

## **College Students' Attitudes Toward Labor Unions: Implications for Employers**

**Mussie T. Tessema**  
**Winona State University**

**Daniel Sauers**  
**Winona State University**

**Joell BJORKE**  
**Winona State University**

**Kathryn J. Ready**  
**Winona State University**

*This study replicates and extends the research on pre-employment predictors of attitudes toward labor unions, which subsequently influence willingness to join a union. The impact of a number of factors including family socialization, parental union attitude, work beliefs (Marxist and humanistic), and college major (field of study) is assessed on college students' attitudes toward labor unions. Selected demographic and attitudinal data were collected from a sample of 402 students representing several majors at a mid-sized Midwestern public university. The findings of the study strongly support the belief that family socialization and personal work beliefs are the most important predictors of college students' attitudes toward labor unions. Unlike prior studies, the impact of race on college students' attitudes toward labor unions was also assessed. Implications of these findings for employers and future research directions are also discussed.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Recent trends show that the rate of unionization has been falling in most advanced countries such as Australia, Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, and the United States. In the United States, union membership rate declined from 30 percent in 1970 to 11.9 in 2011 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). This dramatic and continuous decline in union membership has been characterized as a crisis for the labor movement and a threat to its ability to serve as an economic and political voice for American workers (Rose & Chaison, 1996: 78). In 2011, the union membership rate for public sector workers (37%) was substantially higher than for private industry workers (6.9%) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012), which indicates that public sector unions have not witnessed the same decline as the private sector.

The question is why union membership has declined? Major factors contributing to the decline in union membership include: the global context of industry, the practice of outsourcing jobs to non-union workers and to other countries, the decline in the manufacturing industry, the rise of undocumented or illegal workers, the introduction of progressive management approaches, and growing political and ideological opposition to unions (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Juravich, 1998; Carrell & Heavrin, 2013; Gallagher & Fiorito, 2005; Gould, 2008; Henchek, 2006; Rosenfeld, 2006; Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006).

As the private-sector union membership rate declines, there is increasing interest in identifying the factors that shape the union attitudes and membership decisions of young adult workers, in general, and college students, in particular. This study intends to assess the extent to which parent's background (parental union attitudes and parent's participation in union activities), personal work beliefs (Marxist and humanistic), college major (field of study), and race are correlated with college students' attitudes toward labor unions using a public university in the Midwestern United States as a case study.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Union attitude has received considerable attention across many disciplines including management (e.g., Deshpande & Fiorito, 1989; Gallagher & Fiorito, 2005), psychology (e.g., Barling, Kelloway, & Bremermann, 1991; Kelloway, Barling, & Agar, 1996; Pesek, Raehsler, & Balough, 2006), and industrial relations (e.g., Haberfeld, 1995; Willoughby & Barclay, 1986). Considerable research has been conducted to determine why workers join labor unions or vote to certify unions (e.g., Brett, 1980; Gallagher, 1999; Haberfeld, 1995; Hester & Fuller, 1999; Kramer, 2008). Research addressing reasons for union formation suggests that workers unionize because of dissatisfaction with job and employment conditions, the instrumentality of unions in improving conditions, and the promotion of social advances for all workers (e.g., Brett, 1980; Gallagher & Fiorito, 2005; McHugh, 2007). Most of the studies that focus on individual-level predictors have shown relationships between willingness to join a union and workers' demographics, job attitudes, and union attitudes (e.g., Deshpande & Fiorito, 1989). The above studies demonstrate that employees' voting decisions were consistently predicted by union attitudes. As a result, union attitudes have received much interest as a predictor of union voting intention or other union related behaviors (e.g., Barling et al., 1991; Davy & Shipper, 1993; Gallagher, 1999; Haberfeld, 1995; Hester & Fuller, 1999).

In most of the studies, correlations between measures of pro-union attitudes and willingness to join have been consistently positive in samples of workers who vary by job type (e.g., Deshpande, 1992; LaHuis & Mellor, 2001; Premack & Hunter, 1988). Unfortunately, little is known about how perceptions of union instrumentality develop because research examining union voting intentions and voting behavior has used union instrumentality as an exogenous variable (Gordon, Barling, & Tetric, 1995: 354). Given the central role attributed to individual attitudes towards labor unions, researchers recently investigated the *origin* of union attitudes.

### Family Socialization and Union Attitudes

One of the factors that affect students' union attitudes is family socialization. Family socialization research examines the extent to which the behaviors and attitudes of parents influence children's attitudes and behaviors. Many researchers argue that children's attitudes about unions are influenced by their parent's union membership status as well as perceptions of parent's union supportive behaviors and attitudes (e.g., Kelloway & Watts, 1994; Kelloway et al., 1996). Bandura's (1977) theory of *social learning* argues that as children see their parents becoming more involved in union activities (e.g., attending meetings, holding office in a union, participating in a strike and discussing union related issues), they form their own attitudes toward labor organizations, which subsequently affects their willingness to join a union. Recently, studies suggest that family socialization may play a significant role in the development of perceptions of union instrumentality (Barling et al., 1991; Kelloway et al., 1996; LaHuis & Mellor, 2001; Pesek et al., 2006). Barling et al. (1991) model based on an examination of

student data suggests that attitudes toward unions develop through family socialization processes. Two predictors of general attitudes towards unions are examined: perceptions of parents' general union attitudes and perceptions of parents' participation in union activities. The effect of perceptions of parents' union participation on an individual's general union attitude is mediated by the individual's perception of his or her parents' attitudes toward unions (LaHuis & Mellor, 2001).

Kelloway and Watts (1994) extended Barling et al.'s (1991) model using data from both parents and students (87 student-parent pairs) and concluded that college students' perceptions of parental union participation and attitudes were strongly related to parental reports of participation and attitudes. Consistent with Barling et al.'s (1991) conclusions, Kelloway and Watts (1994) contended that students' attitudes toward unions are shaped by their parents' attitudes toward labor unions and participation in union activities. Hester and Fuller's (1999) study reveals that family socialization (i.e., a child's perception of their parents' participation in union activities and their attitudes about unions in general) is positively related to the development of general union attitudes. The results suggest that union members who participate in union-related activities and who exhibit positive feelings toward unions are likely to have children who have positive attitudes about unions. These results support the role of family socialization in the unionization process and offer support for an analysis of student attitudes. Attitudes toward labor unions fulfill an important role in the unionization process as predictors of union related issues. Based on the above arguments, we hypothesize the following:

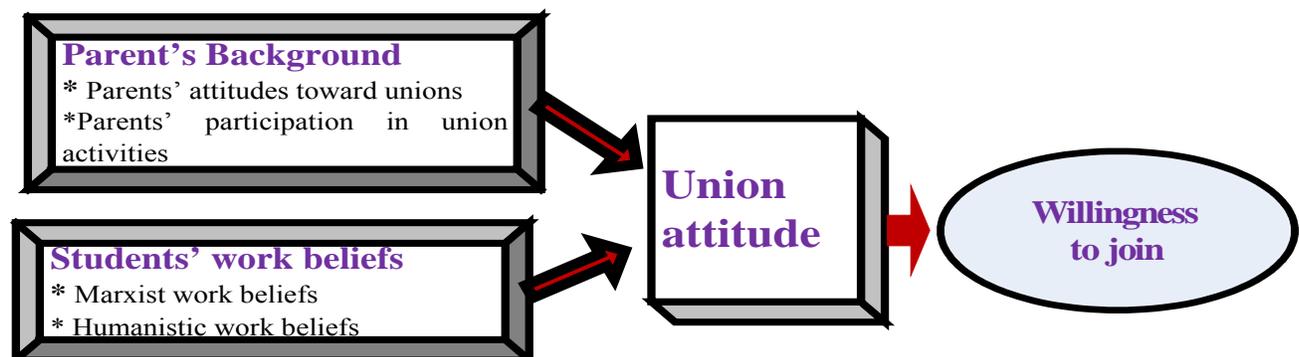
*Hypothesis 1a: College students' perceptions of their parents' union attitudes will be positively correlated with their attitudes toward unions.*

*Hypothesis 1b: Parents' participation in union activities will be positively correlated with students' attitudes toward unions.*

*Hypothesis 1c: Students' union attitudes will be positively correlated with their willingness to join a union.*

In our study, we adopted Barling et al.'s (1991) model of union attitudes as predictors of students' willingness to join a union. The model assumes that the more the students have pro-union attitudes and less antiunion attitudes, the more willing they would be to join a union or have the intention to join a union. This study assumes that pro-union attitudes would be positively related to willingness to join and antiunion attitudes would be negatively related to willingness to join. College students are expected to have little direct or personal experience with unions. Due to limited work experience, student's work beliefs and family socialization are less contaminated by work experiences and dissatisfaction (Barling et al., 1991: 728). We reasoned that student's willingness to join unions would be influenced by their attitudes (positive or negative) toward unions, which in turn are affected by parents' attitudes toward unions and their own work beliefs.

**FIGURE 1**  
**FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENTS' UNION ATTITUDES**



### *Work Beliefs and Union Attitudes*

Although family socialization (i.e., parental union attitudes and experiences) significantly affects college students' attitudes toward unions, it could also be argued that individuals' (e.g., students' own) *work beliefs* could also be significant predictors of college students' union attitudes (e.g., Barling et al., 1991; Pesek et al., 2006). Studies on students' union attitudes as predictors of willingness to join unions are consistent with family socialization models of Bandura (1977). Willingness to join is influenced by parents' attitude toward unions. Because college students are expected to have little direct (personal) experience with unions, their attitudes toward unions are mainly influenced by what they hear (see) from their parents. However, it could be argued that in addition to the effect of family socialization, college students hold their own personal and work-related beliefs that may predict union attitudes and willingness to join. This is because college students' attitudes or work-related beliefs are also affected by their friends, media reports, observation, and college experiences. Those work-related beliefs are likely to affect students' attitude toward unions (e.g., Barling et al., 1991; Buchholz, 1978; Kelloway et al., 1996; Pesek et al., 2006).

Buchholz (1978) argues that work-related beliefs could influence attitudes toward labor unions because these beliefs clarify and place limits on people's behavior. Two important work-related beliefs that may influence attitudes toward labor unions are Marxist and humanistic beliefs. According to Buchholz (1978), the Marxist work beliefs stress that workers should have a greater control over the workplace as a means of avoiding exploitation and alienation, while humanist beliefs stress the importance of individual growth and development. According to humanist beliefs, the experiences of individuals within the work environment are more important than the output achieved; work must have meaning and be fulfilling. Several studies show strong correlations between Marxist and humanistic work beliefs and union attitudes (e.g., Barling et al., 1991; Buchholz, 1978; Houghton, 2000; Kelloway & Newton, 1996; Kelloway & Watts, 1994; Pesek et al., 2006). We expect that individuals who exhibit Marxist work-related beliefs will demonstrate pro-union attitudes, which in turn may lead to willingness to join a union. The desire for meaningful work will lead to similar attitudes according to the humanistic view. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*Hypothesis 2a: College students' Marxist work beliefs will be positively correlated with their attitudes toward unions.*

*Hypothesis 2b: College students' humanistic work beliefs will be positively correlated with their attitudes toward unions.*

A recent study by Pesek et al. (2006) indicated that non-business majors were found to have more positive attitudes toward unions than business majors did. This is because "students in business majors typically are instructed from the managerial perspective" (Pesek et al., 2006: 1574). In light of the above research, we hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 3a: College students' majors will be correlated with their attitudes toward unions.*

Changing workforce demographics may also influence union attitudes. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), among major race and ethnicity groups, black workers were more likely to be union members (13.5 percent) than workers who were white (11.6 percent), Asian (10.1 percent), or Hispanic (9.7 percent). Black men had the highest union membership rate (14.6 percent), while Asian men had the lowest rate (9.1 percent). Moreover, unions tend to benefit more minority (African American, Asian American, and Hispanics) and female workers. That is, Blacks and Hispanic unionized workers have a higher wage premium than do whites (Carrell & Heavrin, 2013; EPI, 2007). This evidence suggests that race may affect perceptions of union attitudes. In light of the above research, we hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 4: College student's race will be correlated with their union attitudes.*

Previous studies have ignored critical methodological issues that are relevant to the measurement of union attitudes. In some studies, samples were not representative of the general population of university students (e.g., Kelloway & Watts, 1994; Hester & Fuller, 1999; LaHuis & Mellor, 2001; Willoughby & Barclay, 1986), and in other studies, a relatively small and homogenous survey (Barling et al., 1991; Kelloway & Watts, 1994; Willoughby & Barclay, 1986) was used. A recent study by Pesek et al. (2006) tries to correct the problem of small and homogenous survey with a sample of 644 college students in a western Pennsylvania University. While the larger sample size provides a stronger statistical analysis than in previous research, the sample was not entirely random. The relative homogeneity of the sample used suggests a high degree of non-randomness in the data-collection process that might bias the test statistics adversely (Green, Salkind, & Akey, 2000).

## RESEARCH DESIGN METHODOLOGY

### Measures

The questionnaire that was used to collect the data consisted of thirty-one union related items. *College students' attitudes toward unions* were assessed using twelve items taken from Deshpande and Fiorito (1989) and LaHuis and Mellor (2001) [e.g., unions are an important positive force in our society]. *Parents' attitudes toward unions* were assessed using four items taken from Brett (1980) [e.g., unions are not obstacles to making companies competitive]. *Marxist work beliefs* and *Humanistic work beliefs* were assessed with four items each taken from Buchholz (1978) [e.g., the free enterprise system mainly benefits the rich and powerful]. *Parents' participation in union activities* was assessed with four items taken from Barling et al. (1991) [e.g., has one of your parents held office in a union?]. Finally, *willingness to join a union* was assessed with three items taken from Wagar and Rahman (1997) [e.g., I would join unionized organization where workers bargain collectively].

Students were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with 27 union related items; the order of items was random. Responses were based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Items that were phrased as negative are reverse coded in the analysis. In assessing the four items related to parents' participation in union activities, the respondents rated themselves on a 3-point scale (yes, uncertain, and no, scored 2, 1, and 0 respectively). As per the suggestion of Kelloway et al., (1996), these four items were later coded "0" (no, uncertain) or "1" (yes). In addition, each respondent was asked to provide selected background information, including college standing, major, gender, age, race, and the student's union membership status. Table 2 also provides a brief description of the variables included in the model.

### Subjects and Procedure

We administered surveys to college students attending a public university in Minnesota. In this study, we employed a *multi-stage sampling procedure*. First, five college majors were selected – business, nursing, education, computer science, and communication studies. Next, 100 respondents from each major were randomly selected. In order to create a representative sample, the respondents were equally drawn from five majors. Out of the 500 (5x100) questionnaires, we received 402 usable responses for a response rate of 80.4 percent. We conducted the survey online using Zoomerang and provided incentives that encouraged respondents to take part in the survey.

Of the 402 respondents, 184 (45.8%) were male and 218 (54.2%) were female. The business and computer science subgroups were the only gender-balanced groups in the sample. The other groups were female-dominated. Nursing and education are traditionally female dominated occupations (Willoughby and Barclay 1986, 227). Female students outnumber male students in most majors; about 80 percent of the respondents were in the 18 to 25 year old age group. 21.6 percent of the respondents were from business 20.8 percent from education, 17.6 percent from nursing, 22.1 percent from computer science, and 17.6 percent from communication studies. In terms of college standing, 22.8 percent of the respondents were freshmen, 29.5 percent were sophomores, 27.0 percent were juniors, and 20.3 percent were seniors (see Table 1).

### Statistical Analysis

In conducting this study, we conducted a number of statistical analyses such as descriptive statistics, Cronbach's Alphas, correlation matrix, regression analysis, and one way ANOVA tests.

**TABLE 1**  
**SELECTED PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	
<b>Major</b>	Business	87	21.6
	Education	84	20.8
	Communication studies	71	17.6
	Nursing	71	17.6
	Computer science	89	22.1
<b>College Standing</b>	Freshman	92	22.8
	Sophomore	119	29.5
	Junior	109	27.0
	Senior	82	20.3
<b>Gender</b>	M	184	45.8
	F	218	54.2
<b>Age</b>	Below 18	8	2.0
	18-25	322	79.9
	26-30	64	15.9
	Above 31	8	2.0
<b>Race</b>	Caucasian	344	85.4
	African American	17	4.2
	Spanish	19	4.7
	Asian American	22	5.5

### FINDINGS

Table 2 displays the descriptions of the five composite variables, reliability coefficients (alphas), means, and standard deviations. Table 2 also provides the results of the calculations of the alpha coefficients, which were used to check the reliability of the variables. All alphas range from .73 to .87; this can be considered satisfactory (Nunnally, 1979). According to the analysis in Table 2, the overwhelming majority of the union related composite variables were rated somewhat in the middle (mean values ranging between 2.72 and 3.05 on a 5 point scale), with a s.d. of .72 or lower.

**TABLE 2**  
**DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND CRONBACH'S ALPHAS**

Composite Variables	High value means	Items (No.)	Alpha	Mean*	s.d.
Students' attitudes toward unions	Strongly agree that unions play important role on individual, organizational, and societal objectives.	12	(.87)	2.86	.31
Parents' attitudes toward unions	Strongly agree that my parents have positive attitudes toward unions.	4	(.75)	3.05	.48
Parents' participation in union activities	Has one of your parents participated in union activities?	4	(.81)	.27 <sup>a</sup>	.72
Marxist work beliefs	Strongly agree that workers should have a greater control over the workplace as a means of avoiding exploitation and alienation.	4	(.71)	2.72	.67
Humanistic work beliefs	Strongly agree that individual growth and development as more important than productivity.	4	(.73)	3.02	.52
Willingness to join a union	Strongly agree that I am willing to join a union.	3	(.75)	2.96	.58

NB: \*1 refers to 'Strongly disagree', 2 to 'Disagree', 3 to 'Indifferent', 4 to 'Agree' and 5 to 'Strongly agree'; <sup>a</sup>0 refers to "No", 1 to "Yes". N=402.

Table 3 presents the correlations between the variables included in the analysis. Although there are relationships between the variables included in the analysis, the extent of the relationship varies (Table 3). Table 3 demonstrates that students' attitudes toward unions was significantly correlated with parental union attitudes, parent's participation in union activities, willingness to join, race, and both types of work beliefs, but not with major, gender, and age. Student's willingness to join was significantly correlated with parent's attitude toward unions and parent's participation and both types of work beliefs, but not with major, gender, age or race. Race was found to be significantly correlated with parental union attitudes, but not with individual work beliefs.

**TABLE 3**  
**CORRELATION MATRIX**

N	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Major										
2	Gender	.03									
3	Age	-.04	-.04								
4	Race	-.02	-.05	.03							
5	Students attitude toward unions	.06	-.02	.05	.12**						
6	Parents' attitudes toward unions	.06	.05	.01	.11*	.67**					
7	Parents' part in union activities	.06	.06	.01	.25**	.47**	.54**				
8	Marxist work beliefs	.07	-.01	.07	-.06	.34**	.30**	.18**			
9	Humanistic work beliefs	.08	.04	.012	.08	.56**	.54**	.45**	.52**		
10	Willingness to join a union	.04	.01	-.01	.02	.63**	.44**	.34**	.27**	.63**	

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level; \*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); N=402.

In Table 4, we performed a regression analysis. The findings support three important points. First, as posited, the four composite variables were found to affect students' attitudes toward unions positively. Second, three out of the four composite variables show a statistically positive impact in explaining the change in students attitudes toward unions and are greater than or equal to  $\beta = .10$ . Third, the four factors altogether explain approximately 51 percent of the variance in students' attitudes toward unions. These findings are consistent with the predicted relationships and provide support to the proposed model. This suggests that the more positive students' perceptions of their parents' union attitudes, the more aware they are that their parents have participated in union activities, and the more they have humanistic work beliefs, the more likely they are to have pro union attitudes, which subsequently affects their willingness to join a union. While Marxist work beliefs were in the hypothesized direction, it was not significant.

When we added the demographic variables of major, gender, race, and age to the model, the  $R^2$  change was not statistically significant. (See Table 4, model 2). This further implies that the variables in Model 1 are among the main predictors of students' attitudes toward unions. Our findings support Hypothesis 1a in that parental attitudes toward unions ( $\beta = .47$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) affect students' attitudes toward unions, and Hypothesis 1b in that parents' participation in union activities ( $\beta = .10$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) affect students' attitudes toward unions. Moreover, our findings support Hypothesis 2b in that humanistic beliefs ( $\beta = .22$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) significantly influence students' attitudes toward unions. The findings support studies (e.g., Barling et al., 1991; Kelloway & Watts, 1994; LaHuis & Mellor, 2001; Pesek et al., 2006).

**TABLE 4**  
**RESULTS OF REGRESSION ANALYSES ON STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD UNIONS**

Variables	Model 1	Model 2
Parents' attitudes toward unions	.47***	.48***
Parents' participation in union activities	.10***	.10***
Marxist work beliefs	.06	.06
Humanistic work beliefs	.22***	.23***
Major		.01
Gender		.05
Race		.04
Age		.03
F	105.1***	52.2***
R	.72	.72
R <sup>2</sup>	.51	.52
R <sup>2</sup> change		.01

<sup>a</sup> Standardized Regression Coefficients are reported; \*\*\* $p < .001$ ;  $n = 402$ .

### Parental Influence on Students' Attitudes Toward Unions

Table 5 shows that students whose parents were union members were found to have slightly higher union attitudes than students whose parents were not union members, although the difference was statistically significant. Moreover, students whose parents have participated in a strike or have held office in a union tend to have more positive attitudes toward unions than those students whose parents have not participated in a strike or have not held office in a union (see Table 5). Our findings suggest that students' perception of parental union attitudes and participation in union activities affect their attitudes toward unions.

The results of our survey revealed that approximately 35 percent of the respondents' parents were union members. This is not surprising given that Minnesota does not have Right-to-Work-Laws and is one of the more highly unionized states. Although union membership continues to decline, the percentage of Minnesota's workforce that is unionized (15.8%) is still greater than the national average of 11.9

percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). The mean values of the composite variables of the current studies are slightly higher than other studies (e.g., Pesek et al., 2006; Willoughby & Barclay, 1986). Respondents were likely to have had greater exposure to unions than students might be that are from states where unions are not as strong. While parental union membership status was not found to be a significant predictor of students' union attitudes (Table 5), both parental participation in a strike and holding a union office were found to have a statistically significant influence on students' attitudes towards unions.

**TABLE 5**  
**ANOVA TESTS FOR PARENTAL PARTICIPATION IN UNION ACTIVITIES AND STUDENTS UNION ATTITUDES**

Composite variable	Parental Participation in union activities											
	Union membership				Strike participation				Holding office in a union			
	Union members N=135		Nonunion members N=267		Parent did strike N=49		Parent did not strike N=353		Parent did hold office N=35		Parent did not hold office N=376	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
<b>Students' union attitudes</b>	2.91	.56	2.82	.44	3.19	.46	2.81	.47	3.32	.38	2.81	.48
<b>ANOVA Test</b>	(1,400), F=3.7, NS <sup>a</sup>				(1,400), F=27.4 <sup>***</sup>				(1,400), F=37.0 <sup>***</sup>			

NS<sup>a</sup> refers to "Not Significant."

### The Impact of Students Major on Attitudes Toward Unions

One goal of this study was to assess the effect of a students' field of study (i.e., major) on their attitudes toward unions. Some majors (e.g., education and nursing) are projected to be growth sectors for future union organizing. ANOVA tests were conducted to determine whether students' major significantly affects differences among the five composite variables.

Table 6 presents the means, standard deviations, and results of ANOVA tests for the different groups of majors on the union attitude scales. The findings reported here show that although there were slight differences in mean values of the five composite variables, students' majors did not show statistically significant differences. Although the mean values for business majors were lower across all five composite variables assessed, and the mean values for education majors were higher on three out of the five composite variables, no statistically significant differences were found across majors.

It must also be noted here that our ANOVA tests did not show a statistically significant difference in union attitudes between male and female students, although female students' attitudes in four composite variables were slightly more favorable than males (results not reported). These results are consistent with the regression analysis from Table 4 that demonstrated that gender did not show a statistically significant impact on students' attitudes toward unions.

**TABLE 6**  
**ANOVA TESTS FOR STUDENTS' MAJOR AND THE COMPOSITE VARIABLES**

Composite variable	Major					ANOVA Test		
	Business N=87 (Mean)	Education N=84 (Mean)	Comm. studies N=71 (Mean)	Nursing N=72 (Mean)	Comp. science N=88 (Mean)	df	F	NS
Students' union attitudes	2.76 (.49)	2.91 (.46)	2.90 (.50)	2.90 (.50)	2.8 (.65)	(4,397)	1.48	NS <sup>a</sup>
Parental union attitudes	2.93 (.65)	3.13 (.63)	3.02 (.60)	3.09 (.65)	3.07 (.60)	(4,397)	1.42	NS <sup>a</sup>
Marxist work belief	2.60 (.72)	2.77 (.66)	2.81 (.75)	2.68 (.79)	2.81 (.70)	(4,397)	1.36	NS <sup>a</sup>
Humanistic work belief	2.91 (.58)	3.09 (.50)	3.00 (.66)	3.02 (.61)	3.10 (.50)	(4,397)	1.51	NS <sup>a</sup>
willingness to join a union	2.88 (.57)	3.03 (.55)	2.92 (.59)	2.95 (.66)	2.89 (.61)	(4,397)	1.142	NS <sup>a</sup>

NB: figures in the brackets refer to "Standard deviation"; NS<sup>a</sup> refers to "Not Significant"

### Impact of Race on Students Attitudes Toward Unions

An interesting result of this study is that while hypothesis 4, students race affects their union attitudes was not supported in the regression analysis (Table 4), race significantly affects two of the five composite variables (college students' union attitude, and parental union attitudes) as shown in Table 7.

**TABLE 7**  
**ANOVA TESTS FOR RACE AND COMPOSITE VARIABLES**

Composite variables	Race								ANOVA Tests		
	Caucasia n N=344		African American N=17		Hispanic s N=19		Asian American N=22		df	F	Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Students' union attitude	2.82	.48	3.06	.53	2.97	.63	3.02	.47	(3,398)	2.70	***
Parental union attitudes	3.01	.60	3.44	.50	3.28	.71	3.12	.56	(3,398)	4.08	***
Marxist work beliefs	2.74	.71	2.54	.83	2.76	.76	2.55	.77	(3,398)	.91	NS
humanistic work beliefs	2.99	.57	3.26	.50	3.17	.61	3.09	.61	(3,398)	1.84	NS
willingness to join a union	2.90	.59	3.27	.72	3.01	.67	2.83	.60	(3,398)	2.37	NS

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

One of the major goals of the current study was to assess the impact of family socialization (i.e., parental union attitudes and experiences) on college students' attitudes toward unions, which subsequently influence willingness to join a union. Our study's findings indicate that parental union attitudes and participation in union activities significantly predicted students' attitudes toward unions (Table 4). Thus, it supports previous research on the impact of family socialization on students' union attitudes and their willingness to join a union. We found the model of socialization proposed by Barling et al. (1991) useful for examining union attitudes among young people when their work experience is limited and their work-related attitudes are nascent. The findings reported here on the parents' union attitudes' effect on students' attitudes towards unions are generally consistent with those found in other studies (e.g., Barling et al., 1991; Kelloway, Barling, & Agar, 1996; Kelloway & Watts, 1994; Pesek et al., 2006).

In this study, we utilized several predictors of union attitudes prior to entry into the workplace. Parents' union attitudes were found to affect the change in union attitudes significantly. The magnitude of the coefficient for parental attitudes ( $\beta=.47$ ) suggests that perceptions of parental attitudes toward unions was the most important predictor of college students' own attitudes toward unions (Table 4).

We expected that parental union membership status would affect students' attitudes toward unions. Our findings, however, did not show significant differences in attitudes between students whose parents are union members and those who are not. Parents' union membership was found to be a weak predictor of college students' attitudes toward unions. However, parents' strike participation and holding office in a union was found to affect students' union attitudes significantly (Table 6). This suggests, "...the salient family influence may not be parental membership status but rather their attitudes toward organized labor" (Barling et al., 1991: 726).

An important question that may be raised is related to the use of self-report survey: How do students know their parents' attitudes toward unions and participation in union activities? The assumption is that students, in part, infer their parents' union attitudes from observing their parents' participation in union activities. Prior research demonstrates that students and parents did not differ on their reports of parental union participation and union attitudes (e.g., Kelloway & Watts, 1994). This suggests that students develop their union attitudes through social learning. As children, they see their parents become involved in union activities and discuss unions; this awareness results in students developing perceptions of, and attitudes toward, labor unions.

Humanistic work beliefs were found to influence student attitudes toward unions positively, which in turn influences student's willingness to join a union. Although humanistic and Marxist work beliefs were significantly correlated, Marxist work beliefs were not a significant predictor of student's attitudes toward unions. Prior research has indicated that both of these work beliefs predict attitudes toward, and involvement in unions (e.g., Barling et al., 1991; Kelloway & Harvey, 1999; Pesek et al., 2006). Our sample is college-educated students who arguably may have set a higher priority on aspiring to meaningful and fulfilling work as evidenced by their pursuit of a higher education than a non-college educated sample that may be more concerned with avoiding exploitation and alienation in the workforce. Further, one can argue that students who perceive their parents as being dissatisfied with their jobs would come to believe that work exploits people. Being dissatisfied with work would predict the development of the Marxist work belief. We did not collect data on parent's level of education or current job level.

Family socialization and work beliefs exerted substantial effect on college students' general attitudes toward unions. The results extend findings that parental socialization and work attitudes are of critical importance to unionization in college students who are not yet employed. This may suggest that the perceptions and attitudes of unions emerge during a young age, but solidify with age and experience.

It is interesting to note that while no statistically significant differences were found between business and non-business students regarding union related variables, students majoring in business tend to hold slightly less positive attitudes toward unions. It is conceivable that business schools spend more time emphasizing the importance of managerial training and the importance of effective communication with employees coupled with effective human resource policies as substitutes for unionization. Substitution policies have been used as an explanation for the decline in trade unionism (Beaumont, 1987). Further, we expected students majoring in education to hold attitudes toward unions that were more positive given that the education sector (37.1%) is the most unionized sector in the country (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). As expected, students majoring in education scored slightly higher in three of the five composite variables, although the differences were not statistically significant. In our study, the overwhelming majority of respondents were, on the average, neutral in their perceptions about unions, i.e., most of them responded neither agree nor disagree to the items asked. Our finding is consistent with prior research by Willoughby and Barclays (1986) and Pesek et al.'s (2006) who found a high level of neutrality in opinions about unions among college students.

One possible explanation for college students' neutrality is that they have had little or no work experience. A number of research studies have indicated that workers join unions out of frustration and dissatisfaction with job and employment conditions and the beliefs that the way to remove that frustration

is through collective action (Brett, 1980; Carrell & Heavrin, 2013; Tolich & Harcourt, 1999). Most of the time, frustration and dissatisfaction are widespread among graduates during their early stage of their careers mainly due to their unrealistic expectations (e.g., Decenzo & Robbins, 2010). Thus, once students graduate and join the workforce, they will develop their own views about unions (Lowe and Rastin 2000).

Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Lowe & Rastin, 2000; Kelloway et al., 1996; Pesek et al., 2006; Schur & Kruse, 1992), females in general tend to be more supportive or exhibit pro-union attitudes and willingness to join unions that do men. One of the possible explanations for the gender difference is that unionization benefits women workers more than male workers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). Unions tend to reduce gender wage differentials- as women represented by unions receive higher pay than non-unionized women employees do (EPI, 2007).

Overall, our findings are consistent with the family socialization models. Perceptions of parents' general union attitudes and perceptions of parents' participation in union activities are the major contributors to students' attitudes toward unions. Our findings also suggest that family socialization effects will most likely occur prior to workplace experience. Second, consistent with prior studies, the more positive attitudes students have, the more willing they are to join a union. Third, unlike previous studies, this study is the first to test the impact of race on students' union attitudes, although the results need to be validated in further studies before generalizing the findings.

College students are candidates for labor market and organizing (LaHuis & Mellor 2001). Understanding the predictors of union attitudes is crucial. Since students' attitudes are important predictors of union voting behavior, knowledge of how they develop has implications for an understanding of the unionization process (Barling et al. 1991, 730).

The study found a high level of neutrality in perceptions of the college students' union attitudes. This finding has two implications for employers. First, although family socialization significantly affects students' union attitudes (before entry to labor market), college graduates tend to make a real decision (as to whether to join a union or not), when they confront the real work environment. This implies that if graduates (newly hired employees) are well treated during the socialization (first entry to the organization) and during their future career, they are less likely to join a union. This in turn demands the introduction of progressive HR management approaches, including competitive compensation packages, flexible working schedule, opportunity for advancement, tuition reimbursement, worker-friendly management policies, addressing concerns of workers, improving communication, establishing fair grievance procedures, creating safe and pleasant working environment, and competitive pay and benefits (e.g., Bryson, Gomez, Gunderson, & Meltz 2005; Carrell & Heavrin 2013; Fiorito, 2001; Heery & Simms, 2010; McHugh 2007; Rosenberg and Rosenberg 2006). Secondly, recruiters tend to focus on the positive aspects of jobs (e.g., Mathis & Jackson, 2011; Decenzo & Robbins 2010), resulting in graduates developing unrealistic job expectations. Young workers become frustrated because of their employer's inability to meet their expectations (Mathis & Jackson, 2011). Hence, managers and recruiters would benefit by providing realistic job previews during the hiring process.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

The present study extends previous research in pre-employment predictors of attitudes toward labor unions. However, it has some limitations. First, some of the college students may not have a solid understanding of union related items, which in turn may affect their rating. Second, the 'race' variable is not proportional in that the three minority groups - African American, Asian American and Hispanic together comprise only 15 percent of respondents. That is, students in this sample are not an exact representation of workforce groups, nor do they represent all types of employees or education levels. Thus, while this study is an important step forward in understanding of pre-employment predictors of attitudes toward labor unions, it also leaves some questions for future research. First, unlike prior research, we empirically tested the effect of race on students' attitudes toward unions. Our findings show that race significantly affects two out of the five composite variables, which are related to union issues. The sample, however, was not proportional in regards to race (Table 7), calling for further validation of

the findings. Second, beyond limited evidence indicating that, as college students join the workforce, their union attitudes and willingness to join a union may change, more research is needed to determine how their attitudes change during the transition from college to work environment. This suggests that family socialization remains crucial until college students join the labor market. The extent to which family socialization influences students' union involvement remains an important question for future research. Thus, we suggest that longitudinal research is needed to examine if students' union attitudes change after graduation or when confronting the real work environment (Pesek et al., 2006). Third, previous research on pre-employment predictors of union attitudes indicates that parental attitude toward unions and their participation in strikes and union offices consistently and significantly influences students' union attitudes. The impact of parents' union membership status on students' union attitudes, however, has been inconclusive. Thus, further research should examine the impact of parental union membership status on student union attitudes.

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