger, 2018; Weber, 1905). Weber labeled this phenomenon the “Protestant Work Ethic,” where work was perceived as a calling from God (Weber, 1905).

Poverty, a pervasive and intractable American social issue (U.S. Census, 2021), plays a large role in the ongoing need for and day-to-day operations of social workers across multiple settings. Distorted beliefs about the poor influence policy decisions that reinforce America’s fragmented and ineffective approach to “managing” poverty (Day, 2009; Kats, 2015; Popple & Leighninger, 2018). A few examples include mass incarceration (Rabuy & Kopf, 2015), stagnant minimum wage (EPI, 2022), punitive safety net programs (Katz, 2013) that especially push children and people of color into deep (less than 50% of the poverty line) intractable poverty

(Cuddy, et. al., 2015), and the nearly 600,000 people who experience homelessness on any given night (HUD, 2021). The notion that work and prosperity serve as both a measure of worth and adherence to moral obligation has been internalized by Americans for hundreds of years (Katz, 2013; Weber, 1905).

Some respondents reported that unions could elevate social workers' professional status, an ongoing concern that is directly linked to the undervaluation of the profession. Reisch (2009) argued that unions could help improve the public's awareness of social work's utility. The field's public image is compromised by negative portrayals in the media, and widespread doubt about social workers' competence in clinical roles, even though they have worked widely in these settings for decades (Olin, 2019). Home health social worker (RRK) remarked, "I think that it [unionizing] might make employers nationally, regionally, and locally more aware of the value that social workers play every day." Healthcare worker (LZZ) shared a similar thought:

> I think they [unions] could definitely be beneficial in furthering our field and coming up to par with other fields that have had more growth recently. Being in healthcare, I work with a lot of physicians and nurses, and they have a lot of benefits that social work doesn't in many areas, one of them being clinical ladders (LZZ).

Social Workers Need Protection from Their Employers

The undervaluation of their profession makes social workers susceptible to mistreatment from employers. Protection was the most discussed construct in the interviews, appearing in eleven out of fifteen transcripts. Keenly aware of their undervaluation, most of the study participants expressed a need for protection from their employers, particularly regarding compensation and working conditions. Most agreed that unions can protect employees from unfair labor practices, low wages, and/or poor working conditions. Durkheim helps to explain the

problem of employer power and its subsequent oppression of workers. He wrote in 1897, “No human being can be happy or exist unless needs are proportioned to their means.” Unions exist to address the gap between needs and means by protecting workers’ wages. Marx also wrote about unions and found them to act as a layer of protection for workers, even though unions themselves are antithetical to Marx’s Communist vision (1847). Social workers in this study referred to wanting or getting “backup” or “power” from union membership. Social service and healthcare worker (HZS) remarked that social workers have a special need for union representation, particularly during difficult conversations with employers:

> As social workers, you know we have a lot of feelings and empathy we feel things really, really, passionately, so I think it’s helpful to have somebody there as your advisor. The union as your advisor instead of your adversary, which is the upper management, like they might not be as caring (HZS).

A few social workers mentioned that protection is needed for social workers to advocate for themselves. County child welfare worker (KLZ) discussed the need for social workers to get a say with employers to help address uneven power dynamics between management and workers. She said, “I think it’s important that workers have a say and have a voice and I do think there is a big disparity between workers and maybe upper management, especially like in social services, even.” Outpatient care worker (RTX) also spoke about employer power, “I feel like in order to advocate for yourselves you can’t depend on the people who already have the power to because they’re not doing the same job as you.”

Unions Create Unfair Work Environments

Although most respondents perceived union protection as beneficial to social workers, 20% of the participants expressed concern that unions unfairly protect their underperforming

colleagues. County child welfare worker (TZY) said that her union protected a colleague who did not do their job: “[they] are making everyone else suffer." VA social worker (QTQ) criticized his union, saying: “I think they [unions] protect the worst employees… as far as representing employees, they don't represent employees like me." He expressed displeasure with being grouped into a collective bargaining agreement with whom he described as the “worst employees.” He was particularly frustrated that his coworker was receiving a salary that was (in his opinion) unjustifiably higher than his because of the collective bargaining agreement:

> Based on like these rigid pay scales based on seniority…And has nothing to do with our ability… I’m a step one which is like the newest you know and then, I have a coworker who's a step nine in the same job. She gets paid probably $20,000 more than me, and I know for a fact she brings a lot less to the table.

Child welfare worker’s (TZY) primary concern was that her workload was higher because low-performing employees were protected by the union. She reported that workers take advantage of union protections to avoid being reprimanded for poor performance and absenteeism, describing instances of egregious behavior such as workers taking extreme advantage of sick leave policies, leaving others to pick up the slack. She described the difficulty of the situation as follows:

> You’re making everybody else suffer or you can just quit, and we can replace your position, but this particular employee will not quit, and the union is protecting him. Everybody else at the job is suffering because we are getting a lot more cases … It’s annoying, it keeps a lot of incompetent people… that my job can’t do anything to get rid of them because the union protects them (TZY).

Marx might help frame this phenomenon. In *Wage Labor and Capital,* Marx wrote, “A house may be large or small; as long as the neighboring houses are likewise small…But let there

arise next to the little house a palace, and the little house shrinks to a hut" (1849). This assertion about subjective relativity is fitting because it exposes the way in which individuals do not have cause for discontent until they have a more favorable basis of comparison. The 'little house' analogy communicates that no matter how much wealth people may accrue, if someone else has more it will cause distress, resentment, and a feeling of lost social status (Marx, 1849). It could be that social workers may be overworked and underpaid, but not identify this as a problem until they are working in close proximity to others who they perceive as having better circumstances. In this case, that might mean that some workers earn more than others in the same job. It could also mean that the respondents' colleagues receive the same pay and benefits but are enabled to perform significantly less work. In both instances, one party has something they do not have.

Social Workers Assess the Value of Union Membership

In addition to the protection that is offered by collective bargaining, social workers also want to know that the union will provide a value that exceeds its cost. Most participants (12) expressed that they were open to joining a union, but half of those said they needed to do more research before making a decision. According to Farr, some social workers may not see value in union organizing (2021). Value and/or benefits were important concepts that emerged during this study, and six respondents cited them as deciding factors of whether to organize. Two social workers said they would not join a union because they perceived it as having no value. These social workers discussed a cost-benefit analysis of union membership. Three key benefit areas mentioned by respondents were:

- Higher wages
- Better working conditions
- The fair and expeditious handling of members' concerns

Healthcare social worker (LZZ) gave an example of value and cost assessment when she explained her position on joining a union, “I’d definitely look into it, I’d need more information before that decision would be made. … Specifically, what that union would do for me and what my role would look like as well.” Child welfare child welfare worker (KLZ) provided another example of this analysis. She reported that her union is ineffective at increasing wages. She said, “If people don’t make enough money [benefit], then, why would they want to give some of it away [costs] to a union that they don’t feel is helping them?” Former union member (ZZT) was skeptical about joining a union after he found no value in his union membership at a previous job, “To be honest, it did not benefit me whatsoever.”

Weber’s writings on practical rationality help to make meaning of these findings. According to Weber, human actors use practical rational thinking when attempting to problem solve in daily life in attempting to solve the routine and daily problems of life (Levine, 1981). “Therefore, actors calculate all possible means available to them, choose the alternative that best allows them to reach their ultimate end, and then follow that line of action” (Levine, 1981, p. 12). Using this lens provides some insight into social workers’ potential motivations as well as challenges that the profession faces. Social workers may base their union decision making on this calculation; if workers believe that the transaction (joining a union) will bring them the best outcome, they will likely join (Levine, 1981; Weber, 1946). It is possible that many social workers find the ‘ends’ to be helping clients. Perhaps their desire to work in the service of others or to work for social justice is the outcome that they desire, which is still a rational calculation. Conversely, this theory might be applied to help understand the social workforce vacuum that continues to get worse by the passing day (Rock, 2021). If potential workers remain unconvinced

that becoming a social worker will produce a positive outcome, the profession will continue to struggle meeting society's needs (Rock, 2021; Weber, 1968).

No Mass Social Worker Labor Movement on the Horizon

Twenty-first century social workers are engaged in virtually every American institution, which speaks to their unique skills. They are well-educated, flexible problem-solvers. Unfortunately, the proliferation of the profession across vastly different settings may have come at the cost of its collective power. Several respondents in the study discussed the profession's diversity as a barrier to unionizing, and that it would be too complicated to organize social workers across so many settings and organizations. Early intervention supervisor (LLK) shared this concern: "The problem is that there's so many different people from different backgrounds." It has been well established that social workers' salaries and political power lag behind their highly unionized sister professions of teaching and nursing. This comparison was made in the literature review, and NASW has made a similar distinction regarding salaries. Unionization may be a major factor in this disparity. However, there is one very significant difference between social work and its two sister professions. Unlike social workers, teachers and nurses work in well defined, highly structured, and homogeneous work environments. This structure and similarity could be what makes unionizing organizing so effective for these professions. Social workers have unique challenges with regard to organizing.

One of the most compelling outcomes of this study is the insight that the social work profession is not yet prepared to engage in large-scale labor organizing. Together, the review of literature, consideration of NASWs advocacy priorities, and the findings of this study all strongly suggest that there is no profession-wide labor movement in social work's foreseeable future. Social workers demonstrate no united conviction for or against unions (Karger & Lonne, 2009;

Rosenberg & Rosenburg, 2006). Beyond the profession's diversity and uncertain position on labor organizing, social workers face other barriers to unionization.

Several study participants reported that employers' anti-union behavior prevents social workers from organizing. Former county child welfare worker (QRP) said, "I know union busting still goes on." VA social worker (QTQ) thought that companies are relocating to states with weak labor laws to mitigate the risk that their employees will try to unionize. He said, "It's resulting from companies moving to states where the union has limited ability to organize." These findings were supported by the literature. For example, employers spend $340 million per year on "union avoidance" consultants who teach them how to exploit limitations of federal labor law to intimidate workers out of exercising their right to organize (Lafer & Loustanunau, 2020). Illegal efforts to sway union elections are frequently reported by the National Labor Relations Board. One study reports that, in 20% of union elections a worker was fired illegally for union organizing, and 40% of union organizing groups reported that employers were illegally antagonizing them about forming a union (Bronfenbrenner, 2009).

Social workers may need education about workers' rights and unionization. A lack of knowledge about labor organizing may prevent them from organizing themselves, or from supporting other unionizing efforts. Half of the study participants pinpointed a lack of knowledge as a barrier to union organizing. Retired social worker (RZR) thought that social workers' lack of (union) understanding may lead to people not wanting to join, saying, "Maybe people don't understand unions, and what they do, and so they don't sign up." Former union member (ZZT) admitted that he was not very knowledgeable about unions: "To be honest, I'm not entirely sure, you know, how unions are set up in the first place, or how like essentially the construction of them are." This is in line with earlier findings that indicate social workers do not have adequate

knowledge of how the collective bargaining process functions (Reisch, 2009; Scanlon & Harding, 2005).

Powerful conservative interests lobby for anti-labor legislation, generally "right-to-work" laws which have been passed in 28 U.S. states (Kenton, 2020; Lichtenstein & Shermer, 2012; Workplace Fairness, n.d.). Right-to-work laws prohibit labor organizers from negotiating contracts with union security agreements (Kenton, 2020). Union security agreements are necessary to ensure that union membership stays at a critical mass, a reduction of membership means fewer funds to organize on behalf of more people and that a potential strike would not likely result in a total shutdown (Workplace Fairness, n.d.). Durkheim provides context to this phenomenon where wealthy interests directly impact government law making. He argued that capitalism had become too powerful, "Capitalism has become the ends and the means; the government rather than its keeper has become its servant" (1897).

Child welfare case worker and union steward (KLZ) shared that her union was unable to negotiate a secure contract, and it greatly impacted their ability to agitate for higher wages. She reported:

> Only select people pay into this service, but everybody has access to it so there's no benefit to being in a union. Then we get problems where we don't have numbers, so we're not able to kind of put the power behind what we're asking for (KLZ).

Implications

Social Workers May Consider Joining a Union if They Believe it is Valuable

The results of this study suggest that most social workers are at least open to joining a union. Half of those willing to join a union said they needed to consider the value and costs of participation before deciding. This finding should be a consideration for labor organizing efforts.

Union representatives should be transparent about costs and communicative about the value that they provide to their constituents.

Consider Adding Workers' Rights to Social Work Education Curriculum

As the findings and literature suggest, social workers may lack adequate knowledge about workers' rights, unions, and/or collective bargaining. It is difficult to advocate for or join an unfamiliar cause. Social workers need a solid foundation of labor knowledge to make educated decisions on their own employment and agency matters. Just as important, social workers need this knowledge if they are to competently assist others in their own labor organizing efforts.

NASW Should Give Social Workers More Guidance about Union Organizing

Social workers still need clarity on how they can advocate for themselves in the workplace. This should be codified in the NASW Ethical Standards. The NASW has been unclear about its position on labor organizing and strike protocols for decades. If social workers are uncertain of the profession's position on union participation, they may be less likely to ally or participate actively with a labor organizing effort to avoid potential ethical concerns.

NASW Should Advocate for Workers' Rights

Social workers deserve protections in the workplace and the NASW should make that clear. Moreover, the NASW should take an active advocacy role in the promotion of workers' rights, starting with its own workers[2]. Social workers are committed to social justice (NASW, 2017). Fair wages, working conditions, and worker protections are all social justice matters. In addition, the profession should consider how it can better align itself with the organizing efforts that are emerging across the country. A labor movement is building (Gallup, 2020; Milkman & Luce) while social work sits on the sidelines.

No Social Worker Labor Movement on the Horizon

The collective examination of the literature as well as the study findings suggest that social workers are not ready to begin a labor movement. The profession does not share a common position on labor organizing (Karger & Lonne, 2009; Rosenberg & Rosenburg, 2006). Moreover, the barriers that social work faces to unionizing are formidable. Large-scale change like organizing 700,000 professionals across the country working in countless settings is not likely, but shop organizing may be more realistic. Expectations should be modest given the barriers the profession faces and the lack of commonality on the issue.

More Research Is Needed

Given the lack of consensus in this study and the available literature, more research is needed to learn how social workers perceive union membership for themselves and for workers at large. It is possible that there are other factors that may influence union perceptions and attitudes such as geography, educational level, or practice setting. Future research might focus on studying these other commonalities. Labor research is relevant to social work (Farr, 2021; La Rose, 2016; Reisch, 2009; Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006), especially now as a modest, but committed labor movement is developing (Mishel & Wolfe, 2019). Given the profession's history and expressed commitment to social justice, social work researchers should address this topic. Suggested questions to consider: are social workers compelled to support labor organizing as part of their ethical responsibility of social justice? Would social workers' negative experiences and/or ambivalent beliefs about unions impact their desire to support other labor organizing efforts? Are union attitudes and perceptions similar within a practice specialty, such as child welfare or private practice?

Limitations

This study had several limitations which should be considered when considering further research on this topic. There are nearly 700,000 social workers in the United States workforce, and they are employed in a vast array of settings and circumstances (Torpey, 2018). Given the nature of social workers' diverse population and the small sample size, the data collected in this study is not generalizable to other social workers. Generalizability is not an objective of qualitative research, although a well-crafted study can assist in creating an initial understanding of a phenomenon (Padgett, 2016). Not all the professional groups contacted responded favorably to the request of allowing access to survey their membership. This influenced the overall diversity of the sample. Racial diversity is a major limitation of this study. Race information was not collected from the respondents, and there was no sampling method used to ensure diversity in the sample. Racial diversity is an important consideration when sampling potential respondents. This is especially important because labor unions have a legacy of excluding people of color and women from membership (Michel, 2019). These interlocking barriers (Crenshaw, 1999) made it much harder for minorities to enter the middle class, largely because they were unable to join union shops (Mishel, 2019). After reviewing the interview transcripts, it was clear there were some missed opportunities for probing questions. Probing questions are an effective way to collect deeper meaning from participants' responses (Padgett, 2016), so these opportunities should be utilized, when appropriate.

There are interview questions that, in hindsight, would have been helpful to ask. Requesting respondents to disclose their political affiliations may have contextualized the attitudes and perceptions that they shared. However, this may have been a challenging subject to bring up in a polarized political environment. Political support for unions falls largely along

party lines, liberals are generally more supportive of unions than conservatives. Political orientation may be an important consideration regarding union support and participation. A question about social workers' beliefs on striking also may have yielded interesting data since there is little in the literature about the topic.

Conclusion

More information is needed about social workers' interest and willingness to unionize and/or advocate for better pay and working conditions. It was no surprise that many respondents in this study thought wages for social workers are too low, but this problem will (has) become a bigger issue for the profession. A workforce vacuum for the occupation is emerging, and agencies are already desperately seeking social workers (BLS, 2021; Jackson, 2021). This need is only expected to grow (BLS, 2021; Jackson, 2021). If social work is unable to keep up with workforce demand, others who are less qualified may fill our roles. For example, this has already occurred with the de-professionalization of child welfare workers. In the 1970s, social workers made up 60% of the child welfare workforce, today that number is less than 25% (Ellett & Leighninger, 2012). Research has shown that there are negative consequences to allowing people without social work education to fill the jobs of social workers (Ellett & Leighninger, 2012). Low pay, long hours, and difficult working conditions do not attract or maintain social workers into the profession. Salaries and working conditions for social workers should be addressed, otherwise the profession will not be prepared to meet the needs of those who rely on us.

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Endnotes

[1]The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the largest and most influential authority on social work practice in the United States. The NASW Ethical Code reinforces the mission of social work, guides social work decision making, orients new social workers to the field, and provides them with guidance about how they should behave as professionals (2017). The NASW Code of Ethics is also a bedrock in social work as education. Learning and applying the NASW Code is a requirement for all students in accredited social work degree programs in the United States (CSWE EPAS, 2015).

[2] It should be acknowledged that NASW developed and successfully advocated for the introduction of the Social Work Reinvestment Act H.R.1532 (2019). If it were to pass, it would fund a workforce study, training dollars, and a one-time distribution of competitive grants, which would go towards making improvements in the profession such as how to increase wages in the field. Unfortunately, this bill has had no action since it was introduced three years ago, and the NASW did not include it as part of its 2021 Virtual Congressional Advocacy Day (2021). Although this bill certainly has its benefits, there are no signs that it will pass, and it is still a neoliberal answer to what is becoming a very real workforce problem. The profession will need more allies and bigger workforce investments to affect widespread change for social workers.

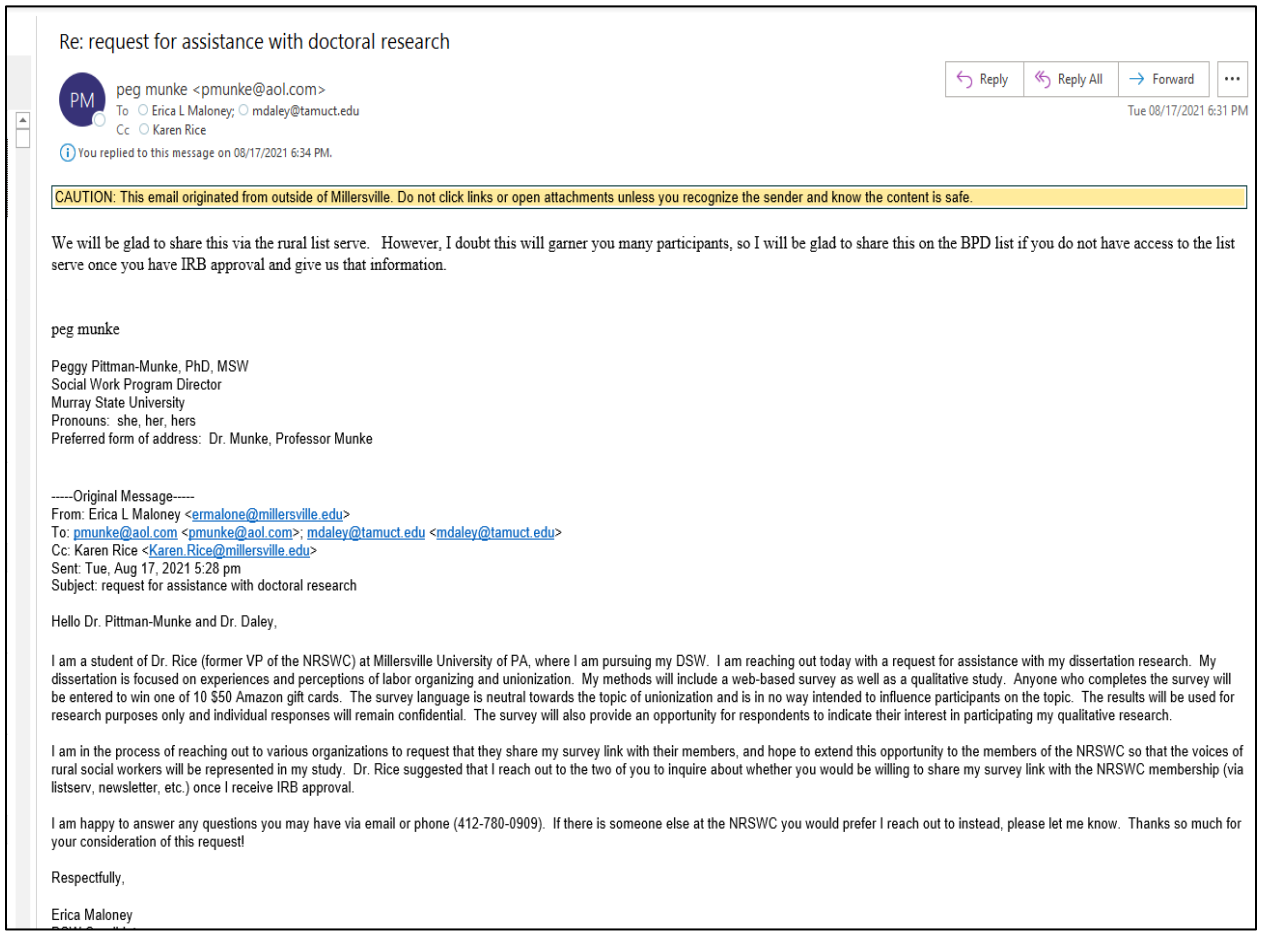
Appendix A

Theoretical Framework

Appendix B

Approvals to Distribute Recruitment Webform Link

National Rural Social Work Caucus (NRSWC) Approval from Dr. Peg Munke, President of the NRSWC. Karen Rice Cc'd.



Re: request for assistance with doctoral research

PM peg munke <pmunke@aol.com>
To Erica L Maloney; mdaley@tamuct.edu
Cc Karen Rice
You replied to this message on 08/17/2021 6:34 PM.

Reply | Reply All | Forward | ...
Tue 08/17/2021 6:31 PM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of Millersville. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

We will be glad to share this via the rural list serve. However, I doubt this will garner you many participants, so I will be glad to share this on the BPD list if you do not have access to the list serve once you have IRB approval and give us that information.

peg munke

Peggy Pittman-Munke, PhD, MSW
Social Work Program Director
Murray State University
Pronouns: she, her, hers
Preferred form of address: Dr. Munke, Professor Munke

-----Original Message-----
From: Erica L Maloney <ermalone@millersville.edu>
To: pmunke@aol.com <pmunke@aol.com>; mdaley@tamuct.edu <mdaley@tamuct.edu>
Cc: Karen Rice <Karen.Rice@millersville.edu>
Sent: Tue, Aug 17, 2021 5:28 pm
Subject: request for assistance with doctoral research

Hello Dr. Pittman-Munke and Dr. Daley,

I am a student of Dr. Rice (former VP of the NRSWC) at Millersville University of PA, where I am pursuing my DSW. I am reaching out today with a request for assistance with my dissertation research. My dissertation is focused on experiences and perceptions of labor organizing and unionization. My methods will include a web-based survey as well as a qualitative study. Anyone who completes the survey will be entered to win one of 10 $50 Amazon gift cards. The survey language is neutral towards the topic of unionization and is in no way intended to influence participants on the topic. The results will be used for research purposes only and individual responses will remain confidential. The survey will also provide an opportunity for respondents to indicate their interest in participating my qualitative research.

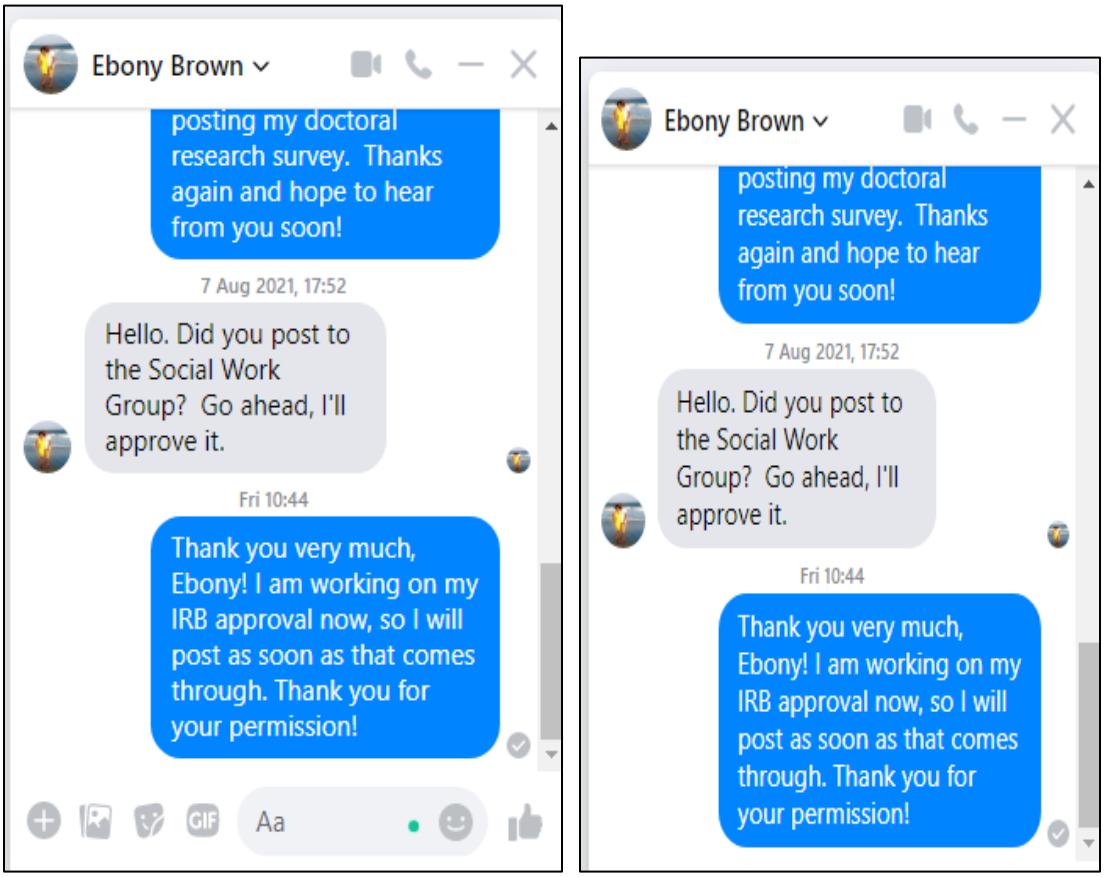
I am in the process of reaching out to various organizations to request that they share my survey link with their members, and hope to extend this opportunity to the members of the NRSWC so that the voices of rural social workers will be represented in my study. Dr. Rice suggested that I reach out to the two of you to inquire about whether you would be willing to share my survey link with the NRSWC membership (via listserv, newsletter, etc.) once I receive IRB approval.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have via email or phone (412-780-0909). If there is someone else at the NRSWC you would prefer I reach out to instead, please let me know. Thanks so much for your consideration of this request!

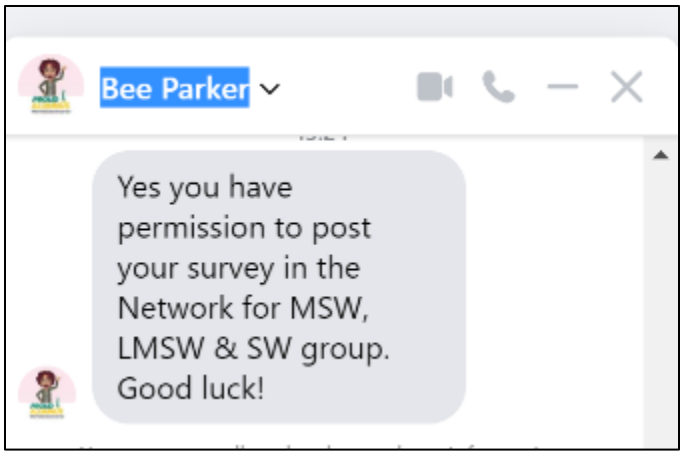
Respectfully,

Erica Maloney

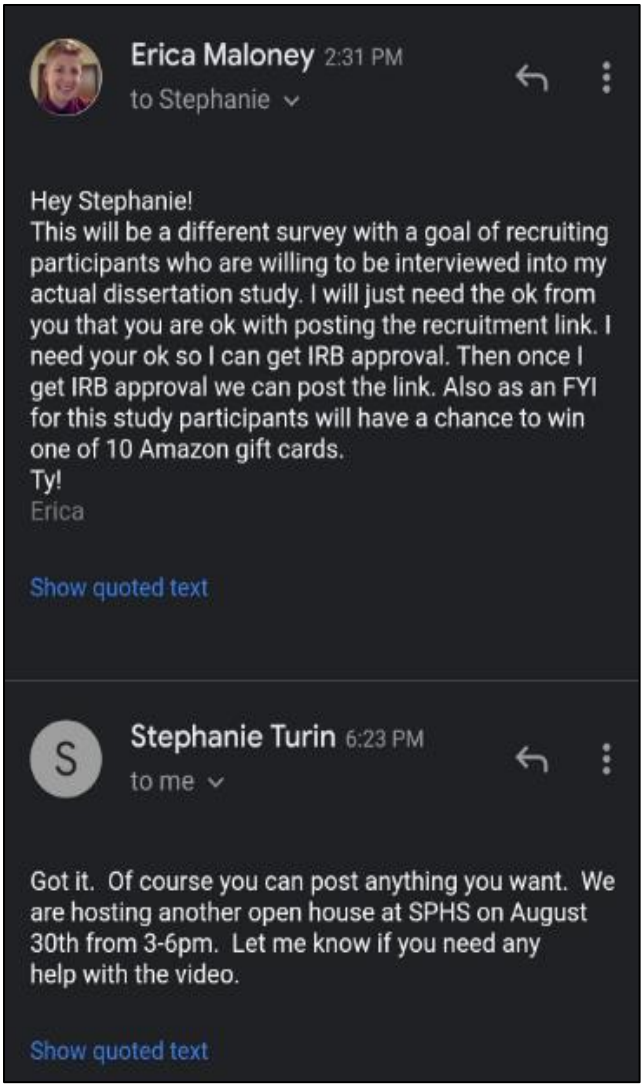
Social Work and the Social Worker—Ebony Brown, Page Admin



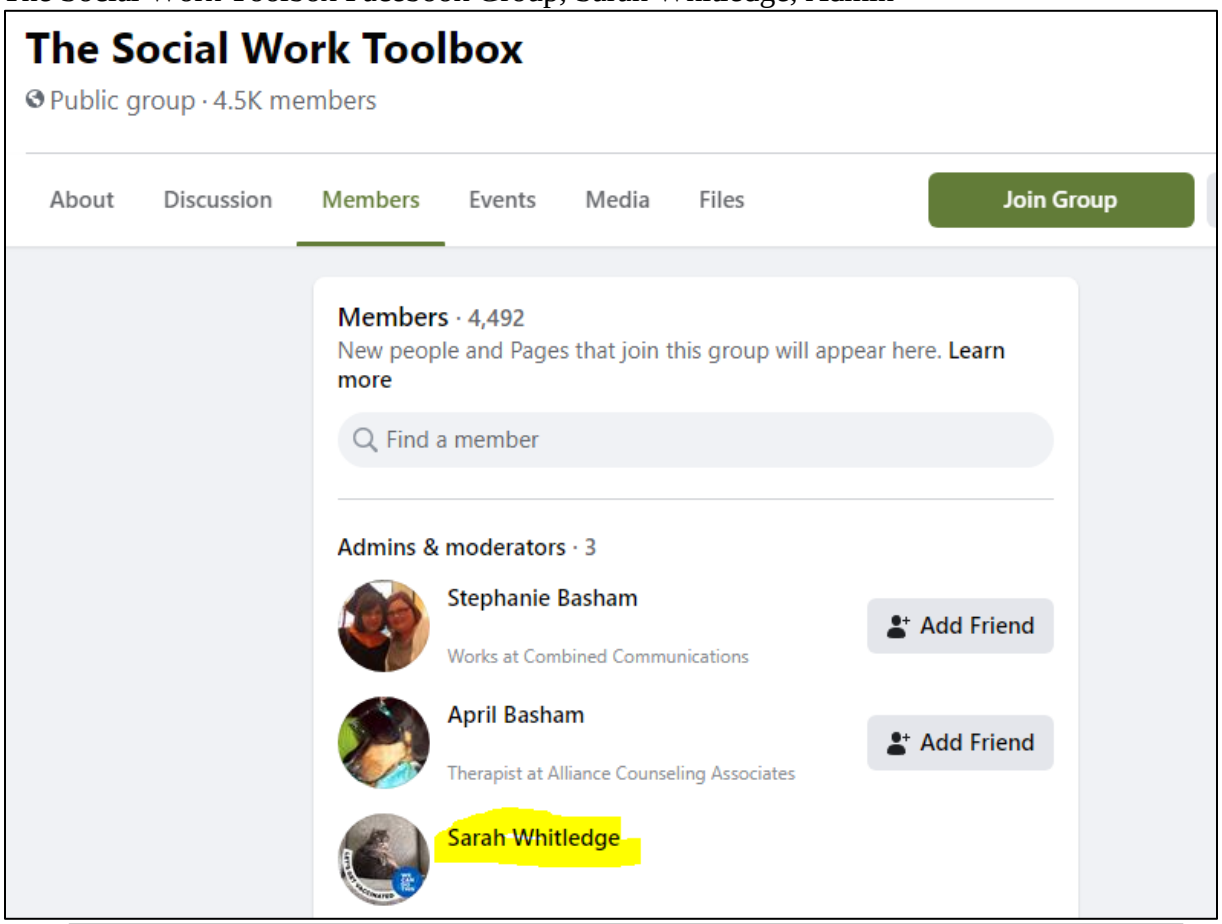
Network for MSW, LMSW, and SW Facebook Group. Bee Parker, Page Admin.

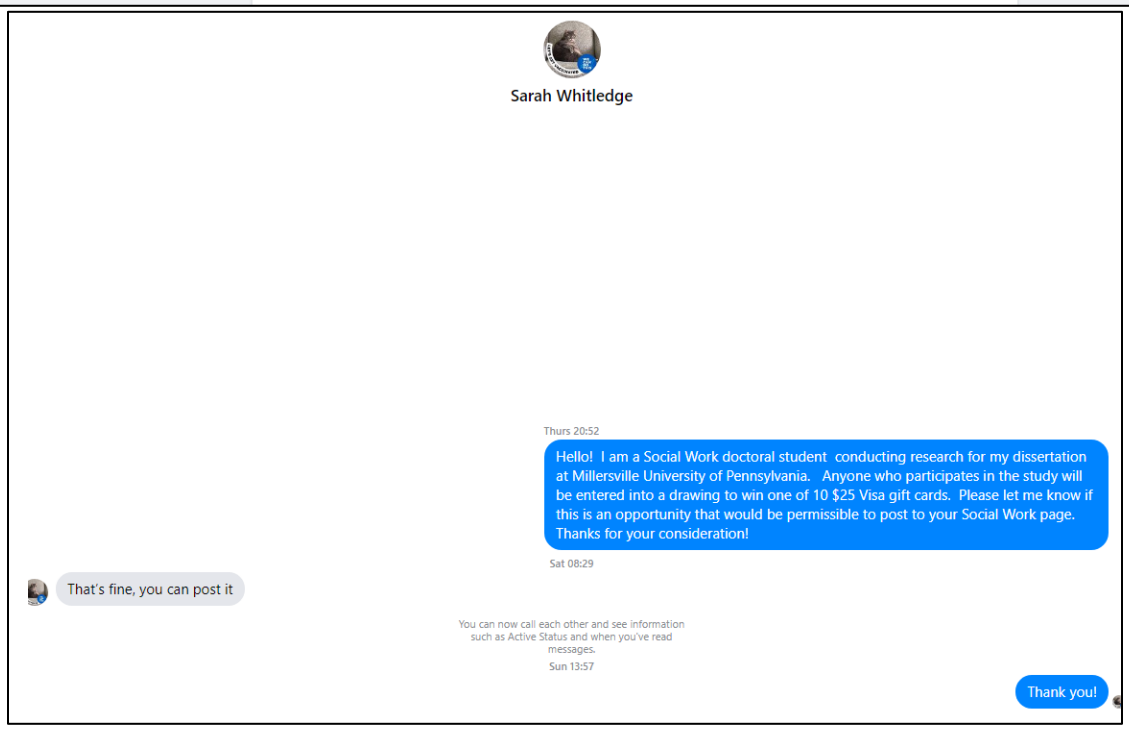


Stephanie Turn, Program Director/Page Admin. Westmoreland County Community College Social Work Facebook Group.

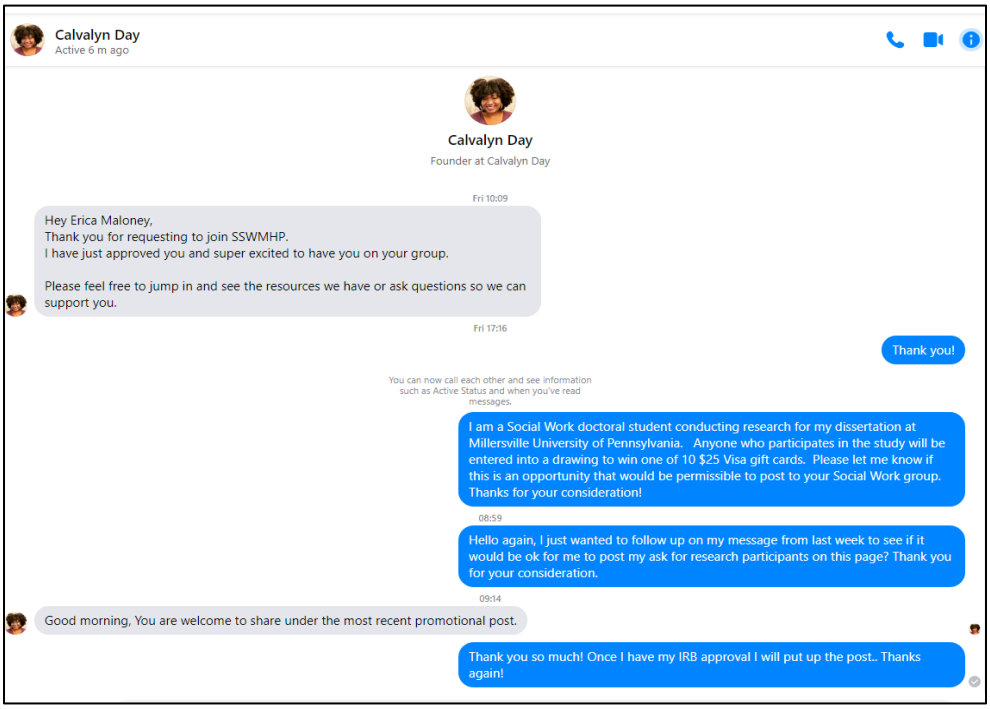


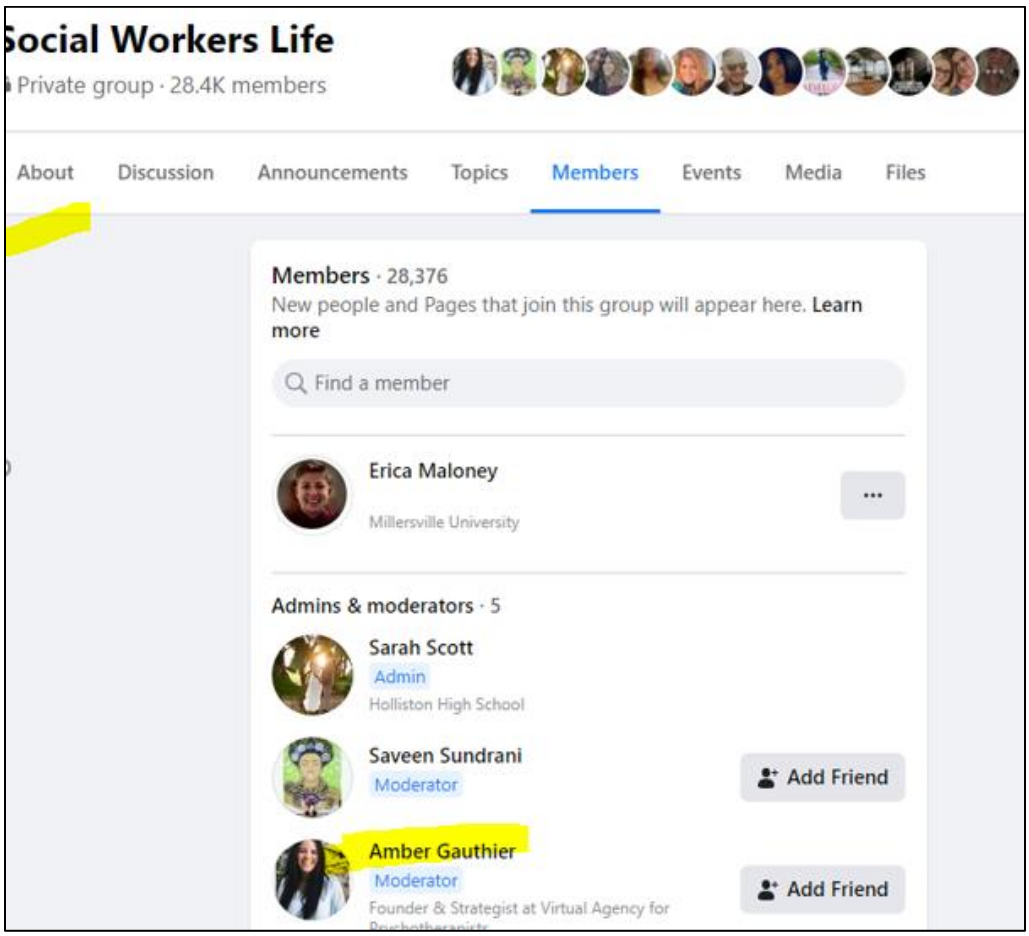
The Social Work Toolbox Facebook Group, Sarah Whitledge, Admin

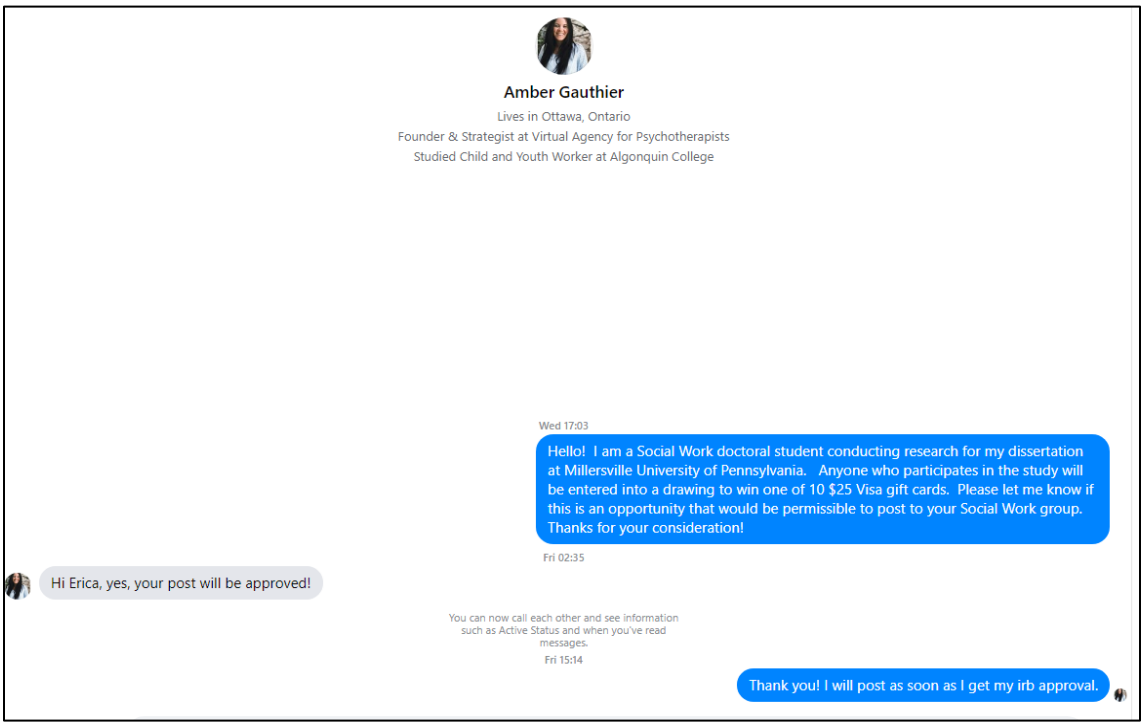




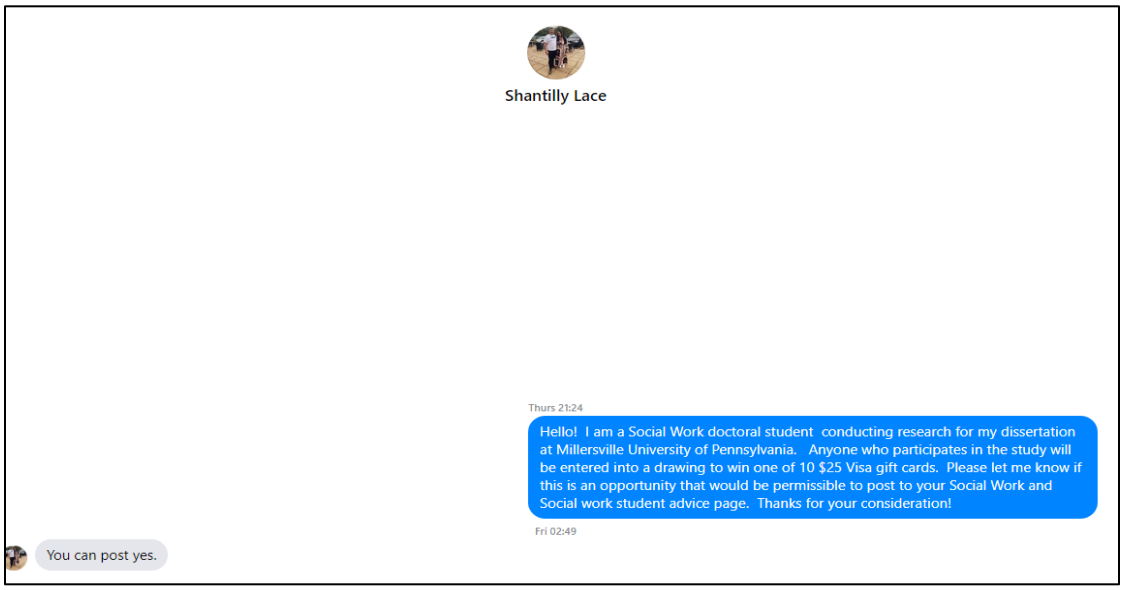
School Social Workers and Mental Health Providers Facebook Group, Calvalyn Day, Admin

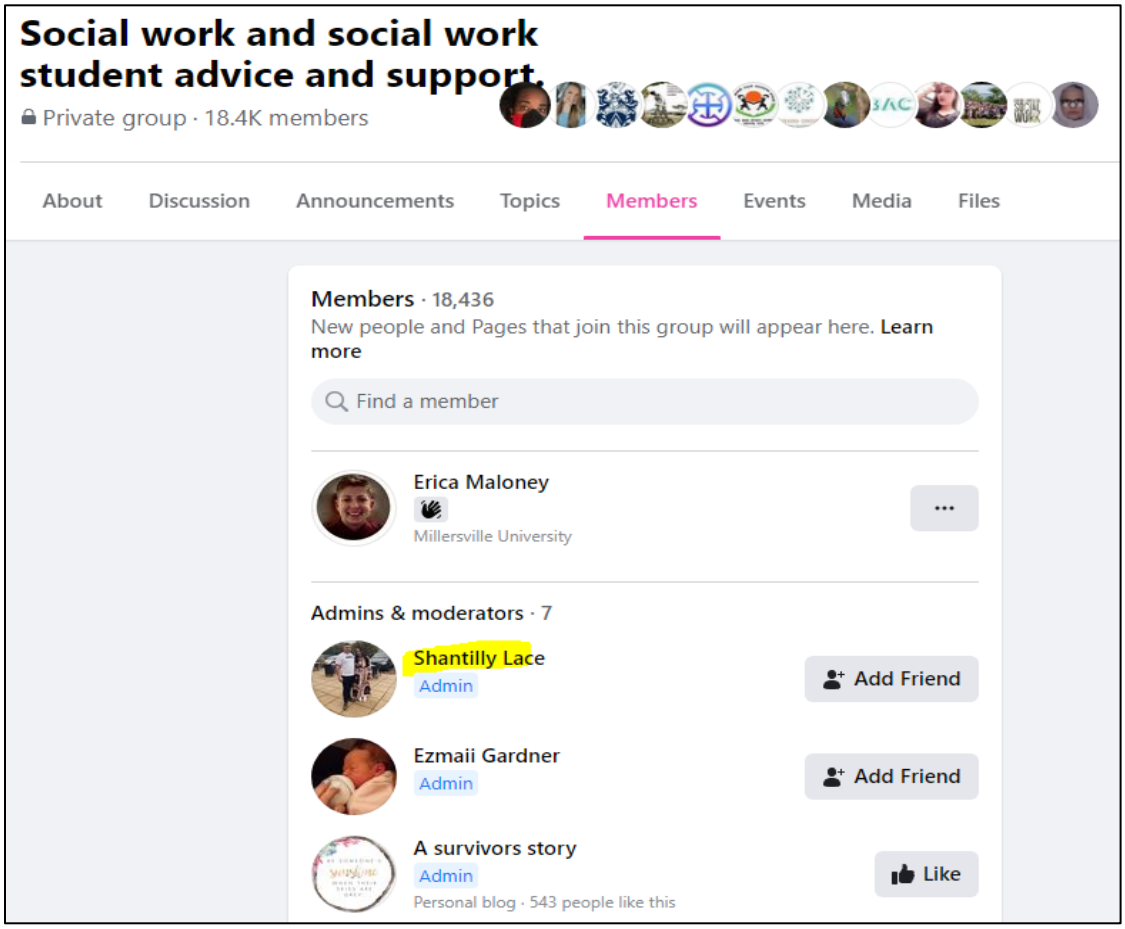



Social Workers Life
Private group · 28.4K members
About
Discussion
Announcements
Topics
Members
Events
Media
Files
Members · 28,376
New people and Pages that join this group will appear here. Learn more
Find a member
Erica Maloney
Millersville University
Admins & moderators · 5
Sarah Scott
Admin
Holliston High School
Saveen Sundrani
Moderator
Add Friend
Amber Gauthier
Moderator
Founder & Strategist at Virtual Agency for
Add Friend

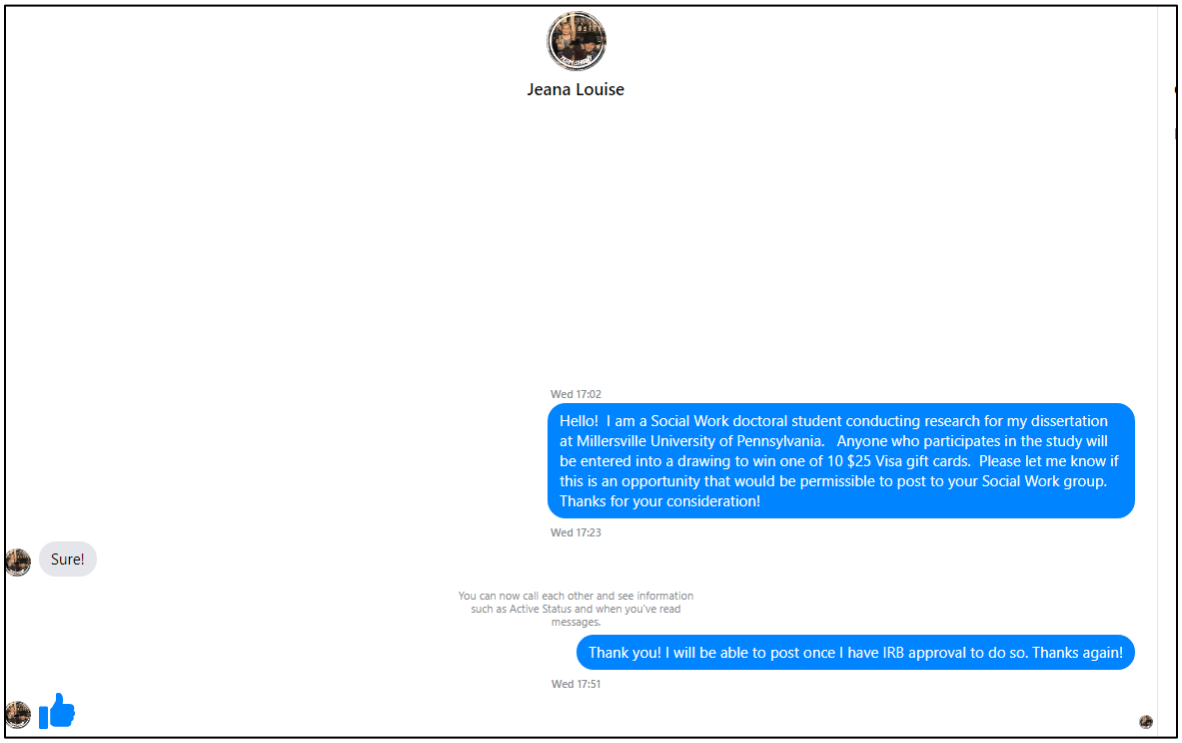

Amber Gauthier
Lives in Ottawa, Ontario
Founder & Strategist at Virtual Agency for Psychotherapists
Studied Child and Youth Worker at Algonquin College
Wed 17:03
Hello! I am a Social Work doctoral student conducting research for my dissertation at Millersville University of Pennsylvania. Anyone who participates in the study will be entered into a drawing to win one of 10 $25 Visa gift cards. Please let me know if this is an opportunity that would be permissible to post to your Social Work group. Thanks for your consideration!
Fri 02:35
Hi Erica, yes, your post will be approved!
You can now call each other and see information such as Active Status and when you've read messages.
Fri 15:14
Thank you! I will post as soon as I get my irb approval.

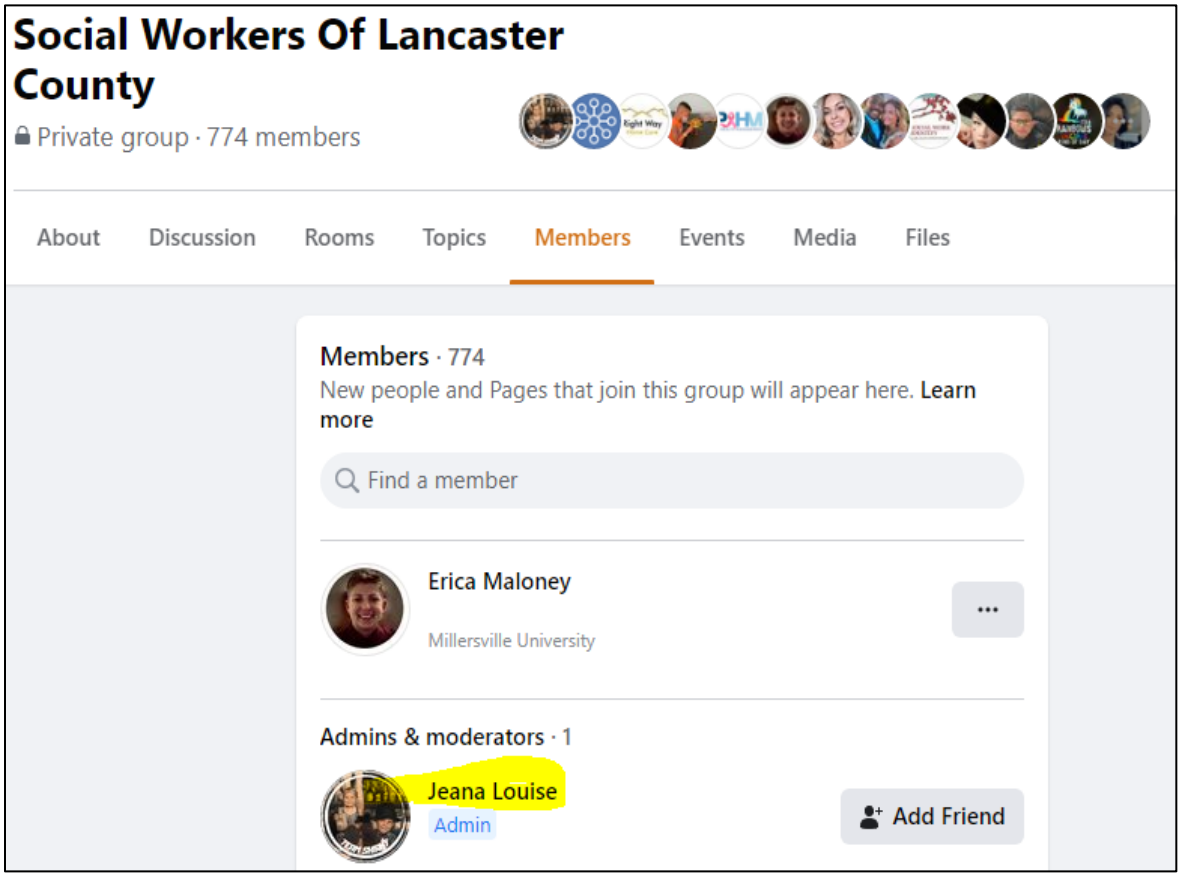
Social Work and Student Advice Page, Shantilly Lace, Admin



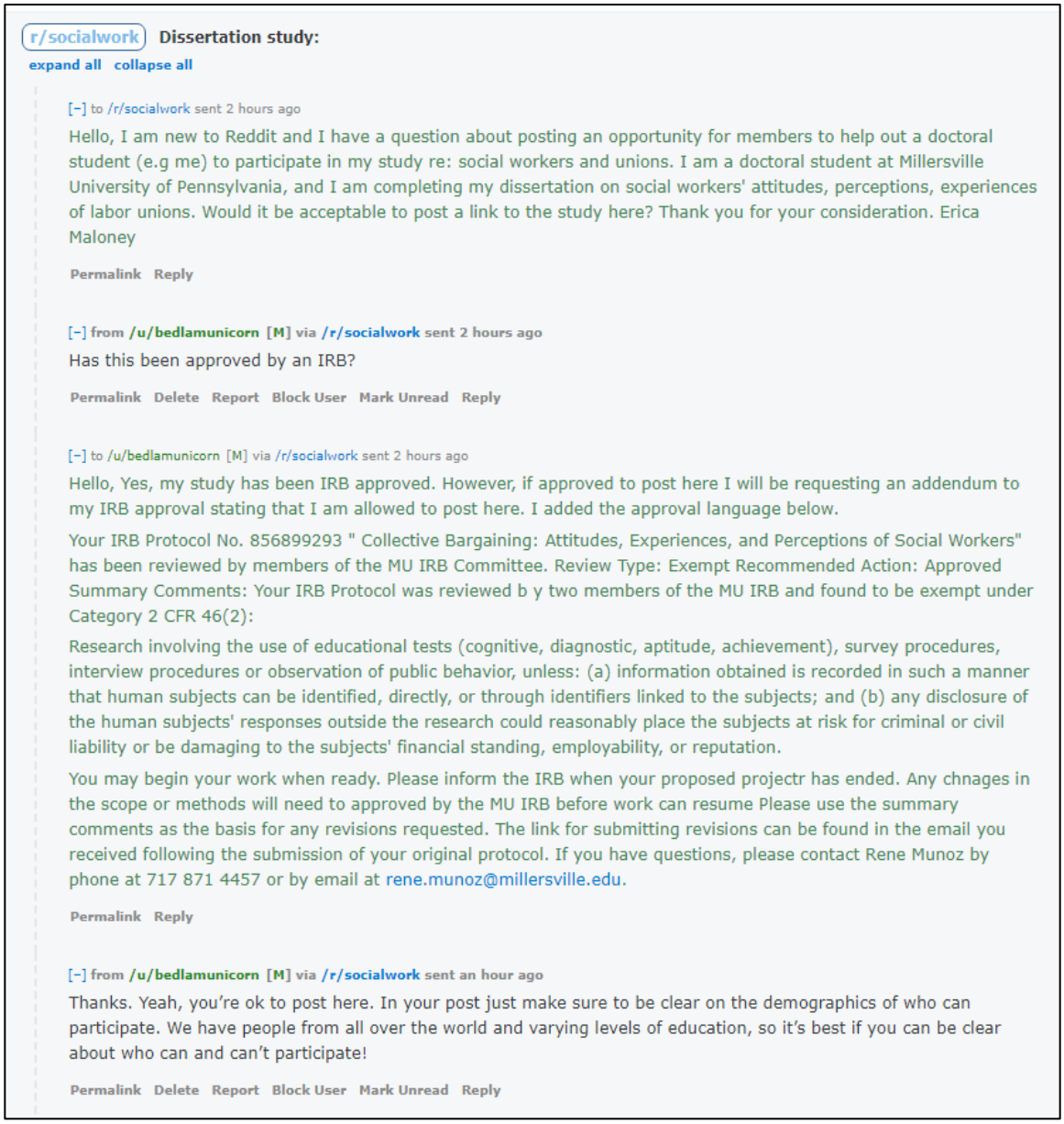


Lancaster Social Workers Page





Reddit Social Work Group



r/socialwork **Dissertation study:**

expand all collapse all

[–] to /r/socialwork sent 2 hours ago

Hello, I am new to Reddit and I have a question about posting an opportunity for members to help out a doctoral student (e.g me) to participate in my study re: social workers and unions. I am a doctoral student at Millersville University of Pennsylvania, and I am completing my dissertation on social workers' attitudes, perceptions, experiences of labor unions. Would it be acceptable to post a link to the study here? Thank you for your consideration. Erica Maloney

Permalink Reply

[–] from /u/bedlamunicorn [M] via /r/socialwork sent 2 hours ago

Has this been approved by an IRB?

Permalink Delete Report Block User Mark Unread Reply

[–] to /u/bedlamunicorn [M] via /r/socialwork sent 2 hours ago

Hello, Yes, my study has been IRB approved. However, if approved to post here I will be requesting an addendum to my IRB approval stating that I am allowed to post here. I added the approval language below.

Your IRB Protocol No. 856899293 " Collective Bargaining: Attitudes, Experiences, and Perceptions of Social Workers" has been reviewed by members of the MU IRB Committee. Review Type: Exempt Recommended Action: Approved Summary Comments: Your IRB Protocol was reviewed b y two members of the MU IRB and found to be exempt under Category 2 CFR 46(2):

Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (a) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly, or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (b) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk for criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You may begin your work when ready. Please inform the IRB when your proposed projectr has ended. Any chnages in the scope or methods will need to approved by the MU IRB before work can resume Please use the summary comments as the basis for any revisions requested. The link for submitting revisions can be found in the email you received following the submission of your original protocol. If you have questions, please contact Rene Munoz by phone at 717 871 4457 or by email at rene.munoz@millersville.edu.

Permalink Reply

[–] from /u/bedlamunicorn [M] via /r/socialwork sent an hour ago

Thanks. Yeah, you're ok to post here. In your post just make sure to be clear on the demographics of who can participate. We have people from all over the world and varying levels of education, so it's best if you can be clear about who can and can't participate!

Permalink Delete Report Block User Mark Unread Reply

Appendix C

Interview Guide

Attitudes

1. If you were given the choice to join a union, how would you feel about it?
2. What's the first thing that comes to mind when you hear about unions?
3. How do you feel about unions for social workers?

Perceptions

1. In what ways do you think unions can affect a social worker's job conditions?
2. In general, what do you think about the topic of labor unions?

Experiences

1. Thinking about both where you work now, and where you have worked in the past, what would be/are the risks and benefits of having a union at your workplace?
2. If you are or have been a member of a union as a social worker, how do (did) unions affect your job?
    - If you are not a union member, how do you think that has affected your job?

Appendix D

Recruitment Letter

Hello!

My name is Erica Maloney, and I am a doctoral student in Social Work at Millersville University of Pennsylvania. I am currently recruiting participants for a qualitative research study regarding social worker attitudes towards, perceptions of, and experiences with unionization. Study participants will be asked to complete a 30-minute individual, recorded, zoom conference regarding your thoughts on labor unions. All interviewees will be entered for a chance to win one of 10 $50 Amazon gift cards.

There is no knowledge of, or experience with unions required to be eligible to participate. All participants must hold a CSWE accredited bachelor or master's degree in social work, be currently employed as a social worker in any area of practice and have access to zoom (free download) via phone, tablet, or PC

There are no explicit risks to participating in the study and all responses will be confidential.

There are no explicit benefits to participating except that all study participants will be entered to win one of 10 $50 Amazon gift cards.

Thank you for considering this opportunity! If you are interested in participating, please click on the link below to get started by indicating your consent to be interviewed, and I will contact you to set up an interview.

Link to consent and background information form:

https://millersville.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3V0kuxOyM80VESG

Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions. I can be reached via email at ermalone@millersville.edu.

Appendix E

Qualtrics Webform Link

https://millersville.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3V0kuxOyM80VESG

Appendix F

NASW Code 3.10 Labor-Management Disputes.

3.10 Labor-Management Disputes.

(a) Social workers may engage in organized action, including the formation of and participation in labor unions, to improve services to clients and working conditions.

(b) The actions of social workers who are involved in labor-management disputes, job actions, or labor strikes should be guided by the profession's values, ethical principles, and ethical standards. Reasonable differences of opinion exist among social workers concerning their primary obligation as professionals during an actual or threatened labor strike or job action. Social workers should carefully examine relevant issues and their possible impact on clients before deciding on a course of action. (NASW, 2017).

Appendix G

IRB Approval

From: rene munoz <noreply+e6f9ee34dad47b17@formstack.com>
Sent: Thursday, October 14, 2021 10:04:08 AM
To: Erica L Maloney <ermalone@millersville.edu>
Subject: IRB PROTOCOL REVIEW COMPLETED for Protocol No. 856899293 Collective Bargaining: Attitudes, Experiences, and Perceptions of Social Workers

Your IRB Protocol No. 856899293 " Collective Bargaining: Attitudes, Experiences, and Perceptions of Social Workers" has been reviewed by members of the MU IRB Committee.
Review Type: Exempt
Recommended Action: Approved
Summary Comments: Your IRB Protocol was reviewed by two members of the MU IRB and found to be exempt under Category 2 CFR 46(2):

Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (a) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly, or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (b) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk for criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You may begin your work when ready. Please inform the IRB when your proposed project has ended. Any changes in the scope or methods will need to approved by the MU IRB before work can resume
Please use the summary comments as the basis for any revisions requested. The link for submitting revisions can be found in the email you received following the submission of your original protocol.
If you have questions, please contact Rene Munoz by phone at 717 871 4457 or by email at rene.munoz@millersville.edu.

Appendix H

Codebook

Name	Description	Files	References
ADVOCATE FOR THEMSELVES	Sw'ers advocate for unions and better work conditions/pay etc	12	33
BACKGROUND of respondents	Asked about their reason for going into SW	15	15
BARRIERS TO UNION PARTICIPATION AND ACTION	Things that can prevent social workers from joining or starting a union	14	30
BENEFITS OF UNIONS	Benefits of unions shared by respondents/positive statements towards union behavior	15	24
COMMUNICATION	Communication is important to social workers (from union representatives)	5	14
CONSIDERING JOINING A UNION	Factors respondents weigh in considering whether or not to join a union	15	30
DISSATISFACTION WITH UNIONS	Downsides of unions shared by respondents/negative statements towards union behavior	10	26
EMPLOYER_UNION_WORKER RELATIONSHIPS	Relationship between unions and workers/workers employees/and union, workers, employer etc	8	27
POWER DYNAMICS	Power or lack of--worker, union, employer	15	47
PROTECTION	Protection of employees/protection of poor performing coworkers. Unions offer protection?	13	33
SOCIAL WORK IDENTITY	Professionalization/status/society perception	10	17
UNION AMBIVALENCE_UNCERTAINTY	Remarks that were indicative of uncertainty about joining a union or their opinions may have been inconsistent	9	22
WAGES AND BENEFITS	How unions impact wages, low wages for sw'ers. Better wages in a union.	15	75
WORKING CONDITIONS	Employer mistreatment, types of relationships with employers (negative/positive). Work environment. Coworkers.	11	22

Appendix I

Hierarchical Chart