

## **Union Participation: A Social Exchange Perspective**

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*We introduce the concept of perceived union obstruction (PUO), which expands the union-member social exchange relationship literature to include negative relationships. In addition, we assess cross foci-target perceptions and behaviors by testing hypotheses regarding the effects of perceived treatment by the organization and union on commitment to the union and participation in union activities. Hypotheses are tested using a sample of 168 public sector union members. Regression results provided mixed results for hypotheses. Generally, negative exchange relationships had a greater impact on attitudes and behaviors. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The 2009 National Labor Relations Board's Annual Report suggests a far more complex union-member exchange relationship than is captured by current theory. In addition to the nearly 700 requests for decertification elections and deauthorization polls, over 5,000 complaints were filed against unions for coercion of employees or illegal restraint and over 300 complaints of discrimination. Specifically, it seems that many union members may not only believe that their unions aren't supportive, but actually make it more difficult for them to achieve their personal and professional goals. To address this trend in the union environment and advance the literature on union-member relations, we present the argument that a member's perception that the union is coercive and limiting presents a much different relationship than one that is simply not perceived to be supportive.

Experts believe that changes in the legislative environment will make it easier for unions to organize. As a result, some speculate that the three-decade decline in union density may come to an end – and even

that union density may increase. However, existing literature suggests union members seek to help their unions realize their goals based upon their beliefs that the union is committed to its members (Tetrick, 1995). In short, members are committed to the union and subsequently help the union achieve its goals based upon their perception that the union is committed to its members. Although new political administrations may make the environment more conducive for organizing, these changes will not alter members' perception of their relationship with the union and not lead to the expected gains in union density. Accordingly, we suggest developing a more nuanced understanding of union-member relationships is important.

To this end, scholars studying social exchange theories have argued and shown that such relationships have both positive and negative facets. To understand the totality of the relationship and successfully predict its outcomes, both positive and negative dimensions need to be captured (Gibney, Zagenczyk, & Masters, 2009). As Eby, Butts, Lockwood, and Simon (2004: 415) note "negative relational experiences should not be conceptualized simply as a deviation from the positive, but (rather) a phenomenon that also composes the totality of relational experience". With this in mind, we look to expand the union-member social exchange relationship perspective to include both positive and negative components.

This objective is necessary given that the majority of union-member social exchange research focuses almost solely on perceived union support (PUS), defined as "members' global beliefs concerning the extent to which the union values their contributions and cares about their well-being" (Shore, Tetrick, Sinclair & Newton, 1994, p. 971). While much of the union-member social exchange research has focused on PUS, other social exchange relationships between the union and the member likely exist (Tetrick, 1995). We expand the literature to account for this possibility by presenting a measure which captures the negative social exchange relationship between the union and its members.

Critical to our argument is the idea that the union-member social exchange relationship does not exist in a vacuum. Members have multiplex relationships, as they maintain memberships in both their organizations as well as in their unions. Employees also have positive and negative social exchange relationships with the organization (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Gibney, et al. 2009; Rousseau, 1995). Eisenberger et al. (1986) defined perceived organizational support (POS) as an employee's perception that the organization values his or her contribution and cares about his or her well-being. Gibney et al. (2009) provided initial evidence that employees develop negative perceptions of their social exchange relationship with the organization, as opposed to relationships which are supportive to nonsupportive, as captured by the POS construct. Gibney et al.'s (2009) research also indicated that employees' perceptions of organizational obstruction (POO) are distinct from POS and psychological contract breach, employees' beliefs that their organization has failed to fulfill promised obligations (Rousseau, 1995). In a similar fashion, we introduce the concept of perceived union obstruction (PUO) in order to fully explain the totality of a member's social exchange relationship with the union. Perceived union obstruction is defined as a member's belief that the union obstructs, hinders or interferes with the accomplishment of his or her goals and objectives and is a detriment to his or her well-being.

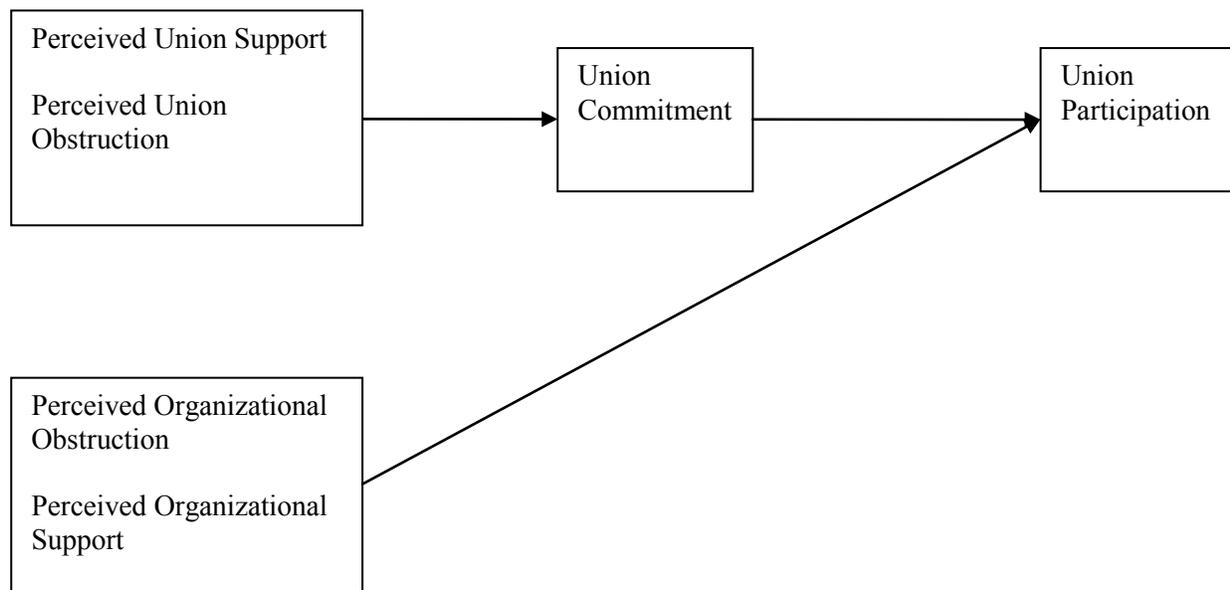
Perceived union obstruction is important because research has long since recognized that union members' perceptions of their exchange relationships with their employers drive their union-related attitudes and behaviors (Iverson & Curri van, 2003; Snape & Redman, 2007). Recent research has begun to examine these cross-foci-target relationships in more detail (Snape & Redman, 2007). For example, do perceptions of organizational support reduce citizenship behaviors directed toward the union? We further expand this burgeoning research stream by including both positive and negative relationships with the organization and union directed behaviors.

While the inclusion of social exchange variables may be a recent addition to this research stream, a long history of dual commitment and allegiance research exists (Iverson & Curri van, 2003; Snape & Redman, 2007). This line of research posits that employees who are committed to the company will be less likely to aid the union through citizenship behaviors or participate in union activities. The same is thought to be true for union members who are committed to the union. Generally speaking, the results of such dual commitment and allegiance studies are equivocal (Snape & Redman, 2007): the inclusion of social exchange perceptions which are predicated on the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) might

present a slightly different picture. A positive or negative social exchange relationship might directly influence behaviors directed toward other groups. The old adage which states that the enemy of my enemy is my friend or the friend of my friend is my friend might endear employees and members to help one foci or the other.

In this study, we expand the current literature devoted to union-member social exchange relationships by including relational aspects which are positive and negative. In addition, we test whether social exchange relationships with one organization have ramifications for relationships with other institutions. We begin by reviewing the social exchange literature and then develop hypotheses. These hypotheses are then tested using a sample of public sector union members. We conclude with a discussion of the practical and theoretical implications as well as the limitations of the study.

**FIGURE 1  
THEORETICAL MODEL**



## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Exchange Relationships

Social exchange theory is predicated on the idea that individual-collective relationships may be characterized as exchanges of mutual support that are socioemotional (as opposed to solely economic) in nature (Blau 1964; Eisenberger et al, 1986; Sinclair & Tetrick, 1995). Underlying the individual-collective social exchange is the assumption that individuals personify the collective, be it a union or employer, and attribute the agents' actions to the intent of the collective itself (Eisenberger et al, 1986; Levinson, 1965; Sinclair & Tetrick, 1995). Thus, perceived treatment from representatives may be interpreted as signals of the collective's valuation of the employee or member. The social exchange relationship model in organizations is one in which employers offer rewards and favorable job conditions in exchange for employee loyalty and work effort (Blau, 1964; Eisenberger et al, 1986; Levinson, 1965). However, these positive work conditions may be attributed to the union if members believe that the positive work conditions exist because of representational and collective bargaining efforts by the union (Sinclair & Tetrick, 1995).

Social exchange relationships are widely believed to be driven by the norm of reciprocity (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 1986). The negative norm of reciprocity obligates individuals to return harm with

harm, whereas the positive reciprocity norm obligates individuals to help, or at a minimum not harm, others who help (Gouldner, 1960). If an individual perceived positive treatment from the collective, the positive reciprocity norm suggests the individual will repay the positive treatment by behaving in a manner that is beneficial, or at a minimum is benign to the organization or union. Support perceptions are fostered when employees receive positive treatment from the organization, including fairness perceptions, human resource practices, and supervisory relationships (for a meta-analysis, see Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), whereas perceptions of union support (PUS) are fostered by union instrumentality or the degree to which the union garners better working conditions for members (Snape & Redman, 2007; Tetrick et al., 2007). Consistent with reciprocity norm, research shows that POS and PUS positively relate to commitment and citizenship behavior and negatively to turnover and turnover intentions (Iverson & Currrivan, 2003; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Snape & Redman, 2004; Snape & Redman, 2007; Tetrick et al., 2007). Extant research generally indicates that social exchange theory presents a useful lens through which to view individual-collective relationships.

Yet some important aspects of social exchange are neglected in the literature. Researchers have long recognized that organizations are an important source of material and socio-emotional support for employees (Mayo, 1945). While early views of the employee-organization relationship focused exclusively on economic exchanges, subsequent perspectives considered the organization to be an important source of socio-emotional resources for employees as well. Employees derive esteem from organizational membership to overcome anomie (Mayo, 1945), which often leads them to attribute human-like characteristics to organizations (Levinson, 1965). Eisenberger et al. (1986) advanced the literature by proposing that employees develop a belief regarding the extent to which the organization provides support for them. They argued that the positive reciprocity norm (Gouldner, 1960) obligated employees to support the organization and union in return for its commitment to them. Together, Levinson (1965) and Eisenberger et al. (1986) demonstrate that employees: (1) personify organizations, and (2) form global beliefs regarding the extent to which treatment received from the organization is perceived to be supportive.

Gibney et al. (2009) expanded the employer-employee social exchange relationship to include negative exchanges. They argued that Gouldner's (1960) norm of reciprocity contains positive and negative elements. Negative elements are so salient that entire research streams are devoted to negative extra-role behaviors – known as organizational retaliatory behaviors. Based upon the foci-target argument inherent in the reciprocity norm, employees must perceive that the organization is a source of negative treatment if they are to retaliate against the organization. Following this logic, Skarlicki and Folger (2004) noted that “although many inanimate objects do not logically qualify as culpable actors, people nonetheless often treat personifications... as transgressors and deem them accountable for negative outcomes” (p. 375). It is noteworthy that Skarlicki and Folger do not in any way limit their reasoning to organizations, but instead consider inanimate objects in general.

Drawing on this logic, we believe that union members will hold unions responsible for negative treatment that they believe stems from the union (Bigoness & Tosi, 1984; Fiorito, Gallagher & Fukami, 1988). For example, unions have traditionally attempted to negotiate the highest wages possible for members. In some instances, such increased costs for employers may result in some members losing employment. Survivor members may hold the union responsible for negative treatment, such as increased workload and hours. Another possible situation may emerge as a result of the long-honored union clause of right of refusal. Right of refusal clauses require the most senior member of a union to refuse overtime before the overtime can be offered junior members. Traditionally, members with less seniority earn less and therefore may have a greater need for the more compensation. It is highly possible that these members could perceive the union as obstructing or interfering with their goals because they perceive that its policies are unfair.

While the research on negative social exchange relationships is fairly new, it is probable that the negative social exchange relationships will impact commitment to the organization or union. Research has consistently found that social exchange relationships correlate with commitment to the union or organization (Iverson & Currrivan, 2003; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Snape & Redman, 2004; Snape &

Redman, 2007; Tetrick et al., 2007). The positive norm of reciprocity obligates individuals to repay commitment with commitment (Eisenberger et al, 1986; Shore et al., 1994). In a union context, this increased commitment is manifested behaviorally through increased participation or through union activities or citizenship behaviors directed at the union.

## **HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT**

### **Social Exchange with the Organization and Union Participation**

Employees who perceived that the organization obstructed them were more likely to engage in voice behaviors (Gibney et al., 2009) and tended to disidentify with the organization (Gibney, Zagenczyk, Fuller, Hester, & Caner, 2011). Hirschman (1970) described voice behaviors as employee attempts to change a situation instead of leaving the situation. Voice was later expanded to include activities such as engaging supervisors and coworkers in discussions about problems in the workplace (Rusbult, Zembrodt & Gunn, 1982) and participation in union activities (Iverson & Curriuan, 2003).

The argument for including union participation in voice behaviors is predicated on the employment situation being characterized as dissatisfaction and displeasure with the current work environment (Rusbult Farrell, Rogers & Mainous, 1988). After actively engaging in other voice behaviors such as complaining, employees who are still dissatisfied with the environment will seek the union's help in addressing the hygiene factors causing displeasure (Freeman & Medoff, 1984; Parkes & Razavi, 2004). This argument suggests that employees participate in union activities to rectify poor working conditions. A rational employee would most likely consider a work environment which is perceived to be detrimental to one's well-being as characteristic of poor working conditions. Thus, an obstructed employee will aid the union by participating in union organizing activities.

While members may seek assistance from a union to moderate the employee-employer relationship in negative work environments, employees have complex relationships with the organization. Employees can also categorize the employer-employee relationship as caring and supportive and identify with the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986). When employees believe the organization supports and cares about them, they are more likely to identify with the organization (Gibney et al., 2011). They will perceive a oneness with the organization and may see the union as a threat to their personal identity. In such a manner they will not help the union because helping the union may ultimately lead to damaging themselves psychologically such that negative statements about the organization could be interpreted as negative statements about themselves.

In contrast to looking for help in rectifying a negative work relationship, employees perceiving a positive work relationship are unlikely to feel obligated to help the union. In contrast to obstructed employees, these employees will distance themselves from active participation in union activities in an effort to not adversely impact the positive work environment that already exists. Some researchers have argued that members are likely to go beyond not helping the union and in fact contribute to efforts aimed at actively attempting to decertify the union as working conditions become more positive (Bigoness & Tosi, 1984). Thus, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 1: Perceptions of organizational obstruction are positively related participation in union activities.*

*Hypothesis 2: Perceived organizational support is negatively related to participation in union activities.*

### **Social Exchange with the Union and Union Participation**

Perceived union obstruction is defined as a member's belief that the union obstructs, hinders or interferes with the accomplishment of his or her goals and objectives and is a detriment to his or her well-being. This perception will be fostered by treatment received from the union. To the extent that the membership believes that the union obstructs goal attainment and is detrimental to their well-being,

members will be less likely to participate in union events. Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) and the negative norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) provide the theoretical underpinning of this relationship.

For example, some scholars have argued that unionization reduces a member's autonomy and as a result their ability to engage in discretionary behaviors (Troy, 2004). As is the case in employer-employee relationships, the union-member social exchange relationship may also be characterized as dissatisfying (Fiorito et al., 1988). Fiorito and colleagues argued and found support for the idea that members develop perceptions that the union may reduce the quality of the working environment. Consistent with research on cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), when the union-member relationship takes a negative tone, members are likely to distance themselves from the union in much the same way that employees distance themselves from organizations that negatively affect employee self-concept (Gibney et al., 2011). This occurs because employees experience tension when they behave in a positive manner towards an organization that they regard negatively. According to the positive and negative norms of reciprocity, individuals do not help those that are perceived to be harming them, but are likely to help those who help them (Gouldner, 1960). Thus, members that perceive the union to be supportive and care about their well-being are more likely to reciprocate by supporting the union through engagement in union activities. A growing body of research consistently finds that members who believe that the union is supportive participate in union activities (Tetrick et al., 2007).

*Hypothesis 3: Perceived union support is positively related participation in union activities.*

*Hypothesis 4: Perceptions of union obstruction are negatively related to participation in union activities.*

### **Social Exchange with the Union and Union Participation**

While the "cross-foci" commitment or dual commitment and allegiance research is equivocal (Bigoness & Tosi, 1984), the mediating role of union commitment is significantly clearer (Chan, Snape & Redman, 2004; Sinclair & Tetrick, 1995; Snape & Redman, 2004; Snape & Redman, 2007; Tetrick et al., 2007). The argument is similar to that proposed in the organizational literature: employees look to reciprocate positive treatment through increased commitment which manifests itself in aiding the provider of said treatment by going above and beyond job requirements (Organ, 1988). However, job requirements may not present the opportunity to repay the union for positive treatment. Accordingly, members who feel obligated will look for ways to assist the union in other ways. Such assistance may take various forms including helping other members, attending union meetings and generally speaking favorably when discussing the union with others.

Based upon the positive norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), members who perceive that the union is committed to them reciprocate with commitment to the union characteristic of a homogeneous exchange relationship. This attitudinal exchange is then manifested in behavior indicative of commitment such as participation and aid directed to the union.

Although these arguments are based on the positive norm of reciprocity, members may also have negative perceptions of their relationship with the union (Bigoness & Tosi, 1984; Fiorito et al., 1998). When members perceive that the union treats them in a negative manner, they are unlikely to be committed to the union's goals. The reduced commitment will be manifested in reduced participation in union-sponsored activities. Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 5: Commitment to the union mediates the positive relationship between perceived union support and union participation.*

*Hypothesis 6: Commitment to the union mediates the negative relationship between perceived union obstruction and union participation.*

## METHODS

### Sample and Procedures

The leaders of a public sector labor union in the eastern United States agreed to participate in the survey, but declined identification of the union in any forthcoming publications. We collected 168 responses from union members. Responses were collected from a small mailing (n=94, response rate 11%) and from attendees at monthly meetings (n=74). The sample was 53% female with an average age of 53 and a mean tenure of approximately 17 years. Approximately 37% of the respondents had completed a college degree (associate, bachelor or graduate degree).

### Measures

The response format for the union-member and employer-employee social exchange relationships, as well as union commitment scales, was a 7-point Likert scale with endpoints of “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (7) with a midpoint of “Neither Agree\Disagree” (4). The response format for the union participation scale was a four point scale with endpoints of “Very Often” (3) and “Never” (0).

#### *Perceived Organizational Obstruction*

Gibney et al. (2009) developed the Perceived Organizational Obstruction scale. We selected three items from their scale which are listed in Table 2 due to space constraints imposed by the organization. The items were chosen to cover the main dimensions of the construct: obstruction of work performance, goal attainment and detriment to well-being. Cronbach’s alpha for perceived organizational obstruction in the current sample is .80.

#### *Perceived Organizational Support*

With space considerations in mind again, we selected three items from the perceived organizational support scale (Eisenberger et al., 1986) that are listed in Table 2. The items were selected to capture the main tenets of the perceived organizational support construct, which purports that the organization values employees’ contributions and cares for employees’ well-being (Eisenberger, et al., 1986). The reliability measure of Cronbach’s alpha for the current sample was .91.

#### *Perceived Union Support*

We selected three items (see Table 2) with the factor loadings above .71 from the Perceived Union Support scale (Shore et al., 1994). A factor loading of .71 suggests more of the variance in item scores is due to the underlying construct instead of error. Internal consistency for the scale, as measured by Cronbach’s alpha, was .94.

#### *Perceived Union Obstruction*

We changed the referent of the three perceived organizational obstruction scale items from organization to union to create the perceived union obstruction scale. Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .86.

#### *Union Commitment*

We used four items from the loyalty subscale of the union commitment scale developed by Gordon, Philpot, Burt, Thompson, and Spiller (1980; see Table 2). We utilized the loyalty subscale since “most prior research has established loyalty as a primary antecedent” to union participation (Tetrick, Shore, McClurg & Vandenberg, 2007, p. 820). Sherer and Morishma (1989) reported a Cronbach’s alpha of .88 for their seven item scale, whereas Tetrick et al. reported an alpha of .91 for the full ten item loyalty subscale. The internal consistency of the measure we used in this study was .95.

### Union Participation

We used seven items from Fullagar, Gallagher, Gordon and Clark's (1995) eleven-item union participation scale. We modified the scale response format. Fullagar et al. (1995) asked respondents whether the respondent had engaged in the behavior during the past year, whereas respondents in this study were be asked to report whether they performed the behaviors very often, often, hardly ever or never. Cronbach's alpha for the current sample was .88.

### Control Variables

We controlled for gender, tenure and age. Gender was coded as 1 for men and 0 for women. Tenure and age were measured in years. We controlled for gender because female members may actually be obstructed by practices such as the glass ceiling. Tenure was controlled since junior members may perceive higher levels of obstruction due to union clauses such right of first refusal. In addition, employees who perceive higher levels of support from the organization are more likely to remain with the organization. Gibney et al. (2009) concluded that treatment by the organization may be more salient to younger workers whereas older employees perceive that organizational events may not directed at them personally. Thus, we controlled for age. In addition, older employees may face some of the same negative treatment that women experience.

## RESULTS

**TABLE 1**  
**DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS**

			Correlations								
	Mean	Std. Dev.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Age	52.58	9.55	N/A								
Gender	.42	.5	.00	N/A							
Tenure	16.74	10.12	.37***	.07	N/A						
POO	3.77	1.79	-.09	-.07	.14	(.80)					
POS	3.21	1.87	.27**	-.08	.01	-.41***	(.91)				
PUS	4.44	1.76	-.06	-.13	.10	.01	.12	(.94)			
PUO	2.30	1.56	.04	.17	.02	.23*	-.09	-.40***	(.86)		
Union Commitment	5.34	1.78	.00	-.02	.14	-.08	.11	.65***	-.60***	(.95)	
Union Participation	1.72	.80	-.08	.12	.17	.34***	-.18	.30**	-.26**	.40***	(.88)

Notes: Cronbach's Alpha reported on diagonal in parentheses, \*\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level, \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

The means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations were calculated and are presented in Table 1. All union social exchange variables were significantly correlated with union participation as well as perceived organizational obstruction, but perceived organizational support was not significantly correlated with union participation. We assessed the discriminant validity of the constructs using the bivariate correlations. We used Morrow's bivariate correlation criterion of .8 for construct redundancy (Morrow, 1983). The results presented in Table 1 suggest that respondents distinguished between positive and negative social exchange perceptions with and between the union and employer.

Before proceeding with hypotheses testing, we chose to evaluate if respondents distinguished between social exchange perceptions with the union and the organization. That is, within each social exchange relationship, we included positive and negative social exchange perceptions. We included union commitment perceptions to aid in evaluation of the degree to which single source bias influenced our results.

Nunnally (1978) suggested a ten to one item-respondent ratio for factor analysis. Thus, our study meets this criterion and we continued with our analysis. The sixteen items included in the factor analysis are presented in Table 2.

**TABLE 2**  
**FACTOR ANALYSIS**

Item	Factor				
	Union Commitment	Perceived Union Support	Perceived Organizational Support	Perceived Union Obstruction	Perceived Organization Obstruction
My organization is a detriment to my well-being.	.02	.01	-.27	.17	<b>.75</b>
The organization gets in the way of my performance.	-.02	-.01	-.14	.05	<b>.88</b>
My goal attainment is thwarted by the organization.	-.03	.03	-.11	.04	<b>.91</b>
My organization really cares about my well-being.	-.01	.05	<b>.91</b>	-.03	-.16
My organization values my contributions to its well-being.	.15	.02	<b>.89</b>	-.07	-.18
My organization strongly considers my goals and values.	-.05	.12	<b>.90</b>	.04	-.17
The union strongly considers my goals and values.	.35	<b>.86</b>	.02	-.09	-.06
My union considers my best interests when it makes decisions that affect me.	.40	<b>.83</b>	.14	-.13	.06
My union really cares about my well-being.	.33	<b>.86</b>	.09	-.20	.06
My union is a detriment to my well-being.	-.11	.00	-.05	<b>.88</b>	.09
The union gets in the way of my performance.	-.33	-.28	.01	<b>.79</b>	.14
My goal attainment is thwarted by the union.	-.36	-.19	-.02	<b>.83</b>	.08
There's a lot to be gained by joining the union.	<b>.90</b>	.30	.03	-.18	-.02
Deciding to join the union was a smart move on my part.	<b>.85</b>	.30	.01	-.26	.01
I feel a sense of pride in being part of the union.	<b>.82</b>	.32	.02	-.28	.01
Based on what I know now, and what I believe I can expect in the future, I plan to be a member of the union for the rest of the time I work for the company.	<b>.85</b>	.24	.04	-.16	-.04

The factor analysis utilized an extraction method of five factors – as compared to eigenvalues greater than one- with varimax rotation. This methodology was chosen, instead of completely exploratory extraction, because theory would suggest the existence of five factors since the larger scales from which the items were selected have been validated in previous research, except for PUO. All items loaded on the appropriate construct with an item-factor correlation of at least .71. No item exceeded the cross-loading item-factor correlation criterion of .4. Thus, confirming our expectations based upon prior research and analysis. The scales exhibit acceptable degrees of internal consistency (see Table 1). From these results, all items were retained for further analysis. We therefore concluded that respondents distinguished between items and responded to similar items in a similar fashion. However, this does not mean that the two different sources of data were invariant in responding to the independent variables in question. We therefore compared the two groups before continuing with our analysis.

Before combining the data, we checked for item invariance across the subsamples on the sixteen survey items which comprised the independent variables. The respondents differed in their response pattern to two items, one perception of union support item (chi square 22.65, 6 df,  $p \leq .001$ ) and one perception of union obstruction (chi square 18.22, 6 df,  $p \leq .01$ ), of the sixteen items.

Due to these differences in the response patterns, we decided to evaluate whether differences in the mean levels of perceptions of support and obstruction existed. We therefore created an index variable for perceived union support and perceived organizational obstruction. The results of an ANOVA provided mixed results. We ran the regressions for each of the subsamples. The same hypotheses found support in each of the subsamples at the same level of significance. However, the beta values changed. The results of the ANOVA found that members attending the meeting perceived higher levels of support, but no there was no significant differences in the mean of perceptions of obstruction between these groups.

Based upon the results of our analyses, we decided to proceed with hypotheses testing by treating the subsamples as a single sample. All hypotheses were tested using hierarchical regression analysis using Baron and Kenny's (1986) methodology for testing mediation. We utilized a three-step regression model. In the first step, we entered demographic variables of age, gender and organizational tenure. Hypotheses 1 through 4 were tested using the second step of the regression which when the social exchange variables were entered. The regression results are presented in Table 3.

**TABLE 3**  
**RESULTS OF REGRESSION ANALYSIS**

Predictors	Union Participation			Union Commitment	
	1	2	3	1	2
<b>Step 1:</b>					
<b>Demographic Variables</b>					
Age	-.16	-.05	-.05	-.07	.01
Gender	.11	.22*	.18*	-.03	.12
Tenure	.22*	.10	.08	.17	.08
Adjusted R2	.03*			-.01	
<b>Step 2: Independent Variables</b>					
Perceived Organizational Obstruction		.39***	.38***		.04
Perceived Organizational Support		-.04	-.06		.04
Perceived Union Support		.19	.06		.47***
Perceived Union Obstruction		-.32***	-.20		-.44***
R2 Change		.26***			
<b>Step 3: Mediator</b>					
Union Commitment			.27*		
R2 Change			.03*		.56***

Notes: \*\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level, \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

We found mixed support for our hypotheses in the second step of our regression analysis. Hypothesis 1 stated that POO would positively predict participation in union events. We found support for this in the third step of the regression ( $\beta = .39, p \leq .001$ ). Hypothesis 2, which stated that POS would be negatively related to union participation, was not supported ( $\beta = -.04, p > .05$ ). Union participation was positively and but not significantly related to perceived union support ( $\beta = .19, p > .05$ ). Thus Hypothesis 3 was not supported. Perceived union obstruction was negatively related to union participation ( $\beta = -.32, p \leq .001$ ) in support of Hypothesis 4.

We used the criteria established by Baron and Kenny (1986) to determine if mediation effects existed: (a) a significant association between the independent variable and the mediator variable, (b) a significant association between the mediator variable and the dependent variable, (c) a significant association between the independent variable and the dependent variable, and (d) an insignificant (*full* mediation) or reduced effect (*partial* mediation) for the independent variable on the dependent variable when the mediator variable is held constant.

The first requirement for mediation was met for perceived union support and perceived union obstruction (see Table 3). Both perceived union support and perceived union obstruction were significantly associated to the mediator variable (union commitment (PUS:  $\beta = .47, p \leq .001$ ; PUO:  $\beta = -.44, p \leq .001$ ). The second requirement for mediation was also met, as union commitment was significantly related to union participation ( $\beta = .04, p \leq .05$ ). Support for the third requirement for mediation, a significant correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable, was obtained for perceived union obstruction (Hypothesis 4), but not perceived union support (Hypothesis 3). The fourth step in the test for mediation, which requires that the independent variable not influence the dependent variable after the mediator is entered into the regression equation, was also met. When union commitment was entered in the equation in step 3, the PUO-union participation ( $\beta = -.20, p > .05$ .) became insignificant in the presence of union commitment. Thus, commitment to the union fully mediated the PUO-participation in support of hypothesis 6. Hypothesis 5 was not supported because Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide evidence which generally supports the notions that: (a) union members develop perceptions which capture negative aspects of the social exchange relationships that they maintain with their unions and these perceptions go beyond perceptions of support; (b) perceptions of the employer-employee social exchange relationship influence member's behavior in union activities; and (3) negative relationships have a greater influence than positive relationships.

While in different directions, the negative perceptions of PUO and POO were the strongest predictors of union participation. Employees and members seem to respond more strongly to negative treatment from the organization and the union. The relatively modest response to positive encounters suggests that negative campaigning works. As such, union leaders should continually emphasize the negative treatment from the organization. While focusing on the negative treatment from the organization, it would also be wise to occasionally point out some of the supportive treatment that the union provides.

Interestingly, while it also wise for corporate management to point out negative treatment from the union, executives need not point out positive treatment from the organization. This would lead to negative campaigns against one another. While our results suggest this would be an effective strategy, it should be used judiciously. Voice is only one response to dissatisfying working conditions (Rusbult et al., 1988). The employee/member may perceive that the only recourse to escape negative treatment from the organization AND the union is leave the organization. By terminating employment, the employee/member ceases being treated negatively by both the union and the employing organization.

One might expect such a response based upon the negative norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) which posits that individuals return negative treatment with negative treatment. The voluntary termination from a union environment simultaneously causes a loss of dues and fees to the union and increased replacement costs to the organization. In comparison to other retaliatory behaviors such as deviant

behaviors (Skarlicki & Folger, 2004), the union and organization may well be better off if the employee/member terminates the working relationship. Future research should explore the relationship between retaliatory behaviors directed at the union and organization in response to perceived negative treatment.

Iverson and Currivan suggested that researchers “rethink the tenuous link that unions create job dissatisfaction” and “focus on within differences” on union members (2003:105). Our results suggest possible area for this research. The evaluation of employee and member social exchange relationships with the union and organization may provide fertile ground for understanding the mechanisms of union participation and voluntary termination in organizations.

Our findings support and expand the current model of social exchange relationships and behavior in the organization. Snape and Redman (2007) posited that a positive social exchange relationship with the organization would be related to positive, discretionary behavior directed at the union (union citizenship behaviors). They did not find support for this relationship. The results of the current study did not evidence a relationship between perception of the social exchange relationship with the organization and positive, discretionary behaviors directed at the union (union participation). Our results expand this research stream by indicating that a negative relationship with the organization is likely to motivate employees to help the union.

This study also provides support for the consistent finding that union commitment is an antecedent to union participation (Bamberger, Kluger & Suchard, 1999; Fuller & Hester, 2001; Snape & Redman, 2007; Tetrick et al., 2007). Tetrick et al. (2007) evaluated different union participation models regarding social exchange. These researchers concluded that union commitment and loyalty mediated the relationship between PUS and participation in union events. Our results support and extend their findings. First, we found that union commitment mediated the PUS-union participation relationship. Second, we expand their research findings by demonstrating the mediating effect of perceived union obstruction, a negative social exchange relationship with the union.

Interestingly, Gibney et al. (2009) found that POS was significantly correlated with loyalty behaviors in an organizational context, while Tetrick et al. (2007) found a similar relationship in a union context. However, POO was not significantly correlated with loyalty in an organizational context, but PUO was related to union commitment in the current study. This suggests that the social exchange relationship between union members and the union is more complex than anticipated. These seemingly counterintuitive findings may derive from the nature of the employer-employee relationship relative to the union-member relationship. First and foremost, employees are paid for participation in the employment relationship through salary and wages, whereas members pay for participation in union activities through dues and fees. This inherent difference could be at the root of the difference in results. In addition, members may have different expectations regarding the union-member relationship. One of the best predictors of unionization is employee dissatisfaction. The expectation is that unions will rectify the problems encountered by employees. When they fail to fulfill these obligations, members may react adversely by withholding commitment and participation from the union. Future research should include measures of the obligations that unions and members owe one another and the degree to which these mutual obligations are met (Rousseau, 1995; Tetrick 1995).

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The major limitation of this study is the cross-sectional research design that we employed. This design prohibits us from drawing causal inferences for the directionality of the relationships between variables. For example, it is possible that members who participate in union activities believe that the union supports them to avoid cognitive dissonance. Thus, future research should employ longitudinal designs to assess this and other possibilities.

Another potential source of concern with the present research might be the use of self-reports. Respondents might have stated that they engaged in support activities if they perceived the union supported them. On the other hand, in the obstruction condition, individuals may deny helping a union

that treats them negatively. Future research should collect union participation information from shop stewards or other union members.

Finally, the data were collected from members of a single union within the United States through a mailing and meeting attendance. The subsamples also indicated that respondents differed in the response pattern to two items of the sixteen items in the survey. However, post-hoc analysis confirmed the pattern of results across the samples, but the results of the ANOVA suggested differences in the response pattern could affect the data. Since some of the data were collected at meetings and some were collected through a mailing, the results of this study should be viewed with caution. These factors could limit the generalizability of the analysis. Future research should use members from multiple unions and members from outside of the United States to increase generalizability.

Our results suggest that future research regarding union commitment and union participation should include not only union instrumentality, but also the applicable social exchange variables. For example, social exchange studies of union commitment and participation should include both PUO and PUS.

## CONCLUSION

Our results suggest that union members develop perceptions of the social exchange relationships with the union similar to those that employees develop with their employers. Our results also indicate that perceptions of the exchange relationship with the employer are related to the member's participation in union activities. Negative employer-employee relationships spur members to help the union, but positive relationships do not.

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