The Role of Communications in Presenting Union Relevance: An Analysis of the United Nurses of Alberta

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Abstract

For the past 30 years unions have faced declining membership density because of a combination of increasingly hostile employers and governments, as well as industrial restructuring and globalization. In response, a number of studies have attempted to shed light on possible union renewal strategies to reverse these trends. This dissertation examines an important, but understudied, issue that is highly relevant to union relevance and union renewal: a union's own communication practices and strategies. Specifically, it examines the communications of a nurses' union, the United Nurses of Alberta (UNA), and their internal and external communication activity from 2010-2015.

The main question driving this research is: What is the relationship between union communications and union members' understanding of their union's relevance? There are several sub-questions including: What are the central activities of the union and what kind of unionism is practiced and communicated by UNA? What are the main types of communications used by UNA? Finally, how do members perceive their union and its communications? How do union members assess the relevance of UNA to their lives? To examine these questions, I conducted 23 interviews and analyzed over 3,500 data points including UNA's newsletter, website and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. The data was collected from 2015-2019, and is analyzed using feminist political economy (FPE) and collective action frame (CAF) perspectives.

Overall, the analysis presented here shows that the different communication avenues showcase UNA's leanings towards social unionism while much of the actual communication content emphasises the business unionism activities and in turn many UNA members still think of UNA primarily as a business union. UNA uses multiple communication avenues to connect with their members, and to "meet their members where they are". At times, these different communication avenues are even geared towards specific groups of members such as general members or those who are highly involved with the union. The FPE and CAF analysis helped highlight two distinct frames repeated through UNA communications. The first frame is that nurses are distinct health care providers based on their education, skill, and regulated status. The second frame is that nurses are advocates for their patients and also for the Alberta public health care system. These frames used by UNA in their communications shape how nurses understand themselves as a profession and also shape the services that nurses think they need from the union. UNA's various communications shape how UNA presents itself as relevant for its members, this in turn partially shapes how UNA members evaluate and understand their own union.

Overall, this case study provides valuable empirical and theoretical insights into the activities and communication practices of a unique and important Canadian union, and highlights its implications for perceptions of union relevance. It also provides solid groundwork for future studies examining the role of union communications and how union members evaluate their unions and the union relevance.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Susan Cake. No part of this research has been previously published. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name 'Organizational Narratives of Health Care Unions', No. Pro00058438, October 10, 2015.

Dedication

To my parents, without whom I would never have been able to begin a PhD.

To Hasin, without whom I would have lacked the motivation and a computer to continue.

To Zahara, without whom this dissertation may have been completed earlier or never at all.

Acknowledgement

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Chapter 1: Introduction

> When unions like United Nurses of Alberta fight to preserve public health care and for the creation of new programs like a national pharmacare plan, we are working on behalf of all middle-class Canadian families.
>
> When we fight for Professional Responsibility Concerns and Occupational Health & Safety in our workplaces, we are not just fighting for members, but for the wellbeing of patients, residents, clients and their families as well.
>
> When we enforce our contracts, to ensure all employees are treated equally within their bargaining units, we are fighting for women's rights, workers' rights and civil rights.
>
> And when we struggled successfully over the past 15 months for a fair collective agreement in the face of strong efforts by some of our employers and political forces to roll back our wages and working conditions, we were supporting the rights of every working person. (Heather Smith, UNA President, UNA 2014, vol 38, no 2, p.2)

Introduction

For the past 30 years unions have faced declining membership density because of a combination of increasingly hostile employers and governments, as well as industrial restructuring and globalization (Hunt & Rayside 2007). Considering the declining number of workers with direct experiences of unionization in Canada, the communications and information workers receive from their own unions and how their unions are framed as relevant to workers may be important tools for union renewal. And, while there have been extensive studies on union renewal efforts around the world, and those specific to Canada, there is currently very limited research on communications in

union renewal and how unions communicate their own relevance. This dissertation addresses this gap and provides a detailed case study of one health care union in Alberta, Canada by focusing on how the union communicates and how union members understand their union and its communications.

Overview and Significance of the Study

Questions about union relevance and union renewal efforts have dominated literature related to unions in North America for well over a decade now. This literature is in response to hostile employers and governments, as well as economic shifts and technological advancements that result in job loss in large sectors where unions have historically been strong. Unions are also fighting against increased globalization where aggressive employers can relocate to avoid unfavourable regulations or laws which, in turn, has led some governments to amend legal protections for workers in favour of employers with the hope of attracting and keeping employers in their jurisdictions.

Communication has been identified as an important factor in union renewal efforts based on previous research that identified the important role of union members in communicating the advantages of unionization for workers. Previous studies have found that union members play a key role in union renewal through their understanding of their own unions and how they discuss their unions with other people (Bamberger, Kluger & Suchard 1999; Aryee & Chay, 2001; Tetrick, Shore, McClurg & Vendenberg 2007). The roles of union communications and union members are central to how people learn about, and understand, the important work of unions, given the limited exposure that most people now have to unions outside of personal experience in unionized workplaces.

This study contributes to the relatively underdeveloped field of union communication, and debates over union relevance and union renewal, through a case study of the United Nurses of

Alberta (UNA) which covers the majority of registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses in Alberta. This is a valuable contribution as Gall (2009) observes that while union renewal has dominated certain areas of academic literature, there are very few definitive answers and the prognosis of the situation is uncertain in most cases. UNA is an ideal union for this case study given the early work this union has done with their own internal communications, along with external awards for some media campaigns in which they have been involved.

Methodologically, this case study makes use of interviews with union employees and UNA members, as well as documents and materials produced by the union across different communications platforms (e.g. newsletters, websites, and social media). The data from this study offers original new evidence from the Canadian context concerning the role that union communications have for union members and offers insights into how these communications, and union member's own understandings of their unions, could potentially be used in union renewal efforts.

Definitions of Terms

Union relevance is an important concept for this research and is generally assumed to have links to union renewal. Concerning the first concept, there are several terms in industrial relations literature that I draw from to develop the concept of union relevance, including union instrumentality, perceived union support, and union commitment (Aryee & Chay 2001; Tetrick, McClurg, Shore & Vandenberg 2007). Union instrumentality defines the value of unionization in terms of an economic exchange between the worker (for example, union dues) and the union (for example, higher wages and better benefits) (Tetrick et al. 2007). Perceived union support is a concept from organizational studies related to whether and how workers feel valued for their contributions to an organization, such as a union (Shore, Tetrick, Sinclair & Newton, cited in Aryee

& Chay 2001). Lastly, union commitment, as used by Tetrick et al. (2007), is an important term for continuously building commitment to the union and union participation, usually through union instrumentality. For the purposes of this research, I further define union relevance through three dimensions: legal, political, and personal. Legal relevance includes having the standing and recognition to represent workers to employers or government. Political relevance includes how much political influence unions have to affect change in workers' lives. On a more micro level, personal relevance can be defined by how individual workers see their lives affected by a union.

The concept of union renewal is important for understanding the general context of this research and the challenges faced by UNA and unions more generally. As noted already, most trade unions in North America, and in many other countries, are facing declining membership density[1]. Union renewal is thus a critical issue, and involves changes that can help to rebuild the labour movement by, for example attracting new members and increasing union density, but also by reinvigorating the labour movement in general (Kumar & Schenk 2006). Union renewal efforts can include strategies to grow union membership through different organizing activities and approaches, or through changing union organizational structures to focus more on union member's involvement or even to find and grow connections between the labour movement and other thriving social movements. While the primary focus of this dissertation is on the issue of union relevance, as it relates to a union's communication approaches, the concept of union renewal is very germane for understanding political economic context in which unions are operating.

[1] Membership density refers to the number of trade union members who are workers as a percentage of the total number of workers.

Theoretical Framework

Beyond contributing new empirical evidence into debates on union renewal and relevance, this study also contributes a unique theoretical lens, building from both feminist political economy and a collective action frame approach. It is well established that for social movement communication to be effective, it needs to have a proper framing from which people can understand the message and examine it against their understanding of the world and their lives (Benford & Snow 2000). A collective action frame approach stresses the collective frames that social movements use to help people interpret events in simplified ways in order to promote the goals of the social movement (Benford & Snow 2000, p. 614). This approach is an incredibly valuable tool to examine how unions frame their communications; however, precisely how communications are framed is often influenced by a wide array of social, economic, and political factors. In order to contextualize how unions frame their communication, this study also draws from feminist political economy approach. In this study, a feminist political economy perspective aids greatly in exploring and understanding the impact of economic, social, and political interests and powers as they relate to the union movement in Alberta. This perspective also highlights some of the unique characteristics of Alberta, including Alberta's political climate within Canada, and some of the more aggressive industrial relations tactics the Alberta nurses' union has used to achieve their goals.

Research Questions

The main question driving this research can be stated as follows: What is the relationship between union communications and union members' understanding of their union's relevance? Several sub-questions around this relationship aid in deepening our understanding of precisely how union communication is linked to union relevance. Focusing on the case of UNA, these sub-

questions are: What are the central activities of the union and what kind of unionism is practiced and communicated by UNA? What are the main types of communications used by UNA? Finally, how do members perceive their union and its communications? How do union members assess the relevance of UNA to their lives?

Organization of Dissertation

This research is presented in seven chapters. The introductory chapter includes relevant background information for the study, including the purpose of the research, the questions being posed, and a general overview of the theoretical framework for the dissertation.

Chapter Two presents an overview of the literature including the current context for unions in Canada, the various styles of unions and their development, overview of literature related to unions and communications, and lastly an overview of the theoretical framework for this research.

Chapter Three focuses more intently on health care-based unions in Canada and more specifically in Alberta. This chapter includes an overview of UNA situated in a history of unions in the nursing profession.

Chapter Four includes an overview of the methods used in this study, the sample and population, and the various communications material included. The chapter concludes with an overview of how the data was collected and analyzed.

Chapter Five focuses on the first stage of empirical results, namely the document analysis of UNA. It includes an overview of the work UNA does and the various methods of social media and communications they use. This chapter also includes the results from the analysis of UNA's website, and an analysis of their newsletter, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube data from 2010 to 2015.

Chapter Six presents and explores the analysis from interviews with UNA staff, UNA elected officials, and UNA members. In this chapter, I reflect on the work of UNA and how both union workers and members understand their own union and its communication practices.

Chapter Seven offers a more overarching discussion of the major findings across all of the data, focusing on how these findings fit within UNA's context and how the findings fit within the literature. As well, I briefly explore some of the potential directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Communicating Union Relevance — A Review of the Literature

> I think when I first started working, I was more against unions because I felt they protected workers who weren't as good or allowed everyone to be an equal wage when they weren't necessarily deserving of equal wage. But I see that more as - that may still be true but on a whole, I think they have far more benefits than they do downsides. There are people who are protected by the unions who maybe shouldn't be working in their respective fields. But at the same time, our workplaces are far safer and far more pleasant places to be and the - your average person has benefited more because of the unions than has been harmed. (UNA Member, Interview 14)

Introduction

In order to set the stage for this research, I review relevant literature on unions and the labour movement in this chapter. Reviewing the relevant literature helps situate UNA's union style, practices, and communication techniques amongst other unions. I have organized the review into four sections which reflect important issues and themes for the study, as noted in Chapter One. In the first section, I outline the general state of unions in Canada including political and economic factors that influence changes in workplaces and union density leading to a focus on union renewal efforts. In the second section, I summarize research on the various kinds of unions and unionism in Canada, including their styles, and development, placing a special focus on 'occupational unionism' as this is very relevant to UNA as a union focused on one occupational sector. In the third section, I consider existing research on union communications and media strategies; this demonstrates the

relatively limited number and scope of studies conducted in this area, despite its growing importance for unions. Finally, in the last section, I elaborate on the proposed theoretical framework for this study which blends collective action framing, and feminist political economy, approaches.

The Union Context in Canada

Academic research on the labour movement in Canada has been dominated by union revitalization and renewal examinations for the past several years. These activities and literature are a response to declining union membership density and thus focus on potential avenues to reverse these trends. This literature covers topics such as internal policy changes, rank-and-file participation, democratic decision making, various forms of unionisms, new leadership, and new organizing strategies – all with a joint interest in union renewal (see Kumar & Schenk 2006). Case studies dominate this research, usually focusing on specific strategies or successful union renewal moments (Kumar & Schenk 2006). Successes are usually measured in membership density, the bargaining power in certain locations or sectors, political power, and institutional validity (Kumar & Schenk 2006). According to Gall (2009, p. 175) the majority of union renewal studies conclude that unions are not doing well, that to improve the labour movement requires 'extensive treatment,' and the results are not guaranteed.

In comparison to other countries, Canada has fared far better in union density (Hunt & Rayside 2007). Canada has a much more favourable legal and industrial-political culture for unions and the labour movement, especially in comparison to the United States (Gall 2003, p. 5). This is not to say Canada's legal, political, or social culture has not been detrimental to unions over the years. For instance, Gall (2009) discusses the shift from card-check certification to mandatory voting in Canada, which has resulted in more delays for union certification and therefore more time for employers to mount their own anti-union campaigns. Mandatory voting has resulted in fewer union

certifications over card-checks in Canada and the United States (Adams 2006; Warner 2013). However, the generally favourable trends and aggregate numbers for Canada, relative to other countries, also masks important difference across provinces, sectors, and workers. There are a number of reasons for differences across Canada. Below I consider briefly three key factors: the nature of the Canadian economy, the divided jurisdictions, and the decentralized organization of the Canadian labour movement.

Union membership across the country is uneven and can be partly credited to uneven regional economic development (Yates 2007). Canada as a nation was economically built on different industries from natural resources to manufacturing and now the new service economy. These industries have not been evenly spread across provinces and territories, resulting in inconsistent economic development, which has led to uneven labour markets and unionization rates. This uneven economic development can also be seen in the different private sector and public sector unionization rates in the provinces and, if traced historically, as done by Palmer (1992), in regional differences in forms of union resistance. Overall, union density has fallen in the private sector over time (Gall 2009) but Canadian union strength has been sustained by public sector growth (Krahn, Hughes & Lowe 2020). This growth has occurred despite public sectors unions being repeatedly confronted by more conservative governments, often with the implicit support of private sector unions (Yates 2007, pp. 62 & 69). Public sector unions have also ventured into organizing in the private and non-profit sector especially with governments subcontracting and privatizing public sector jobs (Yates 2007, p. 60).

We are also seeing more female unionized workers than males, which is indicative of females joining the labour movement but also their strong participation in public sector employment. Not only has the growth in public sector unionization led to more female members but this is in combination with the loss of traditional male-dominated unionized work, and thus the decline of

male unionized workers (Yates 2007, p. 63). Additionally, as mentioned above, more unions have ventured into female-dominated sectors such as staff support and childcare with growing government privatization (Yates 2007, p. 63), often hoping to find another path to union renewal resulting in an increase in female union members compared to male members.

The variety in union density rates can also be attributed to the different jurisdictional areas and labour regulations across the provinces (Foster & Barnetson 2011). Some variation could be because of differences in provincial laws and general political culture (Fudge 2006), as is likely the case with Alberta. Alberta has been highlighted as the province with the lowest unionization density in Canada attributed not only to anti-union legislation but also an anti-union popular culture (Yates 2007; Foster & Barnetson 2011).

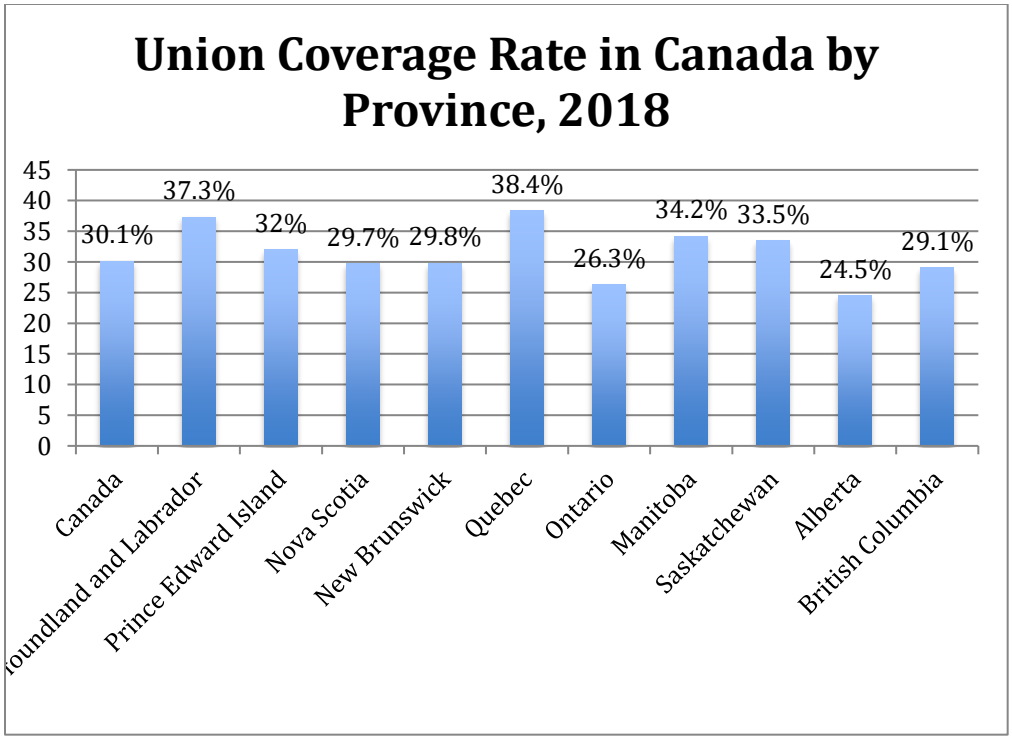

Figure 1 Union Coverage Rate[2] in Canada by Province, 2018

(Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0129-01 Union status by geography)

[2] This chart presents the union coverage rate which includes employees who are members of a union and/or covered by a collective agreement as a percentage of all employees.

Although a relatively stable legal field, punctuated by a select number of precedent-setting court cases, Alberta did have a review of its employment standards, Labour Relations Code, Occupational Health and Safety Act, and Workers' Compensation Act during the course of this research project under the former New Democrat Party (NDP) government who were in power from 2015 to 2019. Although, few if any of the changes would affect current UNA members, as they are already unionized and often have collective bargaining agreements that exceed the Employment Standards Code, it is important to note this historic legislative change. The last previous overhaul of these pieces of legislation happened around 30 years ago (Cotter 2017) . The NDP government that initiated the changes aimed to bring Alberta's legislation up to date with what workers currently have in other provinces (Cotter 2017).

The most notably change, aside from the updates to the suite of workplace legislation, during the course of this research is the right to strike. Nurses in Alberta, similar to other health care workers in the province, have been denied the legal right to strike for many years. In 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada declared legislation banning strikes to be unconstitutional (*Saskatchewan Federation of Labour v Saskatchewan* 2015, SCR 245). In 2016, the Alberta Government passed legislation covering essential public services in the event of a labour disruption (An Act to Implement a Supreme Court Ruling Governing Essential Services 2016). Essential services are defined as services that if interrupted would endanger the life, personal safety, or health of members of the public, which includes the work done by health care workers. This legislation continues to allow groups of workers included in essential services to participate in strikes and allows their employers to hold lockouts while still maintaining a level of service for the general public.

The last factor covered here that helps to understand the uneven unionization rates in Canada is the decentralized labour relations system (Yates 2007, p. 58). Although there are a number of centralized labour bodies, including provincial and national organizations, most of these

centralized labour bodies are quite weak as the real power is with individual unions and their exclusive ability to collect dues and bargain for their own collective agreements (Briskin 1994, p. 92; Yates 2007, p. 61). Although the Canadian labour movement could benefit from having a more coordinated approach, a role that centralized labour bodies could be ideally suited to fill, this does not happen (Yates 2007, p. 68; Camfield 2011). Rarely, if ever, do local labour councils, provincial labour bodies, or the national Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) participate in organizing or collective bargaining efforts. Rather, these bodies are far more likely to participate in campaigns to lobby governments for legislative changes.

Conclusion for Union Context in Canada

As the literature demonstrates, many unions are focused on renewal efforts to combat dropping union density and strength. However, these efforts have not produced a suitable solution for all unions or workers. Furthermore, Canada is a unique case as it has not experienced the same drop in union density as has been seen in other countries; however, this is only relative to some of the worst situations (e.g. the United States of America). Canada still faces interesting challenges with its unique economic development and decentralized labour system. Given its distinct history and decentralized labour movement, it is important to have specific jurisdiction- and sector-based case studies, such as in this research, to understand the unique situations workers and unions face in different contexts. Alberta is a very useful case study for the rest of Canada and beyond, since it has such a strong anti-union history. Given this, strategies that are working successfully in Alberta, could offer promise in other jurisdictions.

Unionism

It would be misleading to speak of Canadian unions as if they engaged in the same practices, same styles, and same commitments; rather, union diversity is vast and spans across provinces, sectors, types of work, and workers. This section focuses on the two types of unionism most commonly practiced in Canada – business unionism and social or community unionism – followed by a brief overview of occupation-specific unions dominated by women. By providing an in-depth discussion of these issues I begin exploring the differences in business unionism and social or community unionism, especially the differences related to union relevance and communication practices. The last sections focus on occupational unionism since this research concentrates on the health care sector, which is known for its occupation-specific labour practices. When discussing the different kinds of unionism, I am describing them as ideal types – so these exact forms may not exist in reality but rather most unions are a unique mixture of these ideal types depending on the context and situation. As well, unions are not static in their behaviours and activities but rather they are dynamic.

Business Unionism

Unions in Canada have largely focused on the dominant model of unionism, known as *business unionism*. This unionism focuses almost exclusively on job rewards and material gains (Krahn, Hughes & Lowe 2020), with a narrow focus on collective bargaining (Camfield 2007), and in a top-down style that positions workers as consumers of union goods and services (Martin 2004, p. 38). By pursuing this unionization form, unions gave up the right to legally strike outside the collective bargaining context, the ability to determine what could be considered an industrial relations issue, and what is allowed in the formal collective bargaining structure (Fudge 1993). This results in what is

known as 'responsible unionism', or a unionism style that positions unions as disciplinarians of their own members (Camfield 2011) in exchange for legal legitimacy in industrial relations (Sullivan 2010, p. 794). Adopted from American unions, this kind of unionism, also known as a 'servicing model' (Gall 2003), which treats workers as consumers by providing a number of products or services, such as legal advice and health and dentals plans. By providing these kinds of services or products combined with the top-down leadership (Smith 2014), this unionism can create apathetic members (Briskin 1994). This unionism is also responsible for the well-known saying 'obey now, grieve later,' which pressures workers to depend on their collective agreement for protection, individualizes issues, and in some cases leaves the union as the sole judge for deciding if grievances are even worth pursuing (Sangster 2010; Camfield 2011).

Business Unionism and Communications

Of specific relevance to this research, business unionism has important implications for union relevance to their members, as well as union communications. Beginning with relevance, business unionism makes unions relevant for the services they provide to workers and unions are evaluated based on the quality of services they provide, in exchange for the dues that workers pay. Since workers are positioned as 'service consumers', as mentioned before, they can become apathetic. This style of unionism can be echoed in not only how the union functions, but also how the union communicates. Rather than workers seeing themselves as active participants with decision-making power, they are communicated to as passive consumers with limited involvement. This communication style for business unionism can further perpetuate the unionized worker as a passive consumer by having only one-way communication forms, with information about services being passed from the union to the member. Despite potential long-term negative effects for the overall

labour movement by creating passive union members, business unionism is still thriving in Canada (Fowler & Hagar 2013).

Community and Social Unionism

In opposition to business unionism, *community* or *social unionism*, as an ideal type, focuses on worker participation (Schenk 2004; Tattersall 2009) and connecting unions with other social movements (Hrynyshyn & Ross 2011) such as the human rights movement (Walsh 2012). Community or social unionism opens up the range of issues that the union can potentially act on and, in the past, have included issues such as reproductive rights for women (Briskin 2011), childcare (Bentham 2007), as well as the student and civil rights movements in the 1950s and 1960s (Ross 2011). The goals of community and social unionism are broader than the specific issues concerning workers who are already covered by collective agreements; rather, these unionism styles attempt to improve employment conditions for all workers (Yates 2011). Associations with other movements and organizations are not without their own challenges – partly because of the already established relationships unions have and the inequalities among the organizations in terms of financial ability, legal standing, political clout, and ideological outlooks (Camfield 2011). Unions are often positioned as having more money, stronger ties to left-of-centre-governments, and a stronger commitment to official government channels than other organizations, which can sometimes cause conflict between unions and other organizations (Camfield 2011).

Social/Community Unionism and Communications

Despite the challenges with community and social unionism, these approaches to unionism have the potential to produce completely different results than business unionism in terms of relevance and communication with members and the general public. Specifically, these kinds of

unionism could position unions as relevant to a variety of issues facing workers both unionized and not. By relying on active rank-and-file and community participation, these kinds of unionism position more people as active participants instead of passive consumers, and this positioning creates potential for two-way or responsive communication. Examples of these types of communication include new social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. To make these new social media forms work for two-way communication unions have to engage with the media in ways that solicit responses from others – for example, rather than providing simple updates or facts, unions can ask questions or start debates (Fowler & Hagar 2013). Compared to business unionism, social and community unionism are well poised to take advantage of different communication forms across a wide audience.

Craft, Industrial and Occupational Unionism

In addition to the kinds of unionisms affecting union practices, there are also a variety of unionisms that have a larger impact on the workers unions even organize. These include: craft-style unionism (Palmer 1992; Krahn et al. 2020, pp. 335), industrial unionism (Palmer 1992; Krahn et al. 2020, pp. 335-37), and occupational unionism. These various unionisms are largely driven by and reflect economic structures; for example, craft unionism reflects an economy that separated workers based on their craft, whereas industrial unionism reflects industrialization and includes semi- and unskilled-workers in the same work setting and hence union. Finally, there are some occupations where unions have grown out of professional associations and developed a specific form of unionism related to the occupation, otherwise known as occupational unionism.

Nurses' Unions

In Canada, registered nurses provide an excellent example of occupational unionism, and their unions have a militant strike history and innovative non-strike tactics (Briskin 2012). According to Briskin (2012), the desire to professionalize their occupation, along with their commitment to service within a system of patriarchal practices and gender subordination, meant that nurses developed occupation-specific tactics and resistances in labour relations unique to their profession – in addition to a unique nursing identity (Coulter 1993; McPherson 2003; Kealey 2008). 'Like many women workers, nurses have been left with many responsibilities but little authority, and they work in a hierarchical structure that vests more power in the hands of doctors and administrators who are removed from the day-to-day realities of patient care' (Coulter 1993, p. 51). As well, nurses are in a unique position since their work, like much of women's work, involves caring which has been poorly rewarded in our economic system (Armstrong 1993). In addition to traditional strike tactics, nurses are also known for their use of sick-outs, slow-downs, work-to-rule, and mass resignations (Briskin 2012; Milner 2012). Some of these tactics were developed in response to governments banning essential and emergency workers' legal right to strike (Briskin 2012). These militant practices have helped form what Briskin (2012, p. 286) refers to as the *politicisation of caring* in describing the militant discourse around public interest and health care coming from nurses' industrial actions. More importantly, nurses have managed to be militant and still gain widespread support from the public during their strikes and labour disputes (Briskin 2012).

Nurses' work is largely considered public sector work[3], and this is significant for how nurses and their unions frame their relevance and how, in turn, they justify their militant, and sometimes

[3] It is also important to note that although public sectors unions in Canada have fared better in comparison to the private sector, the public sector unions still face important issues and setbacks. According to Panitch and Swartz (2003), the public sector has had to contend with an increasingly hostile collective bargaining environment with back to work

illegal, actions. Instead of starting labour disputes for themselves, nurses have framed disputes in terms of their patients' care, and worked to position themselves as advocates for public interest (Briskin 2012). By framing their relevance in this way, the union positions its activities and goals to be potentially seen and interpreted as advocating for the general public by upholding a quality standard of care. Illustrating this, McGrane and Berdahl (2015, p. 67) found in their Saskatchewan-based survey that public opinion supports unions when they appear to work for all people, not just union members. This kind of positioning by nurses' unions has helped to bridge connections and alliances with other community groups including patient advocates, the women's movement, and other unions (Briskin 2012), highlighting their social unionism practices (Gall 2009, p. 176). On the other hand, because the nursing profession is dominated by women, a group often assumed to be caring based on their gender, they can also be presented in the media during labour disputes as heartless and uncaring – failing not only as nurses but also as women (Briskin 2012, p. 290).

Women and Occupational Unionism

It is equally important, since the health care service sector tends to be dominated by women, to consider how women's organizing and union work is distinct and germane to communication and relevance issues. Women have traditionally been viewed as more difficult to organize into labour unions for a variety of reasons including assumptions about their lack of desire to join unions and their limited commitment to the workplace. There is increasing evidence that women, especially in the private sector, did not have opportunities to join unions because they were more often in non-standard jobs, which many unions consider more difficult and expensive to organize (White 1993).

legislation, mandatory extensions of existing collective agreements, wage cuts and freezes, and in the case of some workers the outlawing of strikes.

However, according to Kainer (2009), even when women organize, their efforts are given minimal consideration in union renewal literature and at times are even outright ignored.

Of specific interest here, Kainer (2009) discusses union renewal literature that claims certain organizing forms are a 'new' phenomenon, despite the fact that women have been engaging in these ways of organizing for years. According to Briskin (2012, p. 286), women's participation in labour militancy raises questions around the *feminization of militancy*– militant labour strategies building from women's experiences at work, at home, and in their communities – calling to light the value women bring to the movement and tempering assumptions of their limited commitment. Briskin (1993) further argues that women-focused organizing actually strengthens the labour movement by changing the scope and definition of union issues, increasing the organization and education of rank-and-file members, and encouraging the use of participatory decision-making approaches – all changes shown to improve worker's experiences of unions. These female-dominated union characteristics, as described by Briskin (1993), also overlap with many social unionism aims and provide concrete examples of how membership composition can impact a union.

Concluding Thoughts on Unionisms

It is important to understand the different styles of unionism practiced in Canada and how these different styles can impact union communication and attempts to define the union as relevant to workers. The majority of unions in Canada tend to ensure the basics of business unionism are taken care of while still participating in some form of community or social unionism. The extent that a specific union practices one form of unionism, over another, can also be seen in their communication practices and how they position their own union members. Other unique attributes of unions also have the ability to impact their communications practices; for instance, as noted, nurses' unions which are occupation-based and focused predominantly on public sector work, tend

to present their members as advocates of the public health care system. Through this positioning, nurses' unions are then seen as relevant not only in the industrial relations sphere but also in relation to the public health system.

Union and Media/Communication

Union communication is a complex field of scholarship, with many different research avenues and theoretical practices. Overall, research on union communications has several limitations: it not been well connected to debates on union relevance for workers; it has not focused on both the production and consumption of communication; and it has not given adequate attention to the experiences of rank-and-file members. In this section, I focus on research concerning two important general union communication categories: internal communication (how unions communicate with their own members) and external communication (how unions communicate with people outside the union). In this discussion, I examine both the production and consumption of these two forms of communication.

Internal Communication

Empirical work on internal union communication has emphasized how important union members' own experiences are related to communication. In the context of an organizing drive, Badigannavar & Kelly's (2005) comparative study demonstrates the influence of narratives about workers' decisions of whether or not to join a union. In this specific case, an adversarial approach—involving a story directing blame at an employer—helped to unite young, white-collar workers, over an approach that did not direct blame at the employer or involve rank-and-file members (Badigannavar & Kelly 2005, p. 530). An earlier study by Markowitz (1995) also demonstrates the impact of narratives on workers' decision to join a union organizing campaign or not, illustrating

how narratives function (or do not function) with intersecting characteristics such as gender and race. Of specific relevance to this study, Markowitz's study (1995) highlights how important intermediaries, such as union organizers or stewards, are in framing unions for potential members.

These findings also connect to those of Kumar, Lucio and Rose (2013, p. 35) whose research suggests unions cannot be locked into only communicating to potential union members in the workplace but must also reach out to the local community and social arenas. Once workers are union members, they may experience union communication differently. Manning (1998) found that communications to members across unions varied according to the organizational dynamics of the union, as well as other external factors, such as the dynamics of the labour movement and the political context. Both external and internal factors appear to influence how unions communicate with their own membership. Building on Manning's (1998) findings, Lucio, Walker and Trevorrow (2010, p. 116) argue that unions' relationships with the internet are affected by additional factors aside from internal and external structures. These include 'the different things unions do and the effect of these, and their articulation, within their institutions'. I understand Lucio, Walker, and Trevorrow (2010)'s argument to include factors such as the type of unionism practiced, and how this affects the internal relations and external relations in certain social, political and legal environments.

During the day-to-day union functioning, internal communication can take many forms beyond those previously mentioned in organizing drives. Some of the most common internal communication forms include website updates, physical notice boards, union newsletters, and local meetings. With the increase in online communications, we are also seeing these new channels being used to deliver union services, promote member engagement, organize collective action, and promote union positions (Panagiotopoulos & Barnett 2015). Of course, health care workers, as all workers, are employed in a context where multiple actors are engaged in communication, including their employer and their union. Each of these communicators has the potential to impact others,

suggesting that communications have to be examined within the context in which they are produced and received/consumed. As well, research by Panagiotopoulos (2012) has found that communication efforts have to be examined in combination with the union members they are targeted at. Union members who have access to, and a greater knowledge of new social media, tend to support their unions using social media for communications more than members who do not have access to, or are not familiar, with these media formats.

Aside from studies focusing exclusively on internal communication, there are other studies that have focused on online communication, seeing possible benefits for both members and potential members. The majority of this work has been influenced by Lee (1995; 1997) and his recommendations that the internet opens up union communication capabilities, helping unions involve their members in more decision making, while also letting them connect with potential members and build public support during industrial disputes. The other major study focused on this topic is from Diamond and Freeman (2002) who advocate for the potential benefits of online media communications for unions and the labour movement. Looking at Canada specifically, Sawchuck (2006) researched union internet use for education purposes and further advocates for greater online union activity. Overall the majority of literature discussing unions and new communication technology is optimistic and focuses on how this technology overcomes issues related to time, distance, and finances (Rego, Alves, Naumann & Silva 2014).

Union websites have also been featured in several case studies that examine union communications. Research from 2003 by Ward and Lusoli found that UK unions' websites tended to follow a fairly standard set up template that was aimed almost exclusively at members. The main function of websites for these unions focused on providing general information to the membership, and advertising ways for members to get involved with the union. Several of the unions studied also offered 'members only' sections of the website which were some of the most popular features.

Overall Ward and Lusoli's (2003) research showed that unions who were already active in their communications had more active websites, with more communications material available to members. This adds further evidence to Manning's (1998) findings that internal organizational dynamics are important for unions' communication strategies.

In the Australian context, Muir (2010) highlights how different union websites have been used in different campaigns to showcase a union history, stories of individual workers, and accounts from industrial disputes. Other times, unions set up websites for specific labour disputes or social justice issues (such as the Your Rights at Work campaign in Australia (Muir 2010)). Lucio (2003) found the union websites were sometimes used as simple extensions of leaflets and publications, basically supplementing traditional printed communications and following the traditional line of positioning union members as passive consumers (Kerr & Waddington 2014). Other union websites highlighted service delivery, which seemed to influence the content on the website and indicate the kind of unionism practiced. What officials assumed the membership wanted to see also raises questions of union democracy.

In the U.K., Kerr and Waddington's (2014) study found that Locals had a difficult time keeping websites up to date and maintained. And although the Local websites did lead to greater union member participation, the union did not see the increase in participation that they had hoped to see for women and part-time workers— though there was a steep growth in the participation of part-time workers. These results suggest that online participation is not evenly distributed across all groups of workers. Building from their survey of union members, Kerr and Waddington (2014) found that union members were not interested in what the union had to offer in terms of social engagement, but that their primary concern had to do with the social insurance aspects of unionization which, in turn, affected members' willingness to access union websites.

Although most of the research of union communications has focused on specific industrial disputes, a select few studies have not revolved solely around one incident. Of relevance to this point, Kerr and Waddington (2014) did not focus on a specific industrial dispute but did find that union members frequented Local union websites more often during an industrial dispute, as well as after industrial disputes concluded. This finding suggests that virtual websites may enhance solidarity during specific disputes and help unions build the capacity to mobilize and update union members through online communications later on.

Web 1.0 and Web 2.0

With the developing of communications technology, especially the internet, internal union communications have changed, and scholars have debated the potential benefits and risks of online technologies. Although many unions still rely on what is termed Web 1.0 technology to produce content for members, other unions are experimenting with Web 2.0 formats. The main difference between these two formats is that Web 1.0 is considered one-way communication (for example an online newsletter) whereas Web 2.0 allows user generated content to be added creating a two-way communication stream (for example a Facebook post where members are encouraged to respond) (Fowler & Hagar 2013). This newer approach creates potential opportunities for interaction (Hodder & Houghton 2015). There are many researchers and advocates who claim the ability to incorporate user-generated content is an important step for unions to access a growing group of workers who are spending more time online than in the past (Bryson, Gomez & Willman 2010). However, according to Fowler and Hagar (2013), unions are notoriously slow at taking on new media, especially formats that allow user-generated content; and even if a main union is using this kind of media that does not mean Locals are following suit (Kerr & Waddington 2014).

There are several possible reasons for this slow take up of Web 2.0. The ability for union members to add their own message, or respond openly to a union message, has been viewed negatively by some, as this communication form is often unregulated and thus has the potential to showcase any divides within the union itself—divides that could be exploited by those opposed to the union (Fowler & Hagar 2013). As well, allowing user-generated content may disperse power away from the official leadership, allowing union members to challenge existing power relations (Upchurch & Grassman 2015). According to Lee (2007), the majority of union websites are managed by a single person controlling all the content – and this set up is often designed out of fear of losing message control, as well as a lack of understanding about how online communications actually work. Research suggests the slow uptake of new communications practices may very well stem from the preconceived ideas of unions leaders of who union members are, ideas which may be out-dated or even negative (Aalto-Matturi 2005). Thus, these internal communication practices are tied to union democracy and may be an indicator of the unionism practiced (Lucio 2003).

There are also warnings when it comes to Web 2.0 technology (Bryson, Gomez & Willman 2010). First, internet access and knowledge are not universal or evenly distributed meaning that not all workers, let alone union members, can access this information or participate in creating content. Second, many user-generated content sites strictly control the content users can create within well-defined bounds which seems to conflict with the idea that Web 2.0 is linked to endless user-generated content. Third, if left unchecked organization leaders can use Web 2.0 technology to shut down conversations and restrict discussions (Lucio, Walker & Trevorrow 2009; Hodder & Houghton 2015). Even with Web 2.0 technology online communications can be monitored and controlled to ensure the 'official' union view is the one that is presented (Hodder & Houghton 2015).

On this point, Schradie's (2015) findings seemed to contradict previous studies suggesting Web 2.0 and online communications automatically make unions more democratic by suggesting that the internal politics and organization of the union has a greater influence on how they use communication channels, what they communicate, and how and if they monitor this activity for dissent. This aligns with findings and suggestions from Manning (1998) and Lucio, Walker and Trevorrow (2009). More specifically, Schradie (2015) found in a comparison of public sector unions in North Carolina, that a union with a top-down approach had a greater online presence and used online communications far more than a more democratic bottom-up public sector union. These kinds of results support socio-technical research (for example, Wajcman 2015) that suggest that there is nothing inherent about online and new communication technologies that would fundamentally change organizations or individuals, but that the use of these technologies can be shaped by the organization's size, budgets, culture, membered composition and internal politics, and organization structure among other external factors.

External Communication

Canadian mainstream media communication about unions has been notoriously negative and often gives the perception that unions are no longer necessary or relevant (Kumar & Schenk 2006). This situation is not unique to Canada. Beynon (2003, p. 272) found British unions are viewed as outdated or villains on the industrial landscape, which is troubling considering O'Neill's (2007) findings on how media representation can influence public support during a labour dispute. In the United States, according to Milkman and Voss (2004, p. 1), unions are often presented in the press as dead or dying; as a relic of the past no longer needed (Martin 2004); or potentially worse, they are not presented at all in mainstream media. Australian unions have received an abundance of negative press in the mainstream media, which has motivated some unions to experiment with alternative

media formats (Muir 2010; Milner 2012) such as the website LabourStart founded by American labour activist Eric Lee. In Canada, Kumar and Schenk (2006, p. 17) argue that unions are presented as irrelevant, inefficient, undemocratic, and at best a special interest group. Yet, this representation is inconsistent with the evidence on the role that unions play in most countries in relation to establishing better wages, health and safety regulations, and advancing workers' interests (Kumar & Schenk 2006, p. 17) along with evidence of the union premium in terms of wages, scheduling and occupational safety (Campanella, Barnetson & MacEwan 2014; Wilmers 2017; Finnigan & Mhairi Hale 2018)

Many issues that unions face in the mainstream media have been traced back to corporate ownership (O'Neill 2007), common journalistic practices (such as focusing on drama and conflict, and presenting two-sides of the story to appear objective), reliance on elite sources favouring government or business owners over workers (Hall et al. 1978), and lastly the idea of the audience as consumers rather than citizens (Martin 2004; Ryan 2004). This kind of reporting can mean that union-friendly stories are discouraged from the outset, or that unions must constantly respond to the other side of the story provided by government or management, or that labour disputes are only reported as they pertain to the ability for people to consume products or services (for example, a specific product will not be available because the factory is on strike, or a specific service will be slow because of a labour dispute). Facing these negative portrayals in mainstream media, many unions have turned to alternative media, such as the LabourStart website developed by Eric Lee (Ryan 2004; Muir 2010).

To date, unions' external communications have not been examined beyond the negative representation of unions in the media (Bruno 2009), the recognition that unions may benefit from media use (Manning 2001; O'Neill 2007), and single campaign case studies for specific unions or causes (for example Ryan 2004; Muir 2010). In the case of Muir (2010), the media campaign

included a website, public service announcements that had fictional enactments of what could happen if proposed legislation passed, and public rallies. This campaign was described as breathing new life into the Australian labour movement by attracting new activists and demonstrating publicly that unions are relevant to workers and their day-to-day lives (Muir 2010, p. 67). The union was able to achieve this reinvigoration of the labour movement by highlighting how all workers could benefit from the union campaign, not just unionized workers, and by including opportunities for union Locals and individual members to get involved in the campaign. Although the campaign was considered a success in preventing the proposed legislation from passing, many union members were not pleased with the overall communications strategy and campaign—claiming that it went against 'their traditional industrial and cultural expressions' and that it was 'centralized, sanitized and more passive' than the direct action they would have liked to see, such as a strike or protest (Muir 2010, p. 61). These findings bring up interesting issues that unions face as they attempt to make their efforts and campaigns more appealing, not only to their own membership but also to the general public.

In a different campaign in the United Kingdom, O'Neill (2007) reports that ordinary union members had to engage with media outlets when they participated in picket lines and public events. The internal communications became very important because of this, and thanks to a well-coordinated committee structure with regular planning meetings and Local training, the union members were able to stay 'on-message'. As the labour dispute progressed the union also set up emailing lists and text message notifications for their members to stay up to date and for the union to try and keep morale up. As well, by having plenty of union members available the union was able to help fill the new 24-hour news cycle, giving their members and the union lots of coverage to get their own arguments across. Another unique finding of this case was the different reactions younger and older union members had to the newspaper coverage of the strike. Younger members in

particularly were 'shocked, hurt and angry at how they were being presented in the paper' (O'Neill 2007, p. 828). This specific campaign highlights the importance of both internal and external communications campaigns for unions as well as the different experiences that younger and older unions members have of campaigns and news reporting.

Muir (2010) also points out that as unionization rates are dropping, fewer people have direct contact with unions and consequently they rely on media or external communications to learn about the function of unions, therefore making communications and media very important tools. Furthering this line of thought, Milner (2014) adds that the communication between the rank-and-file members and their executive is critical for a unionist's social identification, which presumably will impact how they understand and talk about the union to their friends and associates as well as to other union members. However, research suggests unions still face difficulties in handling or adapting to new communications forms, especially media communications allowing user-generated content (Fowler & Hagar 2013), and that unions still face difficulties with mainstream media rules and culture (Ryan 2004).

Union Social Media

In addition to union websites, many large unions and even individual Locals will also have Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, and at times even YouTube accounts – which is categorized as a form of social media (Fowler & Hagar, 2013). These new forms of social media provide alternative channels for unions to present their news to members and non-members, which may be key to broadening their relevance and educating people about unions. The key to using these media forms according to Fowler and Hagar (2013, p. 207) is that they need to be used regularly, have an interactive component for members to participate, and have engaging content. If unions do use

these new social media formats, it means they have to regularly engage with the membership, which may or may not be a practice outside of industrial disputes.

Based on existing studies, then, it is clear that there is a great deal of value in examining both the production and consumption of union communications material across a range of communication channels. How people who are involved with unions imagine their audiences is important not only for the work the union does but also for the messages that are communicated to people. Union members are often the ones engaging with the public during industrial disputes and they are a direct contact point for others to learn about unions aside from the mass media. Knowing more about how union workers imagine and therefore produce their messages, and how union members understand the communications from their union, could be incredibly important for renewal efforts.

Theoretical Approach

Since this project draws on scholarship from several areas – union renewal, sociology of work and organizations, and communications – there are a number of theoretical frameworks that potentially could be useful. For example, using feminist political economy (Armstrong & Armstrong 2010; Sangster 2010), or building from the feminist political economy tradition, researchers used varied approaches, including social reproductive frameworks (Cranford 2007; Yates 2011); interactionist approaches (Markowitz 2000) including the use of framing (Monahan 2013); and variations of resource mobilization theory (Gall 2003; Badigannavar & Kelly 2005). In this section I will review the primary theoretical perspective I have selected to handle union media and communications efforts, namely collective action framing. I will also discuss some of the competing approaches and their identified shortcomings. To address some of the shortcomings of the

collective action frame approach, I also include the feminist political economy perspective in my method and justify why this is an ideal combination for this research.

Collective Action Frame (CAF)

Of the various approaches used by other researchers, collective action frame is a particularly helpful approach for understanding issues of union relevance and research on social movements. The collective action frame approach was built out of the work of Goffman (1974) who defined a 'frame' as a layout that helps individuals organize their experiences and gain meaning and thereby function in their lives. A 'collective action frame' functions similarly, as it helps people interpret events by simplifying and condensing aspects of the world in ways that support a social movement or promote collective action (Benford & Snow 2000, p. 614).

Collective action framing as a theoretical approach was a critical response to the dominance of structural approaches in academic scholarship, in particular, rational choice perspectives and resource mobilization theory in social movement research. The rational choice perspective casts people involved in a social movement as rational actors, evaluating their situation and context according to rational criteria and then moving forward with a social movement when it benefits them personally. Although the rational choice perspective does draw attention to individual motivation for involvement in a wider social movement, it has been widely criticized for assuming that people are rational actors when deciding to become involved in a movement. This is summed up by Benford (1997) as 'dubious psychology' (p. 411).

Resource mobilization theory focuses on how social movements are able to acquire and assemble the resources that motivate people towards a common goal. Although this approach does highlight organizational structures, including communications networks, it has been critiqued for being structurally deterministic and casting the people involved in social movements as being highly

rational, a similar issue that faces the rational choice perspective (Benford, 1997). Resource mobilization also fails to account for the differential successes or failures of social movements that have acquired and used the same or similar resources. Overall, both resource mobilization and rational choice perspectives seem to ignore the role of interpretation, social construction, and cultural dimensions for the success or failure of social movements (Benford, 1997), all of which a collective action frame approach attempts to address.

In a classic and widely cited article, Snow and Benford (1992, p. 137) describe a frame as 'an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the 'world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one's present or past environment'. More specifically, framing is a term used by social movement theorists to describe the work done by people trying to maintain a social movement identity through articulating their goals, values, solutions, and strategies (Monahan 2013, p. 440). It is important to remember that frames are not static but a process, and also that different frames can compete or be in conflict with each other over how to interpret events (Benford 1997, p. 416). Frames often work in relation to ideologies; ideologies can be a resource for frames to build from, but they can also restrict frame development (Benford & Snow 2000). According to Snow (2007):

> … [in] the study of social movements, ideology is generally invoked as a cover term for a relatively stable and coherent set of values, beliefs, and goals associated with a movement ... assumed to provide the rationale for defending or challenging various social arrangements and conditions. (p. 396)

Snow (2007) recommends that scholars drawing from collective action frames think of ideologies on a continuum of values and beliefs that has tightly knitted values and beliefs on one side, and loosely coupled values and beliefs on the other. As for the role of ideology in relation to frames, it is rarely

ever fully unpacked in social movement literature. Whereas ideologies can be frames for social movements and frames can draw from one or more ideologies, the relationship is rarely straightforward and without contradictions (Snow 2007). Frames can help join together one or more ideology and connect the ideologies with experiences or events to create a relatively cohesive understanding; or as Snow labels it, frames can act as 'a kind of collective packaging device' (2007, p. 400). In a much more simplified explanation, Oliver and Johnston (2000, p.8) claim that 'framing points to a process, while ideology points to content'. In sum, the relationship between frames and ideologies is not intuitive, straightforward, nor the same for each frame and ideology. Essentially, frames help make events meaningful by organizing them in a way that resonates with people (Benford & Snow 2000) and social movements can use frames to gain momentum and stimulate social change.

Franzway and Fonow (2011) claim that in order for unions to be seen as 'mobilizing structures' for collective action, the unions must be discursively framed to make clear 'union relevance' in workers' daily lives, and thus mobilize people to act. Depending on how a union frames its own identity, current and potential members can evaluate whether a union aligns with their own values and beliefs, which as we have seen in previous research can influence member participation (Monahan 2013, p. 440). In the union context, Ross (2012) demonstrates how framing helps workers to understand their own issues as something unions can participate in and influence; in other words, framing can help to establish the relevance of an external organization— union relevance— in workers' lives. As Fonow (2011) observes, '[to] be successful frames must seek congruence and complementarity between the interests, values, and beliefs of the potential movement participants and the activities, goals, and ideologies of social movements' (Fonow cited in Franzway & Fonow 2011, p. 292).

One difficulty can be finding frames that are flexible enough for shifts in external factors; for example, finding frames that resonate with increasing worker diversity in Canada, both unionized and nonunionized. Further, frames are not created, changed, or functioning in an isolated context. Rather, the union's frames are influenced by, and in turn influence, various political, social, and economic forces. Following from Carragee and Roef's (2004) work, it is important to examine the relationship frames have to the broader political and social context. Collective action frame research focused on unions therefore needs to account for the influence of power on frame creation, maintenance, circulation, and reception across various communications and media venues.

Feminist Political Economy (FPE)

To ensure the analysis fully accounts for the influence of power and context regarding collective action frames, I also draw from feminist political economy. In this project, a feminist political economy perspective is used to help with the limitations of previous research using collective action frames that has ignored important contextual aspects and to aid my own project in further exploring and understanding the impact of economic, social, and political interests and powers (Clement 2001). A feminist political economy approach includes examining the material conditions along with the struggles and contradictions of the situation and understanding that the conditions and struggles continuously influence each other, all within a historical context (Vosko 2002). This focus draws attention to the ways that groups with common economic interests work to advance their interests politically. For example, drawing from a Marxist view of a traditional capitalist state, characterized by private ownership of capital, this perspective draws attention to the divides between labour and capital over, for example, the organization of work and distribution of wages and wealth. The very nature of employment in capitalist states is a relation of conflicting interests and unequal power between employers and workers. Generally, employers have more

power than workers, as any power that workers have— whether that power is through a union or not— is limited by the workers' need for income to ensure that they have some kind of sustenance and housing. On the other hand, employers draw power from owning the means of production, as well as common law and employment law that give employers power over work arrangements. Even with unions, employers are given the right to organize and direct work.

Alberta, although a capitalist state, also has a distinct political, social, and economic background affecting how unions represent themselves and are represented by others, and a political economy perspective helps to highlight these distinctions (Wallace 2001). Moreover, the political economy perspective spotlights the social location of workers which includes their education, race/ethnicity, and gender. The social location of the workers is important to contextualize this research and adds to literature related to the nursing occupation (Kealey 2008). Since the health care sector has more female and/or visible minority employees, any health care sector analysis works well with a feminist political economy perspective. Overall, the addition of feminist political economy perspective addresses some of the identified shortcomings of the collective action frame approach and helps to situate this current research in a rich history of studying health care – more specifically research on women's work in caring roles that has been dominated by the feminist political economy perspective (Armstrong 1993; Armstrong, Armstrong & Scott-Dixon 2008).

Combining a collective action frame approach, with a feminist political economy framework, is ideal for this research project. The combined approach, suited to the questions and material that have been examined, draws attention to key factors influencing the key concept of union relevance – such as goals, solutions, values, strategies, and communications (collective action frames calls attention to) – as well as the political, social, and economic context related to female labour (feminist political economy calls attention to).

Conclusion and Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed a wide range of scholarship in order to help situate questions about the relationship between union communication and union relevance, and the empirical case study of UNA's activities, practices, and communication techniques. From the review of available scholarship, it is clear that while there has been extensive research on the Canadian labour movement, especially with the more recent academic focus on union renewal and union relevance globally, there is still limited research on union communications. Surprisingly, this lack of research persists despite unions' increased media use and the growing diversity in media available to them. Based on this review, three questions and areas of investigation can be identified as important and in need of study (as noted earlier in my introduction p 5).

The first question relates to what kind of unionism is practiced in health care unions in Alberta. As previously mentioned, nurses' unions have stood out in the Canadian labour movement for their different approaches and the different work they do, which has been credited to the predominantly female membership and the profession's unique history. This research picks up this question through interviews with union employees and a thorough document analysis of the union.

A second question concerns the kinds of communications that unions are engaged in. Here there is very limited literature on what unions in general are doing, let alone what health care and public sector unions are doing in Alberta. The first and second questions can be linked, and together they raise other important questions. These include: Do unions adequately communicate with their membership about what they do? Is the type of unionism practiced reflected in the communications materials and other documents sourced for this research?

Third, there are questions about what actual union members think of their own unions and their communication practices. Such information and perspectives have largely been left out of

recent Canadian research that focuses on union renewal efforts. As noted previously, members have also been left out of social movement research that focuses on message framing.

Chapter 3: Nurses' Unions

> ...it's my belief there is no way a union cannot be political. We need to be involved in things like legislative change or at least lobby for changes to legislation, regulations, the way things are done with government…(UNA Staff, Interview 1)

Introduction

Beginning with the efforts of a few religious charities, health care and in turn the nursing profession and unionization, has developed into a complex system in Canada. This chapter focuses briefly on the development of health care in Alberta, along with the history of collective bargaining and the various iterations of collective bargainers in Alberta's health care sector. This historical review is an essential component of this study, demonstrating how nursing has struggled with tensions between professionalization and unionization for decades – tensions that previous research has shown to play out in union communications, especially communications around industrial actions. These historic tensions are important for how unions communicate and try to ensure that their actions resonate with their members. My review also considers research studies on health care union communications, with a focus on the past activities of United Nurses of Alberta (UNA). These past activities of UNA demonstrate how the organization has developed its own communication infrastructure and also answer questions about the kinds of activities and style of unionism that UNA practices.

History of Nursing

Nursing began in Canada as part of religious efforts to help people with their medical needs. In the 1800s, nurses were one of the main service providers that would travel to remote locations and ensure people received some medical attention (Ross-Kerr 1998, p. 105). In 1850s Alberta, the Grey Nuns were one of the first organizations recognized for providing a standard of service that other agencies worked to achieve (Ross-Kerr 1998). During this time, most medical care in Alberta was offered in private homes, while hospitals were often reserved for those in need of charity. Working in private homes meant the nurses were entirely dependent on the people they cared for and were usually the only care worker in that location (Gray 1989).

As the medical system became more organized, charities began to create more hospitals and move health care to centralized locations instead of individual homes. Hospitals addressed the very real need for organized medical attention for the increasing number of settlers in Western Canada (Ross-Kerr 1998, p. 18). With the number of hospitals increasing, and the different international wars Canada was involved in, the demand for nurses continued to grow. The employment relationship for nurses changed as more of them began to work in hospital or public health facilities, where they were employees of those facilities rather than employees for private individuals (UNA 2017, p. 3). In hospitals, nurses were in a better position to make labour demands (Gray 1989), as there were many more nurses and more bureaucracy that nurses could work through for formal complaints (Gray 1989).

In these hospitals, nurses were often expected to work for very little pay at best, or else completely volunteer their time and skills (Ross-Kerr 1998, p. 26). During this time, most occupations that were suitable for a woman were often thought of as temporary or at least secondary to the women's role in the private home (Gray 1989). This thinking was reflected in the

poor remuneration nurses received for their work, often with the justification that they were not in need of the money because male 'breadwinners' would eventually support them. Therefore, these employment positions were never designed to provide a career over a lifetime or opportunities for upward mobility; but rather to prepare women for their domestic duties as wives and mothers (Gray 1989). Nursing as a profession was often defined in relation to the male dominated physician and nursing duties were centred around supporting male physicians (Adams 2010). In fact, the majority of nurses were not even considered employees (United Nurses of Alberta n.d.). Nurses subsidized early hospitals with their free labour, which was justified by the belief that the reward for nurses was in helping people who were in need – it was considered a 'labour of love' (Strachan 1997). Since there was hardly any monetary value in the work for nurses, this meant nursing as a job was also reserved for middle- and upper-class women who could afford to volunteer their time.

The early women's movement helped carve out what was considered 'appropriate professions' for middle-class women to contribute to society, such as nursing. Often, these 'appropriate professions' were extensions of women's traditional roles in the family (Villeneuve 2014, p. 133), often where nurses could play supporting roles to physicians who tended to be male (Adams 2010). This definition of appropriate careers for women was a contributing factor that helps to explain why the overwhelming majority of nurses were and still are women. Nursing has often been thought of as a 'natural' career for women because it draws on what is perceived as a woman's natural ability to care (Gray 1989). Gray (1989, p. 141) reminds us that not only does this thinking make assumptions about women, but it also positions nurses and nursing careers as passive and subservient to physicians/doctors in the medical division of labour. Nurses are often expected to carry out tasks delegated to them from other health professionals and to obey orders (Mitchell & Richards 2014, p. 80). They are expected to be subservient to other medical professionals such as doctors and administrators.

Of relevance to this study, Alberta was somewhat unique compared to other parts of Canada. In Alberta, woman who married were allowed to continue to work as nurses because there was often a shortage of qualified nurses – in other locations these women were expected to leave public work life to dedicate themselves to the private functions of their family (Ross-Kerr 1998, p. 21). Because life on the Western frontier necessitated throwing away some of the gendered social customs of other areas, women and nurses in Alberta had more opportunities and were able to challenge certain mores. There are early recordings of nurses challenging doctors and engaging in power struggles over their rights and responsibilities in Alberta. For example, when hospitals were just starting to become established, nurses in Alberta fought with doctors over admitting privileges (Ross-Kerr 1998, p. 31).

Many of the issues that faced nurses during the foundation of their profession continue to be faced today. Registered nurses still have limited autonomy in their positions with decision-making power being left to doctors or administrators (Breda et al. 1997). In addition, nurses still battle pushback when they try to be involved in policy-making decisions regarding health care. Nevertheless, for nurses, influencing policy can be seen as an important professional obligation (Skelton-Green, Shaminan & Villeneuve 2014, p. 90). Furthermore, many provinces are facing nursing shortages and are putting additional stress on nurses to do more care work, often with fewer resources and with patients who are experiencing more complicated medical issues (Clarke & Clarke 2006).

Nursing Profession and Unions

Professionalization has historically, and still to this day, been viewed as oppositional to unions and unionizing; this is despite the reality of many professional groups being involved in

industrial action (Strachan 1997). The stereotypical blue-collar worker and aggressive strike activity have typically dominated the image of trade unions. Often these traits were considered contrary to professional standards in nursing and even contrary to being a woman. Actions such as protests or strikes by nurses were sometimes labelled as unprofessional and unethical (Breda 1997), or even selfish. Considering that nurses' working conditions and professional image were often constructed around this idea of a selfless submissive woman, it is easy to see how the bar for being unethical and selfish was placed incredibly low for this set of workers compared to others. Nurses were trained, and women were taught, to always put the needs of others before their own (Strachan 1997).

As nurses fought hard to be recognized as a distinct profession with skills and value in health care, the same ethic of professionalism has been used to deter nurses from gaining employment rights and acting to protect their jobs. David Coburn (1988) has pointed out that nurses' professionalization was top-down and focused on their service to patients and subordination to doctors, while unionization focused on the service to patients from the needs of nurses and generally came from nurses themselves.

> Just as [nurses] saw that it was possible to be mothers and employees, so too did nurses start to see that they could unionize to fight for better working conditions, job security, and pay while maintaining their commitment to care and their code of ethics. (Armstrong & Silas 2014, p. 167)

The process of professionalizing nursing was similar to other professionalization processes in that it focused on service, education, certification, and self-regulation. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century debates on self-regulation for professions often focused on the 'public interest', with those advancing self-regulation tying the interest of the public to the interest of the profession – by protecting professions and elevating the standards, it was argued that self-regulated professions

could then protect the public as well (Adams 2016). However, nursing was unique, since most professions have historically been established by male elites (Kealey 2008)—though nursing was not so unique as to be independent of them. Rather, the professionalization of nursing occurred with the consent of male doctors (Ross-Kerr 1998). In Alberta, the legislature at the time made sure to consult with and get approval from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta before establishing a professional association for Alberta's nurses.

The first regulatory legislation for nursing in Alberta was established in 1916 (Ross-Kerr 1998). During this time period, more nurses were formally trained, and all provinces were each responsible for bringing in their own legislation to govern the profession. This was also around the time nurses in Canada formed the Canadian National Association of Trained Nurses which would later become the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA). Part of the regulation stressed the official education of nurses leading to one of the first nursing programs in Canada, which was at the University of Alberta in Edmonton (Ross-Kerr 1998, p. 76). University training represented a major shift from hospital training and helped to increase the status of the profession (Gray 1989, p. 137). However, the shift to university training was also a shift to a male-oriented educational system, which worked to discredit non-university-educated women practicing healing or medicine, including Indigenous women (Armstrong & Silas 2012; Hall 2012; McDonald 2012).

Initially, the federal CNA did not support unionization. Rather, the CNA considered unions a vehicle for selfishness, and even passed a pre-emptive resolution against nurses going on strike for any cause (Richardson 2005, p. 215). This meant the workplace issues facing nurses were often left unaddressed with little organized resistance (Coburn 1988). Nurses continued to push forward with unionization as workplace issues persisted, despite the resistance from the CNA.

In the 1940s, the CNA created a Labour Relations Committee that began to deal with the growing issues around nurses' collective bargaining, unionization and national and provincial

regulations (CNA 1968, p. 8; UNA 2017, p. 4). During this time more and more nurses were moving from private duty positions to positions in hospitals (Coburn 1988). This trend towards collective bargaining was influenced by the national Wartime Labour Regulations Act Privy Council Order #1003, which legally recognized the right of employees to collectively bargain with their employers in Canada (UNA 2017, p. 5). However, pre-emptively CNA also enacted a ban on nurses' strikes across Canada in the 1950s (UNA 2017, p. 6).

By the 1960s the CNA eventually endorsed collective bargaining and supported the provincial professional associations as the official bargaining agent for nurses (UNA 2017, p. 5). The larger public sector workers' groups who were predominately women along with other professions had also adopted collective bargaining, appearing to demonstrate that professional workers could also be unionized (CNA 1968, p. 10; Krahn et al. 2020). It was also around the 1960s that some legislators in Canada began to question the ability of self-regulated professions to be able to put the interest of the public above their own. At this point some legislators even recommended the curtailment of self-regulation with more government oversight (Adams, 2016). Still, the endorsement of collective bargaining from the CNA did not include an endorsement of all labour relations tactics, including the right to strike, until the 1970s when CNA lifted its ban against strikes for nurses (UNA 2017, p. 10). It was not until the 1970s and 1980s that nurses were finally able to exercise their rights as unionized workers with the support of their professional association (Coburn 1988).

Nursing and Health care in Alberta

Shortly after the creation of the CNA, Alberta established the Alberta Association of Graduate Nurses to represent registered nurses in provincial matters, which later became the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses (AARN) in 1916 (UNA 2017, p. 3). The Alberta Hospital

Association (AHA) was formed shortly after in 1919 to represent the health care employers in Alberta (Juzwishin 1980).

The AARN and the AHA began a loose kind of collective bargaining with each other in the 1940s without any real institutional structures to guide them (UNA 2017, p. 5). The bargaining committee for the nurses operated as a group of volunteer advisors and their bargaining demands were met with mixed reactions, as the AHA would only provide recommendations to employers – some of whom would implement the recommendations while others would not (UNA 2017, p. 6). These inconsistencies meant there were glaring disparities between nurses' employment situations across Alberta. As well, the AARN was not allowed to become an official collective bargaining agent for nurses in Alberta under the current Registered Nurses' Act of 1916. This lack of official status meant that any employers that did recognize the AARN as the collective bargaining agent did so on a voluntary basis, which could quickly be undone.

It was not until the 1950s when the Staff Nurse Associations were formed in a few hospitals across Alberta that true collective bargaining was pushed at the individual level in Alberta hospitals. These associations included active professional nurses employed by the hospitals and were exclusive of nurses at the management or administrative level (UNA 2017, p. 6; CARNA, n.d.). The Staff Nurse Association pursued collective bargaining aims at the Local or hospital level in connection with the efforts of AARN provincially. At this time, the AARN was still not allowed under provincial legislation to be the bargaining agent for all Alberta nurses and was still voluntarily recognized by the employer.

In the 1960s, under the Social Credit government in Alberta, AHA and AARN agreed to a three-year freeze for hospital costs including nurses' salaries (UNA 2017, p. 7). During this time, the AARN was pushing the government to implement a pension plan in exchange for the wage freeze (UNA 2017, p. 7) and continued to push to become involved in official collective bargaining instead

of only being voluntarily recognized. Under the new agreement, the salaries for Alberta nurses fell below those of nurses in both British Columbia and Saskatchewan. Compared to other provinces Alberta also had a shortage of nurses, with only one practicing nurse for every 288 people, while the national average was one per 188 people (UNA 2017, p. 9). Alberta was simply unable to educate enough nurses for the population, nor could they entice nurses from other provinces to relocate because the wages were not competitive enough.

The Staff Nurse Associations continued to spread to more hospitals and receive voluntary recognition from their employers (UNA 2017, p. 8). By 1966, AARN had succeeded in amending the Registered Nurses Act and took on the role of bargaining agent for nurses along with the Staff Nurse Association (CARNA, n.d.) The first official collective bargaining agreement for nurses in Alberta was between the Staff Nurse Association and the Calgary General Hospital Board (UNA 2017, p. 9). The older AARN Employment Relations Committee was slowly being replaced by a Provincial Staff Nurses Committee (PSNC), which was populated by nurses within the bargaining units to help ensure true representation. It was important that nurses in management or administrative roles were not able to interfere in or control the bargaining process through any participation on the PSNC.

In the 1970s, under Premier Peter Lougheed and the Alberta Progressive Conservative Party, Alberta saw a rapid expansion of health care infrastructure. Under Lougheed, Alberta had newfound oil wealth. Lougheed used part of these new funds and the newly created Medical Care Act of 1966 to build hospitals in almost every town in Alberta. In a turnaround, the Alberta Progressive Conservative Party – which had fought against expanding public health care – was able to buy political capital for decades to come by bringing public health care to many rural Albertans (Church & Smith 2008).

The 1970s was also the decade that the CNA officially lifted its ban against strikes for nurses (UNA 2017, p. 10). Shortly after, Calgary public health nurses voted overwhelmingly in favour of a strike that lasted for seven days (UNA 2017, p. 10). It did not take long for strikes to be used by unions and for Alberta nurses to begin to develop a reputation on the Alberta industrial relations landscape.

During this decade, the Supreme Court of Canada also ruled that the Saskatchewan Association of Registered Nurses could not be the official bargaining unit for the province's nurses since most of the officers of the association were employed in management positions (Coburn 1988; UNA 2017, p. 10; CARNA n.d.). Instead, nurses in Saskatchewan had to establish a union that was separate from their professional association. Within one year, the majority of the provinces had their own nurses' union in response to the court decision (Armstrong & Silas 2014, p. 164). The AARN officially delegated collective bargaining powers to the PSNC.

In the first years, the role of the PSNC expanded, along with the need for increased funds. Since the AARN still controlled the majority of funds paid to the organization through the collection of registration fees, the PSNC was still never fully independent. This led to plans for an organizational separation of the PSNC from the AARN in the late 1970s (UNA 2017, p. 11). This move resulted in the creation of an independent nurses' union in Alberta in 1977 with start-up funds of $15,000 from AARN, called the Alberta Nurses' Association, which would later become the United Nurses of Alberta (UNA 2017, p. 12; CARNA n.d.).

Merely two months after the creation of UNA, seven hospital nursing units spread across the province went on strike (UNA 2017, p. 12). The strike lasted four days before the provincial government stepped in to declare a state of public emergency and ordered the 2,500 nurses back to work (Canadian Museum of History 2010a; UNA 2017, p. 12). The province also appointed an arbitrator to finalize a settlement that would be binding for both sides (UNA 2017, p. 13).

The appointed arbitrator was Mr. Justice Bowen who ended up awarding the nurses a nine per cent wage increase over one year. This award went against the federal Wage and Price Control legislation that mandated a six per cent increase limit – a law that Alberta had also adopted (Canadian Museum of History 2010a). Some employers choose to implement the limited six per cent increase despite the Bowen decision, leading to a number of UNA grievances. The province ultimately passed Bill 101, which allowed the nine per cent increase for nurses to stand (UNA 2017, p. 13). Once again, UNA was able to demonstrate that their members were determined to improve working incomes for nurses. Nevertheless, the 1977 bargaining sessions were not a complete success for UNA, as Bowen had not supported UNA's requests for the Rand Formula[4] in their collective bargaining agreement (UNA 2017, p. 14), although UNA did successfully negotiate a hospital collective agreement the next year that included the Rand Formula (UNA 2017, p. 14).

By 1982, the UNA members working in hospitals were once again in a position to strike. This time, the Minister of Labour, using the Labour Relations Act, intervened and ordered a Disputes Inquiry Board (MacDowell, Sefton & Radforth 2006, p. 409). This Disputes Inquiry Board would hold hearings on any outstanding bargaining issues and make recommendations for a settlement. No strike actions could take place until 10 days after the Minister provided recommendations to the parties from the Disputes Inquiry Board. This was the first time the Disputes Inquiry Board was used in Alberta and it would not be used again until the 1986 United Food and Commercial Workers' strike at Gainers[5] (UNA 2017, p. 17). The Disputes Inquiry Board

[4] The Rand Formula is from a 1946 Supreme Court of Canada decision by Justice Ivan Rand. This decision requires that workers covered by collective bargaining agreements pay union dues whether or not the workers actually become union members. This same decision also proscribed financial penalties for workers and unions that engage in illegal work stoppages.

[5] The Gainers strike was one of the more violent labour disputes in Edmonton, Alberta. Workers had gone on strike but this did not stop the Gainer meat-packing plant from using replacement workers. Tensions were high in the province as workers across Alberta were suffering during this time with the drop of oil prices internationally. Overall the strike lasted just over half a year and became was plagued by violence between

did not have the intended effect of preventing the nurses from going on strike, as the government attempted to mandate their own vote on the recommended settlement that was different from the UNA-called vote and hence was boycotted by the majority of UNA members – an action that was later made illegal in Alberta (MacDowell, Sefton & Radforth 2006, p. 409; UNA 2017, p. 17). By February of 1982, 6,000 UNA nurses were again on strike and the provincial government followed up with back to work legislation (UNA 2017, p. 17). Both sides received another binding settlement decided by Mr. Justice Forsyth, which included a 29 per cent wage increase over two years along with improved scheduling and a provision for working alone for the nurses (UNA 2017, p. 19).

In 1983, the Alberta provincial government, under Premiere Lougheed, introduced Bill 44 that would remove the legal right to strike and/or lockouts from all hospital workers and instead mandate compulsory arbitration as the only legal option during collective bargaining (UNA 2017, p. 19; Alberta Labour History Institute 2016). Under this new law, hospital worker unions that went on strike would face hefty fines and a six-month suspension of dues collected under any negotiated Rand Formulas (UNA 2017, p. 19). Prior to this, only the three Crown Hospitals (Foothills, Glenrose, and Alberta Children's Hospital) were unable to strike, since they fell under the *Public Service Employee Relations Act* (PSERA), which already prohibited strike activity (UNA 2017, p. 24).

This new legislation did not prevent the 1985 strike of health unit nurses, nor did it prevent the strike of the Calgary Local of the Victorian Order of Nurses later that year. By striking, the nurses at the health units were able to prevent the deep concessions that the employers were demanding during that round of bargaining (UNA 2017, p. 21) and continue to build a militant reputation for UNA nurses. Nevertheless, health unit nurses were not able to make the same gains the nurses working in hospitals had been able to make. The 1980 health unit strike is notable

striking and replacement workers. The strike ended with a new collective agreement and the strikers being hired back with their pension benefits.

because three health units accepted earlier proposals from their employers, while others stayed on strike for nearly 10 months. In the end, the three health units that accepted the earlier proposals were given the same collective bargaining terms as the units that went on strike; however, the units that went on strike were penalized by the employer when they changed the date of hire to reflect the 10 months those nurses were on strike (UNA 2017, p. 21). The UNA Executive Board claimed the three health units that did not go on strike had a moral obligation to not accept the new terms and conditions, although those nurses did take the employer's offer of the same agreement the other nurses had gone on strike for. These three units were given time to apply for successor rights and withdraw from UNA or have UNA revoke their Charters as a result of their decision to accept the new terms and conditions as a reward for not going on strike (UNA 2017, p. 22).

After two uneventful rounds of bargaining with AHA over the hospital collective agreements, AHA came to the bargaining table in 1987 asking for significant rollbacks. This led to the illegal strike of 1988. This strike began at 98 hospitals, including the crown hospitals that were covered under PSERA, and affected 14,000 nurses (UNA 2017, p. 24; Alberta Labour History Institute 2016). This strike lasted 19 days in total. Being an illegal strike, at the end UNA was fined more than $425,000. The benefits of the 1988 strike were realized during the 1990 round of negotiations when nurses received additional benefits, such as more days of rest and a 19% wage increase (Armstrong & Silas 2014, p. 167). Shortly after the 1988 illegal strike, Heather Smith was elected President of UNA at the Annual General Meeting and has remained in that role to this day.

According to Ross-Kerr (1998, p. 63), it was not until the 1990s when the expansion of hospitals across Canada that began in the post war years came to a crashing stop. Many provinces, including Alberta, had moved services to hospitals and invested heavily in new technologies and treatments, dramatically increasing costs. Provinces had made these moves because under the federal legislation for health care, services provided in hospitals would be covered with the help of federal

funds. During the 1990s, neoliberal discourse of competition and productivity was applied to the health care sector. Attempts to privatize the health care sector are often based on the assumption that private systems would be cheaper and more efficient – despite there being limited evidence that this is true (Relman 2012). In cases where governments have experienced cost-savings using privatization, full analyses generally conclude that rather than cost savings, privatization results in cost displacement, whereby costs are moved from governments to families and individuals.

During this time, private sector managerial practices were also applied to the health care sector that shifted power from health care professions and workers to managers and financiers (Henttoen et al. 2013, p. 57). According to Hood (cited in Henttoen et al. 2013), the new management strategies from the private sector move the focus of accountability from the process to the results, which works to deny nurses autonomy and control over their work and recasts administration as the official health care experts.

Cuts to health care in the 1990s undermined the system in many provinces (Storch 2014). With costs continuing to grow and cuts becoming deeper, a 'crisis' was created in health care. Health care was targeted in most provinces since it was one of the largest government expenses, and investors in the private sector wanted to gain more of a foothold in Canadian health care – not only through direct service contracts but also through the management and financing of care (Armstrong & Silas 2014, p. 171). Nurses, being one of the largest occupational groups in most health care settings, were also targeted with cutbacks, layoffs, and new management techniques brought in from the private sector (Armstrong & Silas 2014, p. 171). Reports from the National Forum on Health Care from 1997, the Romanow Report from 2002, and the Kirby Report from 2002 did not support the widespread health care cuts across Canada. Rather, these reports affirmed the merits of the Canadian health care system and in some cases called for further funding for the expansion of public coverage to pharmaceuticals and home care.

In Alberta, the expansion of health care by the Lougheed government was followed by massive health care cuts under Premier Ralph Klein. Almost immediately after being elected, Klein and the new Minister of Health, Shirley McClellan, announced changes to the funding of Alberta's health care (UNA 2017, p. 31). One of the first announcements was a $65 million cut (UNA 2017, p. 31). This $65 million cut was done despite the government moving ahead with a $911 million health care construction plan. It became clear that the intent of the $65 million cut was to implement a decrease in salaries and benefits of hospital workers (UNA 2017, p. 31).

Later in 1993, Klein announced his request for all public sector workers to take a voluntary five per cent rollback (UNA 2017, p. 31). When this request was not taken up by public sector workers – most of whom had their wages and benefits governed by collective bargaining agreements – Klein announced a five per cent cut to health care facilities (UNA 2017, p. 32). Many health care employers did not use even this announcement as a reason to cut workers' wages, as they decided to wait out the current collective agreements and seek rollbacks during new negotiations (UNA 2017, p. 32).

Even when Alberta experienced windfall profits from oil and gas in 1994, the Klein government continued to move ahead with the planned health care cuts. It became increasingly clear that the cuts were not only driven by a desire to eliminate provincial debt but were also perhaps seen as an opportunity for private health care providers to have a greater role in the Alberta market (UNA 2017, p. 38).

In 1995, the Klein government cut health care again by $217 million, resulting in increased privatization in the form of contracting, layoffs of health care workers, and more deskilling between the various health care workers who were still employed (UNA 2017, p. 43). Klein also made the decision to sell off public health infrastructure such as the Holy Cross Hospital in Calgary. Alberta Health Services now leases space in that building to provide public health services. Eventually, in the

same year, the federal Minister of Health financially penalized Alberta for going against the Canada Health Act for the expansion of private health care facilities in the province and for the fees these private facilities were charging Albertans (Stillborn 1997; UNA 2017, p. 43). The federal government withheld $422,000 per month in federal transfer payments because the Alberta government refused to ban private clinics from charging facility fees to patients from November 1995 to June 1996; a total of $5,064,000 was withheld in total (Stillborn 1997; UNA 2017, p. 51). By July 1996, the province took over responsibility for paying the facility fees charged by private clinics, so Alberta was once again compliant with the federal regulations. According to UNA nurses, the quality of care also began to deteriorate during this time. Nurses reported that people in long term care facilities began to be rationed to four diapers per day; seniors in one hospital were only allowed to receive medication costing $1.78 per day; and some patients in another hospital began to be fed through tubes rather than handfed to save staff time (UNA 2017, p. 44). UNA nurses also reported an increase in their own workplace injuries (UNA 2017, p. 44). As key members of the front-line staff dealing with these austerity measures, UNA made a point of documenting and trying to draw attention to the patient and staff concerns, which is a clear example of their patient advocacy efforts in the face of government cuts.

By 1999, the government at the time was pushing for Bill 37, which would allow the Alberta Minister of Health and Wellness to approve private, for-profit hospitals. This bill was stalled in the previous year because of growing resistance from the public. In response, the government appointed a Blue-Ribbon Panel to review the legislation (Foster 2012, p. 220; UNA 2017, p. 92). The panel came back with some issues, but overall it supported the legislation that would lead to a two-tiered health care system in Alberta. Later in the same year, with the support of the Blue-Ribbon panel, Premier Klein promised to introduce a bill that would allow private health care clinics in Alberta (UNA 2017, p. 94). With his majority power, Klein was able to pass Bill 11 – which mimicked Bill

37, the Health Care Protection Act - which permitted regional health authorities to purchase health services from private providers (Canadian Museum of History 2010b; Foster 2012, p. 220).

With all of these cuts and attempts to further privatize health care in Alberta, many registered nurses in the province were laid off during the 1990s. As a result, some health care facilities began to train other groups of workers to complete tasks that were normally assigned to nurses. For example, Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) began to take on tasks previously done by RNs, while some maintenance workers were trained to give bed baths – a task that was previously completed by LPNs (UNA 2017, p. 32). By UNA's own estimates, close to 3,000 full-time equivalent RN positions were lost in this round of cuts in total (UNA 2017, p. 39).

The provincial government even formed a Workforce Rebalancing Committee to make recommendations on the licensing and registration of Alberta's health care workers (UNA 2017, p. 39). The recommendations of the Workforce Rebalancing Committee included de-licensing most health care workers and removing scope of practice categories for different workers (UNA 2017, p. 39). These recommendations would open up more opportunities to have various health care workers assigned to different tasks with the intention of removing the highest paid workers from the system entirely.

During the 1990s, Klein also oversaw the creation of 17 new Regional Health Authorities that were charged with managing health care services in different geographical locations (Church & Smith 2008; UNA 2017, p. 38). These new Regional Health Authorities fully replaced the Board of Trustees in 1995 (Church & Smith 2008; UNA 2017, p. 38). The development of the new Regional Health Authorities also meant that each Health Authority was responsible for collective bargaining in their own geographical district. Bill 41, the *Government Reorganization Act*, was also passed during this time and included a mechanism to privatize government services (UNA 2017, p. 39). This was

one of the many attempts by the provincial Progressive Conservative government to introduce more private health care to Alberta.

The beginning of the 2000s was no different with further cuts to health care and more attempts at privatization. In 2002, many of the Regional Health Authorities in Alberta received funding cuts from the provincial government. In 2005, Ralph Klein attempted again to introduce more private health care to Alberta with his 'Third Way' Campaign (Foster 2012). The government hired AON, one of the largest insurance corporations in the world, to help plan the introduction of a 'third way' of delivering health care (UNA 2017, p. 173). This 'third way' was supposedly different from how health care was currently delivered in Canada and also different to what the United States health care system was – it was a 'third way'. This plan would essentially create a private, for-profit health care system alongside the public system and would allow doctors to work for both systems (UNA 2017, p. 179). With the 'third way', Albertans would be able to buy extra health insurance to cover privately-offered surgeries (Gregoire 2006). Most likely because of the resistance and protests from groups such as UNA, in April of 2005 the Alberta Health and Wellness Minister, Iris Evans, announced the government was dropping plans to introduce the 'third way' (UNA 2017, p. 180). Later in 2005, Ralph Klein announced his resignation.

In 2008, the Health and Wellness Minister Ron Liepert announced he was going to abolish the Health Regions and appoint one provincial health board in their place, Alberta Health Services (AHS), once again restructuring health care in Alberta (UNA 2017, p. 189; Collier 2010). Later in the year, the government announced the appointments for the new provincial health board, which included a former drug company representative living in the United States and a range of private business owners (UNA 2017, p. 189).

In 2015 the Alberta New Democratic Party (NDP) was elected with a majority government. This was the first time since 1971 that Albertans had not elected the Alberta Progressive

Conservatives (PC). The Alberta NDP made many changes in health care in Alberta including funding infrastructure and capital projects across the province and bringing more health care services under government control which had previously been contracted out by the PC government.

Despite a tough economic climate, UNA was also able to make gains under the provincial NDP. UNA members enrolled in the Local Authorities Pensions Plan (LAPP) and saw legislative change to ensure a future government could not change their pension investments. The 2018 main provincial collective bargaining agreement for UNA saw members receive no wage increases for the first two years and a provision to renegotiate wages in the third year.

In 2019 a new conservative party, the United Conservative Party led by Jason Kenney, a previous federal minister under Stephen Harper's Conservative Party, formed government. Within the first year of taking office this party reversed the governance changes for the LAPP and even delayed a wage negotiation for UNA's main collective bargaining agreement.

United Nurses of Alberta

Despite the progress that Premier Klein made with his agenda to cut public health care, UNA played a public role in challenging the cuts of the 1990s which helped build on their reputation as an already militant union. UNA was active not only on the political front through meetings and communications with both provincial and federal politicians, but also through their own advertising campaign to inform the public and their efforts to build a coalition with various allies (UNA 2017, pp. 34-35). In 1995, UNA also used its communication efforts to raise the profile of health care in Alberta, as well as patients' needs and nursing in general (UNA 2017, p. 47).

Additionally, in the 1990s, UNA participated in a campaign focused on international trade agreements. UNA was involved in lobby campaigns focused on the North American Free Trade

Agreement (NAFTA) and its impact on health care (UNA 2017, p. 57). In the late 1990s they were also active in the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), the proposed international investment agreement negotiated through the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (UNA 2017, p. 90). UNA fought against provisions in the MAI that would open Canada's health care system up to for-profit companies (UNA 2017, p. 97). Ultimately the MAI was defeated in 1998.

Focused on their internal organization, in 1997 UNA completed negotiations to amalgamate with the Staff Nurses Association (SNAA). In September of 1997, both organizations voted overwhelmingly to amalgamate (UNA 2017, p. 63). This meant there was now one union in Alberta for unionized nurses. In 1998, UNA voted to join the National Federation of Nurses' Unions and, through that, to also join the Canadian Labour Congress (UNA 2017, p. 92). This vote received strong support from the members present at the Annual General Meeting.

In 1999, UNA negotiations ended with nurses in Alberta receiving the highest wage increases in Canada (UNA 2017, p. 99). Prior to that, they launched a media campaign focused on communicating their bargaining demands to the public. UNA ran ads in key newspapers that focused on nursing shortages (UNA 2017, p. 100). This UNA campaign countered the employer advertisements that focused on nurses' demands for money (UNA 2017, p. 100). UNA also provided a 1-800 number operated 24-hours a day for members to call if they needed up-to-date information on collective bargaining – this was in addition to their other communications through the UNA Newsletter, UNA Stat, and UNANet as well as Local meetings (UNA 2017, p. 100). UNA also had 360 users access UNANet this year and started to provide telephone help for new users to access the software, as more users were using their own computers to access the network (UNA 2017, p. 101).

UNA also sent financial support to nurses in Newfoundland in 1999 during their strike and to nurses in Saskatchewan who had defied a government and court order to end a strike (UNA 2017, p. 108). Later that year, UNA also financially supported nurses in Quebec with donations and an interest-free loan of $450,000 to the union, as nurses in Quebec were also on an illegal strike (UNA 2017, p. 111 and 114). UNA also began a Canada-wide campaign for the Quebec nurses called 'For All of Us' to raise more funds (UNA 2017, p. 114).

UNA members were clear that they wanted to avoid the public advertisement battle during negotiations that happened in 1999 (UNA 2017, p. 124). Therefore, in 2000, UNA and the employers agreed to a communications protocol that prevented public/media discussion of negotiating proposals and progress to avoid bargaining in public (UNA 2017, p. 124). This agreement would not prevent UNA from using local media channels to communicate to the general public around collective bargaining or other important issues affecting nurses and Alberta's health care system.

In 2001, at the Annual General Meeting, UNA members elected to have a full membership vote before joining the Alberta Federation of Labour and the district Labour Councils (UNA 2017, p. 143). The vote took place in 2002 and ended with UNA joining both the Alberta Federation of Labour and the district Labour Councils (UNA 2017, p. 159). Now UNA was officially connected with the Canadian labour movement nationally, provincially, and locally.

The next year, many of the Regional Health Authorities in Alberta received funding cuts from the provincial government. In response, UNA placed a series of newspaper advertisements in the Chinook Health Region in Southern Alberta alerting citizens to what the funding cuts would mean in terms of reduced services (UNA 2017, p. 148). In other regions, the Local UNAs spoke at rallies and through the local media (UNA 2017, p. 148). In preparation for the 2002 round of collective bargaining, UNA began a promotional campaign (UNA 2017, p. 155). The campaign

included advertisements on television, radio, and buses targeting the public. The messages were meant to remind people of the importance of nurses, emphasizing that nurses help ensure safe, quality health care (UNA 2017, p. 155). Some of the messaging also encouraged people to participate in the Romanow Commission's public hearings that were currently taking place (UNA 2017, p. 155).

During the 2004 negotiations with the Continuing Care Employers Bargaining Association, an association of fifteen long-term care facilities in Alberta, the association claimed it could not agree to the wage increases that other nurses in Alberta were receiving (UNA 2017, p. 169). UNA launched a billboard campaign outlining how the employers in this association had planned to eliminate registered nurses from their facilities (UNA 2017, p. 169). After the intervention of a mediator in the collective bargaining, the employer group accepted the terms that other nurses in the province were already enjoying (UNA 2017, p. 169).

UNA used telephone broadcasts to relay information to UNA members for the first time in 2004 (UNA 2017, p. 169). The messages were from Heather Smith, the UNA President, and outlined details about the new collective bargaining agreement (UNA 2017, p. 169).

Overall, UNA has developed a reputation as a strong union that is willing and able to take a variety of approaches – both legal and illegal – in the face of concessions and government cuts. Their actions in the past demonstrate the willingness of their members to engage in these activities as well. Over the years, UNA has also joined together with a variety of partners to fight against provincial and federal legislation, to ensure that nurses are heard during trade deals, and to make connections with other labour and social groups in Canada. UNA has also provided strong financial support for other nurses in Canada as they encounter different industrial disputes. In terms of communication, UNA is committed to multiple platforms to inform their members and the public

about UNA. These platforms include more traditional ones like news adverts and billboards, but also new technology as I discuss below.

Nurses and Unions Framing

Generally, nurses and their unions have challenged the assumptions of what is a proper professional nurse and a proper female worker and framed their industrial actions as necessary for protecting patients and the health care system. This framing still builds on the self-sacrificing characteristics of nursing and tends to allocate blame to hospital management and administration – sometimes even the government – and allows nurses to connect their working conditions to the health outcomes of patients. This framing is fragile in the sense that it needs to be maintained and precludes having important discussions about health care workers as workers. It is relatively easy to suggest that nurses on strike are uncaring and greedy as a way to undermine the union's own framing. When nurses are framed as unionized militants who are greedy, they can end up being punished by the public through lack of support or pressure to return to work not just for being workers on strike, but also for being uncaring women and uncaring nurses.

We see examples of this in prior research. Focusing on an industrial action by mental health nurses in New Zealand, Farrow and O'Brien (2005) found that print media was a main source of information for the public about the industrial activity and showcased the struggle around the framing of nurses' strikes. The media depictions of nurses as greedy, lazy, and militant offered the public a frame within which to see the nursing profession. Such a frame allowed the public to take a moral position on the industrial unrest. It is notable that no such performative framing was offered around health board management. This contrast suggests that the media may work to a politicized agenda when reporting events (Farrow & O'Brien 2005, p. 192). Farrow and O'Brien (2005, p. 187)

also found that professional nursing associations and unions in the New Zealand context they studied did not participate in the media to provide alternative understandings of nurses or the profession. They concluded that these organizations must participate with the media during industrial action. UNA offers a striking contrast to the findings of Farrow and O'Brien (2005) with their active media participation during several rounds of collective bargaining and government cuts to health care in Alberta.

Of further relevance, Henttoen et al. (2013) also found that the media representations of nurses and unions during health care industrial activity were an important site for collective sense making. Examining media during a strike in Finland, the authors argued:

> …that the debate was essentially a negotiation of the nurses' individual and societal rights and responsibilities, and that this negotiation drew on the competing and contested discourse of professionalization, caring, labour markets and new public management. Furthermore, we argue that the nurses' labour disputes, and the associated discursive struggle, both sustained and reproduced the traditional gendered meanings related to the nursing profession, as well as providing a context for unsettling, at least for a moment, the normative gender order of the Finnish society. (Henttoen et al. 2013, p. 57)

Henttoen et al.'s (2013) analysis found several different themes that media sources highlighted when it came to this health care industrial dispute. The main themes include: the right to take industrial action which was used as either a reason nurses should or should not be allowed these rights, juxtaposed with the responsibilities of caring for patients; the right to fair pay, which drew distinctions between the education nurses have compared to other health care workers; the right to fair working conditions, which linked the working conditions of nurses to the overall health care

system; and, finally, responsibility for patient care, which was used both for and against nurses involved in industrial actions.

Even when caring was used in the media it was often used to discredit nurses' industrial actions because nursing became synonymous with caring, which was considered something natural to nurses and women, distinct from paid employment, and oppositional to withdrawing one's labour. The other way responsibility for patient care was used to defend nurses' actions was by painting them as heroes for their patients who stood up against a callous administration mainly concerned with finances. Lastly, a responsibility for solidarity theme came up, whereby some texts positioned nurses as selfish people out only for themselves, whereas others lamented that other female health care workers were being left behind. This last theme also picks up on efforts from various organizations to differentiate nurses from other health care providers as a profession with a distinct education, which highlights certain skills over others and ends up devaluating care work as a non-learned skill (Henttoen et al. 2013). In fact, nurses were sometimes criticized for not helping all public sector workers to make industrial relations gains, such as police and firefighters – groups that are traditionally male dominated.

The research of Henttoen et al. (2013) and Farrow and O'Brien (2005) is important in understanding the struggles that nurses still undergo when it comes to how the public perceptions of nursing as a profession, nurses as workers, and unions in health care. Nevertheless, there is evidence that industrial activities by unions in health care have overall improved conditions for both the workers and patients.

Even if industrial relations activities help improve working conditions for nurses and health outcomes for patients, industrial action has historically been shown to cause personal issues for individual nurses when they try to reconcile these activities with their profession (Bessant 1992; Hibbered 1992; McGauran cited in Brown et al. 2006). Individual nurses often frame strikes or other

work actions around improving conditions for patients as opposed to fighting for pay increases for themselves (Jennings & Western 1997; Strachan 1997; Brown et al. 2006). Furthermore, Brown et al. (2006) demonstrate how nurses' understanding of industrial actions change with their experience in such actions before, during, and afterwards. For example, Brown et al. (2006) found that before an Irish nurses' strike, some nurses viewed the strike as responding to the government's claims that the profession was weak and lesser educated. In the beginning of the strike, nurses saw the action as making history through an expression of solidarity. As the strike continued, many nurses framed strike activity as similar to a job. The final framing of the strike for nurses was less positive and blamed the activity on industrial relations laws that forced nurses into certain allowable actions like strikes, which some nurses found incongruent with being a nurse. Similar to how nurses feel a disconnection between their education and their workplace in terms of expectations and the scope of their work, nurses are still trained to think of themselves as 'nurses' before 'workers' and can have difficulty reconciling their self-image with that of a striking worker.

Based on their ethnographic study, Brown et al. (2006) consider strategies that help nurses reconcile their self-image of a nurse with that of a striking worker. The first suggestion is to reaffirm that both roles value caring. The second strategy is to link industrial action with patient advocacy. The third strategy is to see the strike as a form of professional development, thus redefining what it means to be a professional nurse. To some extent, nursing unions have been successful with these strategies, as they realize nurses are more open to unionization when they feel unions are an avenue to address quality of patient care (Clark & Clark 2006). Nursing unions have focused on the outcomes for patients by linking them to working conditions for nurses and trying to address the issues in collective bargaining agreements, and through legislation and regulations such as those pertaining to patient to nurse ratios (Clark & Clark 2006).

Although the process of professionalization and unionization for nurses in Canada has faced many challenges, most nurses in Canada can identify with being a nurse who is part of both a professional organization and a union. Nurses still face the expectations of being a good nurse but also expectations of being a good woman tied into their professionalization (Kealey 2008, p. 9). According to Adams and Nelson (2009), nurses to this day still act in ways that make their work invisible and require them to internalize their self-sacrifice. Many of the traits of a good nurse and a good woman overlap – such as altruism, self-sacrifice, and caring. These expectations have often forced nurses and their unions to become creative when reconciling the opposing expectations and at times pushing the boundaries of industrial actions. Briskin (2007) notes that female workers in many different occupations have expanded the scope of industrial activities beyond traditional boycotts and strikes and in some cases have still been extremely militant and made great gains for female workers.

UNA and Communications

Aside from the previously mentioned campaigns, UNA was an early adopter of developing technology to communicate to its members and the public. In the early 1990s, it began to explore the potential of the world wide web and networked computing. For example, UNA, created its own computer network for both their main UNA Provincial Office in Edmonton and their Southern Alberta Regional Office in Calgary in the early 1990s (UNA 2017, p. 29). UNA even ensured that Executive Board Members and 16 Locals with the majority of members had access to this network by supplying them with computers and training (UNA 2017, p. 29). This network was later titled UNANet at the 1992 AGM (UNA 2017, p. 37). In 1995, UNA claims it was the first nurses' union on the internet with their own website (UNA 2017, p. 50). During the same year, UNA also continued to keep members educated with the NewsBulletins, UNA Stat, and Frontline, as well as

fact sheets based on important issues at the time that they were distributed to all Locals (UNA 2017, p. 47). The NewsBulletins were the major vehicle for communication and highlighted issues facing health care in Canada, while UNA Stat was a biweekly publication focused on UNA activities and nursing issues in Alberta. Frontline was a publication dedicated to updates on collective bargaining rounds sent to each Local. By 1996, all UNA Locals were on the UNANet system (UNA 2017, p. 61). The Locals could access collective agreements and other UNA documents (UNA 2017, p. 61). In 1997, UNA expanded its communications efforts by providing email access to all network users (UNA 2017, p. 76).

With the rise of new forms of media, UNA branched out in 2000 to produce their own content for the public with a 10-minute video called 'What Democracy Looks Like' that captured protests against Bill 11 (UNA 2017, p. 118). Bill 11 would have allowed private for-profit hospitals in Alberta (UNA 2017, p. 122). In 2001, UNA ran newspaper and radio advertisements reminding Albertans about Bill 11 during the provincial election, and about the potential consequences of private health care for Albertan families (UNA 2017, p. 141). This same year, UNA participated in Nursing Week with a series of newspaper ads that featured UNA members and the slogan, 'We Care: for your family's health and health care' (UNA 2017, p. 118).

During this time period is when different social media platforms were created, most notably for this research is Facebook which was started in 2004, YouTube which was started in 2005, and Twitter which was started in 2006. By 2011, UNA had one of the largest Facebook presences of any Alberta-based union (UNA 2017, p. 198). UNA used Facebook to provide another online platform, in addition to UNANet, that connected nurses to each other as well as to UNA. UNA still uses the platform to give updates about health care and nursing in Alberta (UNA 2017, p. 198).

In 2014, UNA changed their website to include an introduction to the union (UNA 2017, p. 217). This introduction was part of UNA's new member orientation and included information about

how the union helps its members (UNA 2017, p. 217). This section also mentioned UNA's dedication to fairness in the workplace, its work on professional advocacy, and the various benefits of being a union member, and included an online union membership form (UNA 2017, p. 217). The UNA website was again updated in 2017.

UNA ran a month-long campaign for National Nursing Week in 2016 to celebrate the work of RNs (UNA 2017, p. 227). The campaign included billboards, digital billboards, transit shelter posters, and a website YourRN.ca (UNA 2017, p. 227). The campaign targeted the public, stressing the importance of RNs to health care in Canada and celebrated RN contributions (UNA 2017, p. 228). During the actual Nursing Week, UNA also ran radio messages with Heather Smith, the President of UNA, stating that UNA members are 'on your side and at your side' providing expert professional care (UNA 2017, p. 228).

Overall, UNA has a strong communications record and a history of forward thinking when it comes to using new communications technology to reach out to UNA members. From the development and maintenance of their own internal network for nurses to the use of publicly available communication avenues, UNA maintains a range of communications to ensure members are kept up-to-date. UNA also uses communication in attempts to reach the general public to defend both nurses and health care in Alberta and Canada. For these reasons, UNA is an especially interesting organization in which to study questions of union communication and union relevance.

Conclusion

The development of nursing as a profession, and the tensions between this profession and unionization, have been ongoing for decades. Nursing as a profession has been deeply entangled with attributes that also define good women, namely being able to provide selfless care to others. In contrast, unionization has often been presented as antithetical to nursing, with unionization being

presented as self-serving for the worker. During industrial relations activities, it is therefore important for unions to attempt to frame and organize any industrial action in ways that make sense for nurses and for the relationships that they have with their patients as workers and caregivers. This helps them keep their motivation up and also helps the public understand the role of industrial relations in the health care system.

Despite the tension between nursing and unionization, UNA has consistently shown a dedication to a good communication infrastructure and practices, not only with their own members, but also with the general public. This dedication makes UNA an excellent case study to examine the impact of these various forms of communication on their own members. Not only have they shown a willingness to embrace new technologies as they have become available (e.g. internet, social media), they have also shown a willingness to challenge traditional ideas about the role of nurses in the health care system, again making them an ideal organization for study.

Chapter 4: Method

> I think nurses in the union are the ones that portray the image to the public of why nursing is an important profession and why people trust nurses because they kind of take a - I feel like they take that image where people believe that nursing was a calling or some sort of, kind of angelic gift from the heavens - and they render it a lot more accessible and make us look more capable and more professionally trained and intellectually capable people. (UNA Member, Interview 19)

Introduction

The primary goal of this study is to provide an understanding of the role of union communications as it relates to union relevance and the context of union renewal, and to fill the gap that exists in the current literature. As I discuss in Chapter One, there has been relatively limited research on this issue. Likely as a consequence of this, and as I elaborate on below, we do not yet have well-established indicators of union relevance or evaluation methods for union communications. Given this, I use a case study approach within my research, drawing on a multiple data sources, including: a wide range of communications documents from UNA as well as a rich set of twenty-three (23) semi-structured interviews. I also draw from previous research that has used a feminist political economy and collective frame approach. In this chapter I discuss my experience of conducting this research and the methods I have used for this study, organizing the material in the following five sections: research design, research selection site, data collection, data analysis, and a concluding summary. As will be demonstrated, I gathered and analyzed over 3,500 data points from the vast number of communication strategies UNA uses including their social media

communication, their website, and their newsletter in addition to interviewing 23 UNA staff and members. Overall this rich data provides a comprehensive and emphatic case study of UNA's communication efforts.

Research Design

Case Study Method

For this study, I employ a case study method, which allows me to build on previous union renewal research (Ryan 2004; Kumar & Schenk 2006; O'Neill 2007; Sullivan 2010; Foster & Barnetson 2011; Fowler & Hagar 2013; Ott & Milkman 2014). The case study method focuses research in a specific 'case' or set of 'cases' within a bounded system and generally asks questions related to why and how (Stake 1995; Merriam 1998; Yin 2014). Case studies typically focus on contemporary events and processes, using a variety of data collection techniques including direct observation and interviews (Yin 2014). In fact, one of the distinct strengths of the case study method is its ability to incorporate a wide variety of data or evidence (Baxter & Jack 2008; Yin 2014, p. 12) as has been done in previous research focused on unions and providing multiple viewpoints from different data sources (Bacon 1999; Holgate 2009; Gagnont & Beaudry 2014). Indeed, Gagnont and Beaudry (2014) demonstrate the value of a case study approach when working with a large amount of data and seeking an iterative analysis process of working through interviews and documents (p. 32). Overall, a case study approach is a very appropriate research design for this study because of the kinds of question the study addresses, the contemporary nature of the phenomenon being studied, the demand for in-depth details, the use of multiple data sources, and the context of the research.

For this research, the union, UNA, serves as the unit of analysis for the case study, as an organization with already established boundaries that help define the case – including legal and

geographical boundaries dictated by labour law. In addition, I have chosen to set temporal boundaries of 5 years beginning January 1, 2010 to December 31, 2015 to make the document and communication collection manageable while still being able to investigate the evidence according to the research questions.

Qualitative Approach

Because the goal of this research is to answer basic questions of what, when, how, and why of union communications, this research is also well-suited to a qualitative approach that encourages the analysis of nuances and variations in meaning while providing rich detail and descriptions (Rubin & Rubin 2012). This research closely follows the four defining features of a qualitative case study as developed by Stake (1995), which are that the research is: holistic, empirical, interpretive, and emphatic. In this research, I offer a holistic account, connecting my case study to the wider context including the political, economic, social, and technological context in which UNA is communicating to their members. The case study has a very strong empirical basis as I rely on direct observation of UNA's communications and in-depth interviewing about the various ways people interact with these communications. This qualitative case study is also interpretive and emphatic as I work with interview participants to understand the production and reception of UNA communications, while also rigorously reviewing the actual communications materials across different platforms. My research also aligns with Merriam's (1998) definition of a qualitative case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon" (p. xiii) given the temporal and geographic bounds that incorporate a significant amount of data and the iterative analytic process used in this study, as I will discuss below.

Research Site Selection

United Nurses of Alberta (UNA)

The Canadian labour landscape is divided into several jurisdictions by federal and provincial laws, and regulations governing health care professions. I selected UNA for this case study because it is relatively unique. As Rubin and Rubin (2012) argue, there is great value in unique case studies. In the case of UNA, it is located in one of the more anti-union provinces in Canada, and thus represents an extreme case study, therefore providing lessons to places that do not face as hostile an environment. Moreover, as noted in Chapter Three, UNA has a strong history of innovating in the use of communication technology and being a strong advocate for nurses and public health care, adding to its unique nature. At the same time, the case of UNA can provide a potentially useful comparison case to other research on nurses' unions in Canada. It also has value for potential generalization of the theoretical propositions used to analyze the communications and interview data (as argued by Yin 2014). The results from this case study are not necessarily ideal for superficial generalizations across the whole Canadian labour movement, rather, the uniqueness of the case presents a strong comparison to other potential case studies, as has been the case in previous studies (Bacon 1999; Gomm et al. 2000; Yin 2014).

Whereas other union renewal research has focused on single campaigns or industrial disputes or organizing campaigns, I have decided to focus this research on the every-day activities of the union. This is a valuable contribution, filling a notable gap in our understanding of union communications. As is evident from my discussions in Chapter Two, there is already a very well-established body of work that focuses on specific campaigns and one area that is lacking information concerns the everyday activities of union outside of major campaigns.

Data Collection

Documents

I began this research in 2015 by collecting basic and key information about UNA and its history. I then moved on to collect UNA's communication data, starting first with the newsletters (e.g. NewBulletin) which were readily available on the UNA website, then the Facebook data, followed by the Twitter data, UNA videos from YouTube, and finally the website analysis as is discussed in more detail below. My approach to the document analysis involved beginning with the document that allowed me to have a firm grasp of UNA as an organization, and the variety of communication practices they used. Several of the documents (e.g. website material, United Nurses of Alberta 2017 & United Nurses of Alberta 2018) were also used in the previous chapter which reviewed UNA's history within the Alberta and Canadian context.

The NewsBulletin data were collected from PDF copies of the newsletter readily available on the UNA website from 2010 to 2015, resulting in 28 newsletters in total and 552 pages of text. The UNA Facebook data were collected from 2010 to 2015 using the Facebook Analytics program to scrape all posts to the UNA Facebook page, along with the number of comments, likes, and shares as these were the main forms Facebook users used to interact. A total of 2,221 Facebook posts were collected. The UNA Twitter data were collected by scraping the UNA tweets and retweets, a total of 1,590 data points. UNA's YouTube presence starts on December 4, 2009 and includes 46 videos from 2010 to 2015, or approximately 4 and a half hours of video. The YouTube data were gathered by watching the video clips on the YouTube platform and writing summaries of the video that include the material discussed. The UNA website data were collected using screenshots of the website after a 2017 redesign.

As discussed below, each subgrouping of data was analyzed separately using a coding system I developed from the relevant literature. I first coded the newsletters, then the Facebook data, followed by the Twitter data, the YouTube data and last the website material. After coding each subset of data, I reviewed the previously reviewed data to see if any new codes developed were also applicable.

Interviews

After finishing the document analysis, I moved on to the semi-structured interviews and began by interviewing UNA staff and elected officials to further understand the communications methods and strategies. In this first round of interviews, I spoke with seven (7) individuals. For the second stage of interviews, I interviewed highly involved UNA members who simultaneously receive communications from central UNA and produce some of their own communications for UNA members. This involved six (6) individuals. Lastly, I interviewed UNA members whom are largely receivers of UNA communications and not producers. This group comprised 10 individuals (further details are provided below).

The aim of each of these interviews differed depending on the participant, and their background, role, and knowledge with respect to UNA. The first group of participants were direct employees of UNA and the elected UNA Provincial Executive Officers. This group was selected for their knowledge of UNA's structure, their employment in UNA, and their participation in UNA communications activities. The second group of participants were people heavily involved with UNA as District Representatives and executives of UNA Locals. This second group was selected for their unique role as intermediaries between the UNA head office and UNA members. The third group consisted of UNA members who had not held any elected position within UNA and were selected for their perspectives as recipients of UNA communications and their general membership

in the union. Interviewing this diverse group allows me to examine and learn more about both the production and consumption of communications within the union.

The same general interview protocol was used for all three groups, serving as a common base, with additional questions developed for the central UNA staff and those heavily involved in the union. The interview questions were broadly organized around the main research questions for this project: what are the central activities and unionism practices by UNA, what and how does UNA communicate, and how are those communications understood by members. The specific interview questions are included in Appendix 1 and were designed to allow participants to have the chance to reflect on union practices and communications. The protocols were further refined after each interview was completed, tape recorded, and then transcribed. I sent transcripts to the participant if they requested either the audio or document file. Two participants requested this and neither sent feedback.

Participants in the first two groups were initially contacted via social media or email using publicly available contact information from the UNA website or Facebook pages. Participants in the third group were contacted through word of mouth using snowball sampling. In total there were 23 participants, seven from the UNA staff and elected official group, six from the intermediary group, and 10 from the group with limited UNA involvement completed from 2017 to 2019.

Data Analysis

Documents

Using the computer software, Dedoose, I develop several consistent themes through an iterative analysis process that included multiple reviews of the material and developing concepts and

themes by drawing from previous relevant literature (Strauss 1987; Rubin & Rubin 2012). The process in developing codes is outlined below.

The first collection of documents analyzed were the UNA NewsBulletin, their quarterly newsletter, sent to the homes of UNA members and others who have signed up for the distribution. Using the 2010-2015 timeframe 28 newsletter issues were examined in total.

Using qualitative content analysis to examine these materials, I created a series of codes through an iterative process to ensure the capture of all material relevant to my research questions. For example, a 'parent code' of nurses' jobs was created with 'child codes' related to the work nurses do and attributes of nurses in their nursing role such as caring, profession, and skill. Mentions of industrial relation activities were also coded under a parent code with child codes that included strikes, lockouts, worker discipline, and occupational health and safety (OHS). To help develop these codes I relied on nursing and union communications literature. The original theoretical frameworks of feminist political economy and collective action framing served as sensitizing tools.

I then moved on to the UNA Facebook posts from 2010 to 2015 and used the same set of codes that was developed during the examination of the newsletter. The codes were expanded and refined as new material was analyzed. After a first run through of the Facebook data was complete all of the datum was re-coded using the refined and expanded code set, including both the Facebook and the newsletter data. This process was repeated with the Twitter data from 2010-2015 with all the previous Facebook and newsletter data re-coded after once again refining and expanding the code set in light of the Twitter data. The social media data were then analyzed for posts and tweets that were most interacted with by other social media users, such as the posts that had the most 'likes', 'shares', or comments from other social media users. The process was once again repeated with the YouTube summaries that were created during the collection phase of the research project. In total,

four hours 32 minutes and 23 seconds of YouTube video was summarized for research analysis from 46 distinct videos posted on the UNA YouTube account from 2010 to 2015.

Data were also collected from the re-designed UNA website on February 8th of 2018. These data were collected and coded according to Ward and Lusoli's 2003 study of union websites. Using the four areas highlighted by Ward and Lusoli (2003)—information, participation and campaigning, service provisions, and networking— the website was also reviewed according to the code set developed with the newsletter and social media data.

Interviews

Building from the analysis of the communications materials, interviews began in 2017 and were completed by spring of 2019. Almost all interviews were done in person; one was done over the telephone. I transcribed all of the interviews myself, and then analysed the transcripts using the computer software Dedoose. Similar to the document analysis, I developed codes for themes through an iterative process that included multiple reviews of the material, insights drawn from previous relevant literature (Strauss 1987; Rubin & Rubin 2012), as well as the codes developed from the prior analysis of the communications materials and the overall research questions.

Interviews were also analyzed in groupings beginning with the seven interviews done with UNA staff, followed by six interviews done with UNA leaders and those heavily involved in the organization, and then the 10 interviews done with UNA members who are not involved with the organization.

Participants in the staff interviews had a plethora of experience. Four of these participants had previous experience as nurses in Alberta and some also had experience nursing in other provinces. Many of the participants have been involved with their unions for decades, starting in the

1970s, and had participated as unit representatives, on Local executives, negotiating committees, and district representatives before occupying their current roles.

Participants in the heavily involved group had been involved with UNA from five to 25 years at the time of the interviews. This group was also quite diverse with some people having over 40 years of experience as a registered nurse and others having only six years of experience. This interview group also had a wide range of experience working as RNs in a variety of settings including hospitals in large cities, rural hospitals, long-term care, community nursing, health centers, and Canada Blood Services. These UNA members also had an array of experiences from being Local Presidents and Vice-Presidents to District Representatives. The Locals these participants were from also ranged from a dozen to over 3,000 UNA members.

UNA member participants had been registered nurses for 1.5 to 10 years. These RNs had worked in large and small hospitals in Alberta, homecare, and community nursing. The participants in this group had also worked in the following cities: Calgary, Edmonton, Fort McMurray, Lethbridge, and Red Deer. These participants had attended the following nursing schools: University of Alberta, University of Calgary, MacEwan University, University of Lethbridge, Mount Royal College, and Athabasca University. Two of the participants completed their nursing degrees outside of Alberta. Overall the participants in this group were quite diverse in terms of how long they had been nurses, their geographic location, and their nursing experiences.

Bringing it all Together

By starting with an analysis of the wide range of UNA communications materials, and then moving on to the semi-structured interviews with the three key groups, I was able to build from and re-evaluate my understanding of UNA's structure and communications efforts through the various iterations of analysis, as I acquired new information and insights at each stage. The document

analysis also better prepared me for the interviews and let me effectively use my interview time to confirm and clarify information. As Rubin and Rubin (2012, p. 27) observe, document analysis is always incomplete in some way, and works best when combined with interviews. The combination of data sources helps to provides different views with which to explore UNA's union communications (Baxter & Jack 2008; Fowler & Hagar 2013), and the multiple data sources allow me to draw connections between individual experiences and structural factors (Reinharz & Davidman 1992, p. 204). All of these are important strengths of the empirical study, relative to the key questions the dissertation takes up.

In order to bring together the very large and rich body of the information I had collected, I once again repeated a review of all of the communications materials and interviews materials with an eye for how the overall themes developed during coding were framed and used by UNA staff and leaders, and how these frames were understood by UNA members. Drawing from Ryan (2004), the framing analysis notes who the major players are defined as, who is responsible and holds power in the situation, and the presentation of possible solutions. This framing was contextualized within the history of Alberta as a province with a unique economic and social context as well as the history of UNA as a union.

Conclusion

While the case study approach is both time and labour intensive, it proved to offer a very good foundation to study the contemporary phenomenon of social media communications in relation to union renewal and relevance. In particular, the case study approach helped me in incorporating a variety of different data, including semi-structured interviews and secondary document analysis comprised of social media communications, videos, and a website. Overall this study included over 3,500 data points inclusive of all the interviews, Facebook posts, Tweets on

Twitter, videos on YouTube, and the UNA website. Coding was done using an iterative process that recognized the similarities and differences between the variety of data, was informed by relevant literature reviewed in previous chapters, and was open to ongoing refinement as new data were added and analyzed. These codes were then pulled together to analyze the framing done through UNA's communication over the study period.

Chapter 5: Results – The Work of the Union

> Well, honestly, I haven't interacted personally a lot with UNA. But I think to a large degree, I am really thankful for the things that they do to fight with policy making to ensure that we're getting fair treatment. (UNA Member, Interview 20)

Introduction

In this chapter, I provide an overview of UNA, its general structure and organization as well as the services UNA provides to its members and a summary of the different platforms and publications UNA uses to communicate with its members and the public. This information builds from the previous historic summary of UNA's activities provided in Chapter Three and examines the question of UNA's unionism and activities. I then provide an overview of the coded themes from the various communications data from UNA - namely Facebook posts, Twitter tweets, YouTube videos, the UNA newsletter, and the UNA website. I have grouped the codes into parent codes that explore the connections UNA has with various individuals, organizations and the government, industrial relations that UNA covers in their communications, how nurses and their jobs are presented, how health care is covered in UNA communications, and finally I explore the idea of union relevance (see Appendix 2 for communication code counts). The review of UNA communications material helps answer the question of what exactly UNA communicates and the different venues the organization uses to communicate. Lastly, in this section I cover each of the online communication platforms and some of their unique attributes such as the ability to 'like', 'retweet', and 'share' material. These different functions highlight UNA member's ability to interact with UNA on their various communication platforms. The analysis of UNA's communication materials, structure, and activities demonstrates the organization's commitment to keeping their

members engaged and involved in a number of ways. Of key importance, this chapter helps see how UNA attempts to frame its relevance for members especially compared to the important work that nurses do for their patients.

Overview of Union

UNA is an Alberta-based union that covers over 30,000 Registered Nurses, Registered Psychiatric Nurses, and other allied workers. UNA provides a suite of services to their members. One key service, and what UNA describes as its 'most important job' (UNA n.d.), is negotiating and servicing collective bargaining agreements that cover members' salaries, benefits, schedules, and working conditions. UNA also participants in matters related to occupational health and safety (OHS), pensions and retirement, matters before professional and regulatory bodies, as well as the Workers' Compensation Board – Alberta. UNA members fund UNA with 1.3% of their gross monthly income through union dues.

UNA describes itself as a democratic organization. Their budget is subject to approval at their Annual General Meeting, members have input over UNA's bargaining priorities at the 'demand setting meetings', and members of the bargaining committee are elected by co-workers to represent their bargaining demands. All UNA collective bargaining agreements are ratified by the members through a majority vote before going into force.

UNA is divided into Locals that each have their own bylaws and elected executive members including their own presidents. There are over 165 Locals across Alberta ranging in size from fewer than 12 to over 2,000 people. These Locals are responsible for representing members at their workplace and helping to ensure the collective bargaining agreements are serviced. Locals are grouped into geographically based Districts: North, North Central, Central, South Central and South.

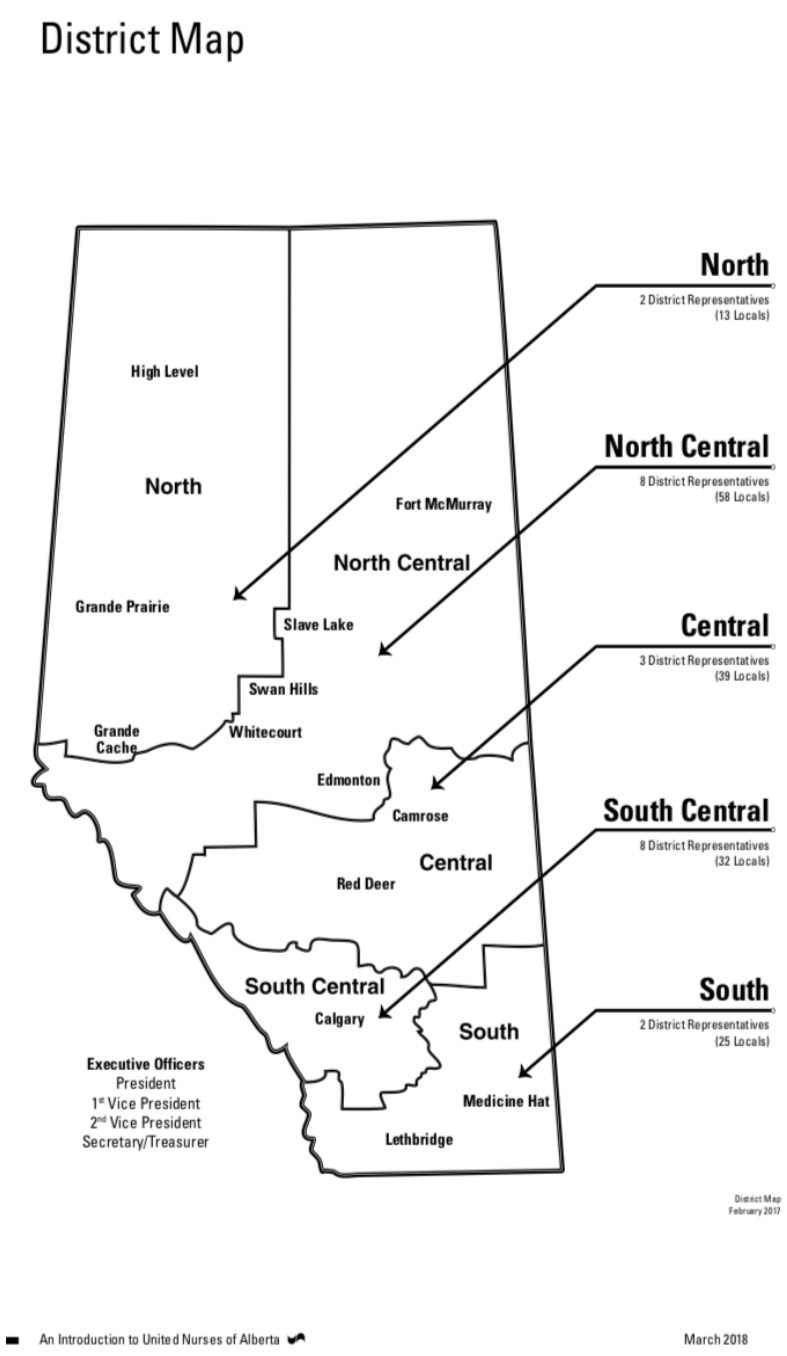

Figure 2 District Map of UNA (UNA 2018)

Executive members of different Locals meet through regularly scheduled District Meetings to share information and brainstorm ways to deal with issues together. District Representatives are elected at the Annual General Meeting and make up UNA's Provincial Executive Board. For every

1,500 dues-paying members, each District is allowed one representative at the Provincial Executive Board. The Board functions as the decision-making body between UNA's Annual General Meetings and is charged with interpreting the UNA Constitution. Members of the Provincial Executive Board also populate UNA's five standing committees: advocacy and engagement, finance, legislative, membership services, and steering. Non-board members may be on these steering committees where a board member is not available, or when a non-board member's expertise would be valuable.

The standing committee for advocacy and engagement is responsible for the educational needs of members and Locals; supporting communications between UNA members, working with other committees, affiliates, or interest groups to promote UNA objectives; identifying and addressing member and Local concerns; and monitoring the political environment and legislation at all levels. The standing committee on finance is responsible for developing a proposed operating budget to be delivered to the Executive Board and the Annual General Meeting. The budget must ensure there are sufficient funds to negotiate improved collective bargaining agreements, to service existing agreements, and to run UNA affairs. Additionally, the finance committee has a role in providing education to Board members and Locals on UNA financial policies or issues. The standing committee on legislative matters ensures UNA activities are compliant with the UNA Constitution; acts as the Constitutional Amendments and Policy Resolution Committee reporting to the Executive Board at the Annual General Meeting; and acts as an Appeal Committee for appeals related to contract interpretations, grievances, arbitrations, and PRCs. This standing committee is also responsible for submitting resolutions on behalf of UNA for affiliates conventions and annual general meetings. The standing committee on membership services works on improving communication and services to UNA members; works with Locals to address concerns; works with other committees, interest groups, and political parties to advance UNA objectives; administers the

UNA scholarships, bursaries, and grants; and reviews and makes recommendations for UNA elections and votes among other tasks. The standing committee on membership services also is the credentials sub-committee responsible for identifying different parties at the AGM (voting delegates, observers, staff, guests, press) and supervising polling stations and the voting process at the AGM. The steering committee is made up of the four Executive Officers and is tasked with ensuring UNA policy objectives are achieved, preparing proposals for new projects for the Executive Board, and investigating and addressing issues related to the quality of life of UNA members.

In addition to the Locals, Districts and the Provincial Board, UNA has four Executive Officers, the President, The 1st and 2nd Vice Presidents, and the Secretary Treasurer who are traditionally elected at their Annual General Meeting. The UNA President is responsible for presiding over all Executive Board meetings and carrying out UNA policies. The 1st Vice President covers meetings in the absence of the President, where the 2nd Vice President is responsible for meetings neither the President nor the First Vice President can attend. Both the 1st and 2nd Vice Presidents are also responsible for 'establishing and maintaining the flow of communications between the UNA and its members, and between the UNA and other organizations' (bylaws 4.05 (b) (c)). The Secretary/Treasurer is tasked with looking after UNA's finances and all records, documents, and correspondence of UNA.

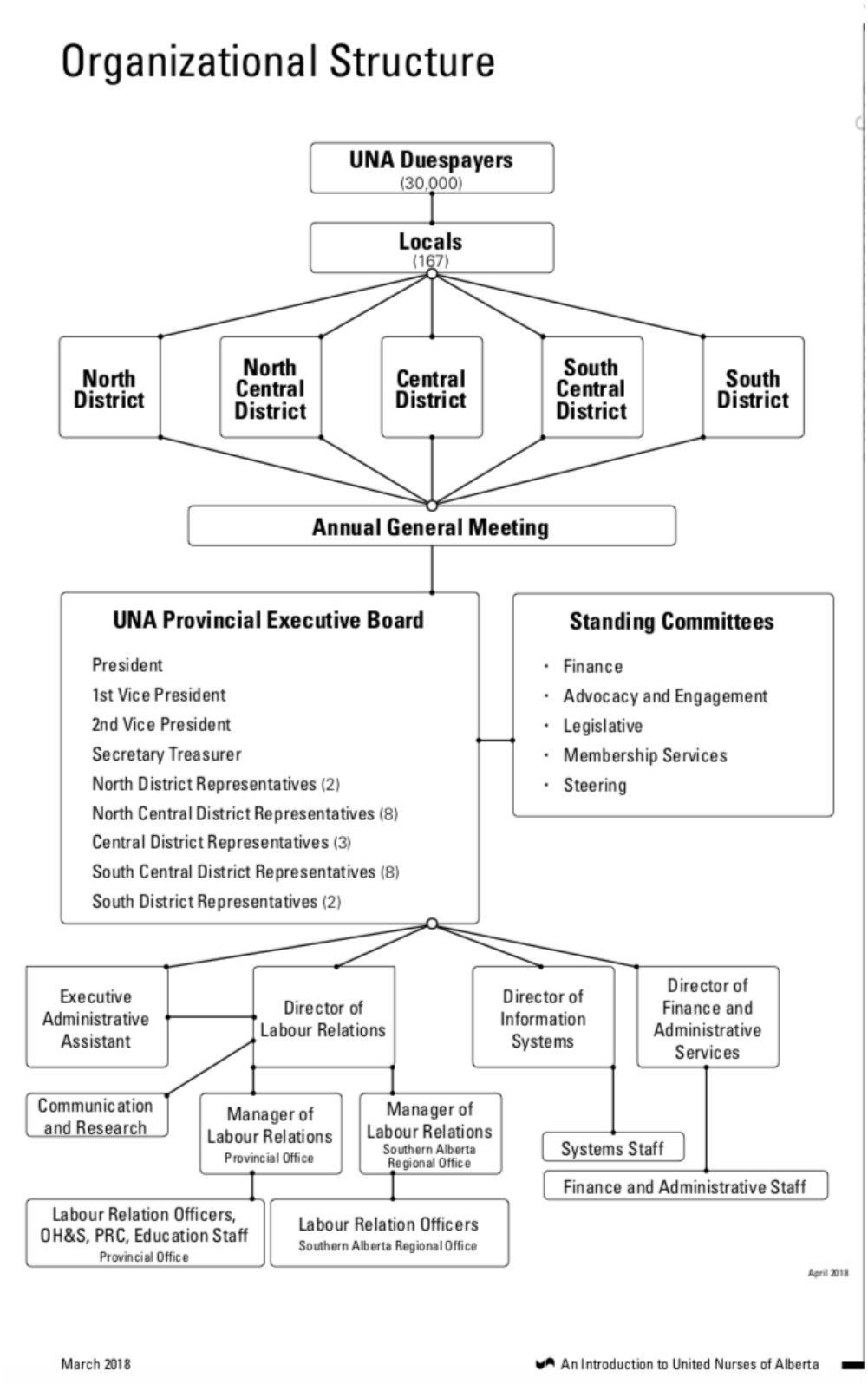

Figure 3 Organizational Structure of UNA (UNA 2018)

UNA offers a number of services to their members including bargaining and servicing collective bargaining agreements and helping to govern the Local Authorities Pensions Plan on behalf of enrolled UNA members. UNA also offers education to their members directly through their Education Department which offers classes including the following:

- How to Run a Local - Administration
- How to Run a Local - Member Engagement
- Treasurers' Workshop
- PRC Workshop
- OH&S Basic and Advance Workshops
- Grievance Workshop
- Unit/Office Rep Workshop
- Dealing with Abuse
- Know Your Rights

In addition, upon request, UNA offers mini educational sessions on duty to accommodate, human rights, Workers' Compensation Board, and Control Interpretation. To help ensure members can participate in these educational sessions, UNA offers salary replacement, meals, mileage, and accommodation for out-of-town participants.

Additional education is offered by UNA through their affiliation with The Canadian Labour Congress, the Alberta Federation of Labour, and municipal labour districts, as well as connections with the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions. Each of these associations and councils offers different education through conferences and week-long intensive classes.

UNA also offers 10 UNA scholarships and one Canadian Federation of Nurses Union award to students enrolled in first-year nursing programs in Alberta. These financial awards are open to students at approved nursing programs who are related to UNA members. Applicants for these awards must complete an essay answering, 'How has the United Nurses of Alberta made a difference in the work lives of Alberta Nurses?'. UNA also offers grants twice a year from their International Solidarity Fund to help UNA members provide humanitarian assistance internationally. Members successful in their grant applications must submit a report to UNA once their

humanitarian work is completed. Lastly, UNA offers six grants annually to help UNA members prepare and present nursing abstracts for nursing research.

UNA Communications

UNA uses a number of communication tools to allow UNA members and non-members to access information. These tools include: UNANet, various online and print publications, various social media platforms, and their own UNA App.

UNA Publications

Every UNA member and non-member who signs up can receive a physical copy of the UNA NewsBulletin. This now quarterly newsletter began in 1976 and was one of the first mass communication tools that UNA used to keep people up to date on the union's activities. In 1994 UNA added UNA Stat and Frontline to their publication line (UNA 2017, p. 43). UNA Stat was a publication designed to be posted on UNA bulletin boards at worksites, while the Frontline bulletin was an update on collective bargaining sent to each Local (UNA 2017, p. 43). In 1997 UNA started producing Spotlight as well, where they would highlight specific contract issues in a poster-format (UNA 2017, p. 68). UNA has continued to use these various formats for UNA publications but now includes them on the social media platforms, as well as producing paper copies.

UNA App

The UNA App for iPhone and Android devices allows users to receive news and have access to their collective bargaining agreements and other UNA resources directly on their cell phones or other devices. Members with UNANet accounts can also submit expense claims, PRC concerns, and

any OHS forms. Local executives can also use the app for informational searches of their members and dues payers.

UNANet

UNANet is an umbrella label for UNA's FirstClass and document management system (DMS). FirstClass is system that includes email, online conferences, and bulletin-board style posting abilities. The DMS is an online system used to track, manage and store documents. Both of these systems are included under the heading of UNANet and both are secure internal network for UNA members and staff. All UNA members are provided with a UNANet account that includes a UNA email if they sign up. UNANet includes a number of forums for UNA members, executives, and staff to discuss issues amongst themselves. The role a person has in UNA will determine the number of forums made accessible to them. Each Local is able to create their own forums as well. When members have issues, they are able to go to UNANet and post questions to forums that can then be answered by other members or UNA staff. UNA also uses this program to reimburse UNA members when they participate in UNA funded education training and attend meeting such as UNA's AGM.

Social Media

UNA uses a number of social media platforms to connect with UNA members and the public including their own website, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

Coded Themes from UNA Communications

To begin this results section, I start with a discussion of the different connections UNA has to individuals, organizations, and governments. The third section focuses on the industrial relations

category of codes followed by a discussion of how nurses' jobs and the health care system are communicated across the various platforms. This section concludes with a brief overview of how each of these codes can contribute to the idea of union relevance (see Appendix 2 for communications code court).

Connections to other Organizations or Associations

Throughout all of the media platforms there are references to a number of other groups and organizations. I have divided these connections into two categories: individual and group connections. The individual connections refer to the UNA membership and usually non-unionized workers and the group connections refer to organizations or bodies external to UNA.

Individual Connections

Across all of the media platforms, UNA ensures that individual UNA members are highlighted. There is a regular section of each newsletter dedicated to stories about UNA members – whether they are retiring, have passed away, have gone on a volunteer trip to help others, or if they have taken on a UNA staff position. There are also times when UNA members take on other work or advocate for other social causes that also gets reported in the newsletter – for example, one nurse who was advocating for changes in the elementary school system was highlighted for having similar attributes to those the newsletter often praises nurses for having – being an advocate for others and caring. This same story was also highlighted in a YouTube video clip where the nurse was discussing her views on the Alberta government's budget cuts for education that year. Elected Officials and UNA Locals were more often mentioned and highlighted in YouTube videos than individual UNA members.

The Facebook posts, in addition to mentioning individual UNA members, also highlight UNA Locals. Often these Facebook posts include how UNA Locals were participating in UNA campaigns, such as the Wear White Wednesday campaign[6], or if a Local was holding an information picket on a particular issue such as pensions or collective bargaining. Similar trends were noted in the UNA Twitter data that would commonly highlight UNA Locals participating in campaign and information pickets.

As for the UNA website, there is a news section which replicates select news stories featured on the Facebook and Twitter sites as well as in the newsletter. On the website, there are few references to any individuals aside from the names and Locals of the executive officers and the district representatives. There are general email addresses given for the UNA staff departments if a person wanted to directly contact them, but no individual names are listed.

The UNA scholarships announcements are consistently posted across Facebook, Twitter, the newsletter and the UNA website. The scholarships are advertised in the newsletter and on Facebook and Twitter and the winners usually have their picture taken with a UNA elected executive and their sponsor (which has to be a relative who is a UNA member in good standing). Although not commonly mentioned, the scholarship comes with the understanding that the recipient will stay and work in Alberta when they complete school. If a nurse does find work outside of the province, when they are finished their training, they have to give the amount for the scholarship back.

Although not as common as references to the above-mentioned individuals, it is interesting to note that the newsletter, Facebook, and Twitter posts make direct reference to workers who are

[6] As previously mentioned, Wear White Wednesday was a campaign that promoted nurses wearing white on Wednesday so that patients and their families could identify who was a nurse and who was not. The idea behind the campaign was to draw attention to how few nurses were actually working in some of the health care settings and promote nurses as distinct for their education and skills compared to other health care workers.

not covered under UNA and, in some cases, not covered under any union. Some of the same stories are also posted on the UNA website; however, few of the YouTube videos mention non-unionized workers. Although these references are not common, they are still interesting, given research in the area of union renewal that found unions who demonstrate that they fight for the rights of all workers, not just those in their own union, tend to have higher approval ratings and improve the image of unions for workers (McGrane & Berdahl 2015, p. 67).

Group Connections

The groups mentioned across UNA's different platforms include: The Alberta Federation of Labour, Canadian Federation of Nurses' Unions, Public Interest Alberta, Friends of Medicare, College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta, Parkland Institute and other unions. The Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) is a provincial umbrella association of unions and employee organizations with the main goal of improving 'conditions for working people, their families and their communities' (Alberta Federation of labour n.d.). They emphasize that, although they have worked on issues directly related to the workplace (for example, minimum wage and OHS), they also advocate in other areas such as public education and public health care. This organization is similar to Public Interest Alberta (PIA), an organization dedicated to education and advocacy on public interest issues such as childcare, the environment, post-secondary education, and seniors' rights and services (Public Interest Alberta n.d.). Both of these organizations have counterparts across the country in different provinces. Friends of Medicare is a non-profit organization in Alberta, with the goals of raising 'public awareness on concerns related to Medicare in Alberta and Canada' (Friends of Medicare n.d.) and this organization is commonly referenced in the newsletters. Heather Smith, the president of UNA, is also associated with each of these groups as either a board member or serving on their executive committees.

Heather Smith is also a board member of the Parkland Institute, which is a non-partisan research center located on the University of Alberta campus. 'Parkland Institute studies economic, social, cultural, and political issues facing Albertans and Canadians, using the perspective of political economy' (Parkland Institute n.d.).

The Canadian Federation of Nurses' Union (CFNU) is a national umbrella organization connecting nurses' unions in each province and representing the interests of nurses at the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). The CLC is also an umbrella trade union involved in advocacy, education, research, and analysis (Canadian Labour Congress n.d.) working towards positive change for all working people in Canada.

Another group commonly mentioned in UNA communications is the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CARNA). CARNA is the professional and regulatory body for nurses in Alberta. This organization is 'mandated to define and uphold the standards of safe and ethical nursing practices' and is responsible for approving nursing education programs in Alberta, keeping track of registered nurses, and enforcing any complaints against nurses according to the Health Professional Act (CARNA n.d.).

Outside of the hyperlinks and logos featured on the UNA website for these groups, when these groups are mentioned on the other platforms it is often in reference to campaigns, conferences they are hosting, research they have published, or other industrial disputes – such as strikes or lockouts – that are happening. There are a number of Facebook posts as well as YouTube videos that highlight struggles and issues facing other unionized workers. These media posts demonstrate UNA's connections to other workers in the labour movement and highlight the issues facing other health care workers leading to industrial disputes.

When thinking of the connections UNA has to other groups, it is important to consider how this affects their relevance and the type of unionism practiced. UNA is often given credit for helping

the aims and goals of other groups and events through affiliation – which can make UNA relevant in different ways. It is also important when considering the type of unionism practiced by UNA. Since UNA is affiliated with a number of groups and associations, their overall positioning of themselves as a union does not suggest they are a pure business-style unionism. Rather, the connections to so many other groups suggest they lean more towards community unionism. These findings also align with Briskin (2012) who showcased nurses' unions as well connected with other social groups and demonstrative of nursing union's social unionism practices.

Government and Legislation

Another group of references in the newsletter, Facebook posts, Twitter posts, and YouTube videos are to some form of government body or activity, either provincial (1,350) or federal (193), or to a budget or a piece of legislation that was either in place, being changed, or moving through the political system (151). The most often mentioned pieces of legislation pertained to the governance of the health care system (for example the Alberta Health Act, Health Care Protection Act, Hospitals Act, and the Nursing Homes Act) at the provincial level; or at the federal level, the Health Accord which is an agreement between the federal government and the provinces setting out funding allocation and national standards. These references are probably standard for unions working in the public sector or for unions with workers closely governed by specific legislation.

Out of the 46 videos UNA has posted on YouTube, 24 of them make some mention of the provincial government. Often, there is mention in relation to an Alberta government budget or to a collective bargaining agreement matter such as the 2012 strikes at the Hardisty and Devonshire long term care homes, or the changes that the government attempted to make to the Local Authorities Pensions Plan. Overall, the majority of videos made by UNA are either in response to an action by the provincial government or calling on the provincial government to take action.

Overall, the role of government is not stressed on the UNA website. The website only provides a hyperlink to government websites and services and will occasionally mention a news story posted on another media platform in the website news section.

UNA seems to be a very well-connected union – to other unions in Canada, including umbrella organizations such as the AFL and the CLC, as well as to other nursing groups and unions, and health care-based organizations. UNA is also up to date and helps keep their audiences up to date on relevant government activities whether that is related to their workforce or to public health for Albertans. Lastly, UNA tries to highlight the activities of their Locals, and individual UNA members in their communities. These connections have the possibility of expanding the issues UNA can deal with, opening up opportunities for members to become involved in different organizations, and helping contribute to UNA's community presence and authority as advocates of the public health care system in Canada.

Industrial Relations

UNA communications are often related to what I have termed as 'industrial relations' activities. In analyzing the data, I established this parents code to capture discussion of any industrial disruptions which is usually in reference to a strike or lockout; discipline given by employers; grievances filed by the union either in the distant past, recent past, or the promise to do so in the future; references to OHS; staffing and scheduling practices or issues; and also includes any mention of the collective bargaining agreement and negotiations. As I discuss later, these items are also commonly mentioned as well in relation to the idea of union relevance.

The industrial relations sub-codes that came up the most often in the newsletter (136) and Facebook page (250) are in reference to the collective bargaining agreement (whether talking about the current agreement or the negotiations of a new agreement), followed by references to staffing

issues (which was sometimes grouped with scheduling concerns and the shortages of nurses in Alberta) (109 mentions in the newsletter and 208 mentions on Facebook). The third most common industrial relations issue was OHS for the newsletter (95), but was pension related (114), followed very closely by mentions of rallies or informational picket lines (112), for Facebook.

In each newsletter there are dedicated sections for collective bargaining and OHS features that increases the number of times these topics come up. In 2014 UNA was actively involved in a pension campaign in the face of legislative changes proposed by the Redford Conservative government. During this pension campaign there were a number of rallies, and many UNA Locals held information pickets at their workplace to educate the public, all of which were repeatedly highlighted on the UNA Facebook page.

The most common industrial relations coding for the Twitter data involved mentions of public demonstrations, such as rallies and informational picketing (246), followed by tweets about the collective bargaining agreements or the state of collective bargaining (174), and then references to staffing, including staffing ratios and safe staffing levels (157). Mentions of industrial disputes (94) and pensions (48) next most commonly referred to industrial relations activities on the UNA Twitter account.

The UNA website prominently features information about collective bargaining agreements as the first 'tab' on the website's permanent header. Under this tab users can find all of the collective bargaining agreements, Spotlights on issues covered under the agreements, Joint Statements to resolve issues that often come up under the agreements, a brief outline of how collective bargaining negotiations work with UNA, and a table of nursing salaries. The main page also features a 'Report a Concern' for PRC, OHS, and contract issues. Aside from the collective bargaining agreements, the most commonly references industrial relation codes on the UNA website are PRC and OHS.

The UNA YouTube account features several videos dealing with different themes under the industrial relations code. The most common topics were related to public action including strikes, rallies, pickets, or informational lines (38). The second most common topic for industrial relations was references to issues related to staffing and scheduling (32), most often mentioning how there were not enough nurses to cover all of the essential work at a specific worksite. The third most common topic related to industrial relations was discussion of the collective bargaining agreement (12), or negotiations alongside any strikes or lockouts that were taking place. There was a notable lack of mention of any specific OHS issues, which was often mentioned in the newsletter and Facebook posts; however, during rallies it was not uncommon for elected officials to mention safe patient care where the main focus of safety was on the patient and not necessarily for the health care workers.

Various statements were repeated by UNA across multiple media platforms. This exact phase is re-used in several of the newsletters, Facebook posts, and UNA website especially in relation to updates of collective agreement negotiations: 'UNA provides a wide range of services to its members. A key role is negotiating the excellent collective agreements that regulate salaries, benefits, schedules and working conditions of members. UNA also administers its agreement to resolve disputes, improve working conditions, and protect nurses' workplace rights' (UNA 2015a). This passage suggests much more business style unionism of providing traditional workplace services to the membership. As well, these activities, and their prominent display in the UNA newsletter and on Facebook posts, aligns with the statements on the UNA website that their work is dominated by negotiating collective agreements that cover salary, benefits, schedules, and working conditions for UNA members in addition to helping UNA members resolve disputes.

Overall UNA strives to keep its members informed about the various industrial relations activities in which it is involved. It is clear that through the repetition across the various media

platforms, UNA focuses a good deal of attention on negotiating and servicing their collective bargaining agreements for their members. Members are also repeatedly updated and reminded of how collective bargaining is going in the province, with a focus on UNA's responses to industrial breakdowns or to the potential for industrial breakdowns through information pickets and public demonstrations. Lastly, after reviewing UNA's communications, it is easy to see the industrial relations problems they are focused on including staffing ratios, pensions, and OHS concerns.

Nurses' Job – Patients, Caring, Advocacy

Another theme I identified through my analysis is what I have termed 'nurses' jobs'. This category includes characteristics attributed to nurses (for example, a caring disposition, skill); or common aspects of their job (references to patients, clients or residents; or being an advocate; or quality of care); and mentions of their profession.

The most common reference to nursing in the newsletter includes mention of 'patients' (88), then 'caring' or 'quality of care' (58), followed by references to nurses being 'advocates' (55). Often the mention of 'patients' comes up in relation to nurses defending the health care system, to ensure that their patients are receiving good health care or overlapping with industrial relations concerns of staffing issues. In relation to caring, comments revolve around 'quality of care', or the caring nature of nurses, or how nurses enjoy the care work they do. When the idea of nurses as 'advocates' comes up, it is typically in relation to ensuring that their patients receive quality care, for defending the public health care system, and ensuring public health care spending is done efficiently.

In the Facebook posts, the most common reference to nursing was first 'patients'(168), then 'nursing as a profession'(106), which is very closely followed by references to 'nurses being caring' and 'quality of care'(102). This was then followed by mentions of nurses as 'advocates' (87). The Facebook posts that mention nursing as a 'profession' often also mentioned the Profession

Responsibility Concern (PRC) process, which is described below. Other Facebook posts simply state that nursing is a 'profession', either comparing it to other professions or mentioning the professionalism or skill of nurses in their work. Nursing was often described as a 'profession' in Facebook posts that mentioned the Wear White Wednesday Campaign that encourages nurses to wear white so they could be identified as distinct among other health care workers. This was also connected to the idea of promoting the nursing 'profession'.

In the Twitter data, the references to nurses that came up the most related to 'patients' (90), followed by mentions of 'safe patient care' or a 'safe staffing level' for patients (74), and lastly was mentions of 'standing up' or 'advocating' (66). Similar to the other data, many of the UNA Tweets repeated that nurses were 'standing up' or 'advocating' for 'safe patient care', for 'safe staffing' levels for patients, or simple for the Canadian health care system. The act of 'providing care' or 'being caring' and mentions of 'nursing as a profession' were the fourth and fifth most commonly references nursing traits in the Twitter data gathered for UNA.

On the UNA website there are only sporadic mentions of the actual work nurses do and far more space is dedicated to the traditional work of unions. In the 'About' section of the website there is one line stating, 'Working for improvements for nurses, our profession, our patients, our residents and clients, and all Albertans' (UNA n.d., tagline). There is also a brief mention of how providing a safe workspace is essential to providing quality care under the OHS and PRC sections of the website, otherwise there is far less space dedicated to the work nurses do and more space dedicated to the work the union does.

On the UNA YouTube channel the most common theme under 'nurse's job' included mentions of 'patients' (38), 'caring/care' (28), and 'advocate' (14) respectively. Since the majority of UNA YouTube videos also mention some aspect of the provincial government, whether that be a

budget or piece of legislation, there was often a link between the actions of government and the ability of nurses to carry out their duties.

In the process of analyzing the data, I also began to notice an interesting dynamic between nurses and the health care system, and how this dynamic comes across in UNA's communications. Often nurses are positioned as 'advocates' for their patients, and frequently as 'advocates' for a well-funded public health care system, and less often as 'advocates' for themselves at work. Being an 'advocate' is often tied into the job of a nurse and can be related to other codes such as OHS and caring. Examples of such passages found in the OHS section of UNA's newsletter written by Dewey Funk include the following: 'Most health care workers are women. Health care wasn't seen as an industry – *it's health care!*– so society doesn't think of health care workers as being at risk of injuries or workplace abuse. And nurses themselves are patient focused, which can mean not focused enough on their own wellbeing' (Funk 2016, p. 10). Or 'Only when nurses have safe workplaces can you feel safe – thereby giving you the ability to advocate and provide safe patient care' (Funk 2015, p. 21).

While encouraging nurses to take better care of themselves, UNA newsletters have also stated 'Your patients will still be patients, but if *you* don't feel safe or *you* are not healthy, you can't give them the care they deserve' (UNA 2013a). Other examples encourage nurses to fill out PRC forms; for example, as stated in the newsletter: 'Reporting a Professional Responsibility Concern is a constructive action that can help protect patients, clients, and residents and alleviate moral distress that nurses sometimes experience when they are unable to provide care as required by the standards of professional licensing bodies' (UNA 2013a). According to other UNA documents, PRCs were added to the collective bargaining agreement to include a process for resolving complaints around workplaces situations that prevent nurses from abiding by their own provincial regulatory standards. For example, if there is a situation where an area is understaffed, and nurses feel they cannot

properly live up to the standards sets by the regulatory body they can report the situation instead of facing disciplinary action from the College and Association of Registered Nurses (CARNA). It is also important to note that UNA has included the PRC into the collective bargaining agreement – meaning the union sees a role for itself in how the profession is regulated. Although there is some overlap between PRC and OHS issues there are examples where only the patient is at immediate risk that would not count as an occupational health issue. If UNA did not include PRC in their collective bargaining agreements, it may be difficult for them to help nurses in these situations. At least PRC processes give the union a role in helping members navigate their advocacy role in their workplace. Although this system does not appear to be designed to protect patients as much as it is designed to protect nurses, patients can clearly benefit from this system and it is often promoted as helping patients. As well, the potential to inadvertently harm patients can be used to encourage nurses to also protect themselves, as it would seem UNA does when it encourages its members to fill out PRC forms.

As previously mentioned, nurses are not just advocating for their individual patients but are also presented across the media platforms as advocating for the health care system. The President of UNA, Heather Smith, is quoted in the newsletter as stating, 'The federal government plans to reduce spending on health care in all provinces by more than $40 billion over the next decade. It's pretty clear that, without changes, something's going to have to give, and it won't be good for our patients, our profession or our country.' Once again, patients are ranked first, followed by the profession, and lastly the country. Rarely are nurses positioned as the ones to benefit from taking a stand.

Past research shows how nurses' unions can use their advocacy for patients during industrial disputes or other activities (Manthous 2014). By presenting nurses as defenders of the public health care system nursing unions may win public support and since they are often bargaining with politicians who depend on voters for their election, this framing can work very well in a situation

where public support is important. However, as is clear from the attempts to get nurses to take care of themselves and their rights – to enable them to provide the best care – this framing is not always the best for nurses as it reiterates the viewpoint that there are many groups of people and interests that come before nurses. It is interesting to see UNA try to balance the rights of patients and the rights of nurses, alongside promoting nurses' role as an advocate for patients and the health care system and defending nurses as workers.

Health care

As could be expected in a nursing-based media, UNA communications make many references to the Canadian health care system. Some of the topics most often mentioned in the newsletter include wait times (48), demands to fix long-term care (31), and arguments for adding pharmacare to the federal health care program (26). Many of these topics were echoed in the Facebook data including the calls to fix long-term care (96) and the need for a pharmacare program (86). Topics echoed in the Twitter data included mentions of hospitals (156) and calls to fix long-term care (138). By far the most commonly mentioned health care related issue in both the newsletter (67) and Facebook posts (106) revolves around protecting the Canadian health care system from privatization. This is also true for the YouTube videos where distinctions between private and public health care are called out more than any other health care issue (11). The public health care system is often described as 'efficient' and 'fair' whereas the private system and clinics are reported as having many financial issues and overall detrimental to the health of Canadians. These references also make mention of efforts of certain players (for example, Koch Brothers (Mayer 2016)[7]) and certain political parties (for example the Conservative parties at both the provincial and

[7] The Koch Brothers, Charles Koch and the late David Koch, are members of the Koch Family, who have funded conservative and libertarians politicians, groups, and think tanks for over forty years mainly in the United States. They advocated for a number of conservative policies including private, for-profit health care.

federal level) to undermine the current health care system with hopes of bringing in more opportunities for a private, profit-driven system. As was discussed before, these references of a private system also include the role of nurses to defend the public health care system for patients and the health care system.

On the other hand, the UNA Twitter account made far more mentions to hospital care (156), or events happening at hospitals and calls to fix long-term care or events happening at long-term care facilities (138) than it did mention differences between private and public health care (66). Many of the tweets that mention hospitals were in reference to activities UNA Locals were conducting, either having informational pickets or activities for Nursing Week or mentions of hospitals in other media articles that UNA retweeted. The tweets referencing long-term care were similar to Facebook posts that included calls to fix issues with long-term care in Canada. These posts were followed up by tweets mentioning the differences between public and private care and the need to protect Medicare in Canada.

The UNA website does not have a dedicated space focused solely on health care outside of the hyperlinks provided to the Alberta Government agencies.

Union Relevance

In analysing the data, I identified a number of themes that are linked to weave a narrative around what I term 'union relevance'; that is what makes UNA, and perhaps other unions – especially public sector unions – relevant. Union relevance included when UNA mentioned the relevance of itself as a union or the importance of some of the work the union does. These mentions are often explicit references to union relevance whereas some of the other coding – nurses' job in relation to advocacy, industrial relations coding, and health care issues — can also be read as union relevance.

Beginning with the mentions by UNA of its own relevance specifically, we see statements such as a message from the President of UNA, Heather Smith in the UNA newsletter:

> When unions like United Nurses of Alberta fight to preserve public health care and for the creation of new programs like a national pharmacare plan, we are working on behalf of all middle-class Canadian families.
>
> When we fight for Professional Responsibility Concerns and Occupational Health & Safety in our workplaces, we are not just fighting for members, but for the wellbeing of patients, residents, clients and their families as well.
>
> When we enforce our contracts, to ensure all employees are treated equally within their bargaining units, we are fighting for women's rights, workers' rights and civil rights.
>
> And when we struggled successfully over the past 15 months for a fair collective agreement in the face of strong efforts by some of our employers and political forces to roll back our wages and working conditions, we were supporting the rights of every working person. (UNA 2014, vol 38, no 2, p.2)

Other less lengthy statements supporting this framing include slogans such as 'We're here for nurses…and Alberta's nurses are here for you!' (UNA Bulletin 2015, vol 39, no 4, p. 20). Slogans such as this rely on the relevance of nurses to justify the relevance of the union. This theme is also in UNA's Facebook posts that reference UNA advocating on behalf of nurses with posts such as, 'UNA's new radio ad is playing across Alberta. UNA is speaking up about health care in Alberta on behalf of its member, their patients, families and all Albertans' (UNA 2015b). This theme is echoed on the UNA Twitter page with tweets stating, 'Safe staffing saves lives, and unions fight for safe staffing' (UNA 2014c). Speaking more generally of the trade union movement, there was also comments such as the following account of an AFL event: 'You in this room can take credit for creating the middle class,' participants were told Saturday afternoon by Reg Baskin, who was

president of the AFL from 1973 to 1977 [at the centaury celebration of AFL]. 'The trade union movement is a foundation for democracy and you prove it!' (UNA 2012, 'Party of the Century', vol 36, no 3, p.4). The Facebook posts also include comment linking UNA to the labour movement more generally with the following types of post: 'The labour movement is committed to improving the lives of workers and has been for over 100 years. That's our job. The aim of the labour movement is to improve the lives of all Canadians by working on the issues that matter most to everyone' (UNA 2014a). This is once again echoed on the Twitter page with tweets such as 'UNA believes speaking up for the safety of nurses and all working people on the job is part of our union's patient advocacy role' (UNA 2015c). With this particular tweet, UNA, as a union that is advocating on behalf of workers, is directly related to the role that nurses have to advocate for their own patients.

Some of the social media posts, website sections, and newsletters include this theme of union relevance in connection to the scholarships that UNA provides for nursing students in Alberta. The advertisements for the UNA scholarships include the requirement that applicants write a short essay, and the question usually revolves around how UNA advocates for members or helps members. This essay requirement helps ensure that applicants and winners are aware of the work that UNA does and how this work is considered advocacy on behalf of nurses.

Overall it seems that staff and executives at UNA are aware of the need to inform their membership, and perhaps people outside of their membership, of the work they engage with and the role they have in society. Once again, this theme will be revisited in the next section that focuses on interviews with UNA staff and members.

Facebook

Unlike the newsletter, UNA Facebook posts can also be analyzed not only for their content, but according to the reactions and interactions that people online have. This kind of analysis showcases not just UNA's role in communications but also how their Facebook audience interacts with these communications which adds depth to the analysis of communications materials. By analyzing these interactive components of different platforms, we can begin to further understand which messages illicit the more reaction from UNA's audiences.

Over the years, Facebook has allowed users to interact with Facebook posts in a number of ways including 'liking' comments (which is equivalent to giving a thumbs up to a post). The top Facebook comments from the UNA page for 'likes' are two from 2013 that features letters from nurses that were published in the Calgary Herald and Olds Albertan with 759 and 652 likes respectively. These letters deal with accusations that AHS does not have the best interest of taxpayers or patients in mind and that AHS's claims that nurses only work part-time for the most part has more to do with the stress and burnout nurses experience on their jobs than the desire of nurses to work more or fewer hours. The third most 'liked' UNA Facebook posts is a meme that states 'Here's to all the ER nurses who convinced me I'm not dying after medical Web sites (sic) convinced me I was' (UNA 2012) from 2012 with 574 likes. It is not until the fourth most 'liked' post, with 499 likes, that collective bargaining is even mentioned. This fourth most 'liked' post is an update on the provincial collective bargaining agreement from 2012.

The Facebook platform also allows users to 'share' posts, which means a user has posted the UNA Facebook post to their own Facebook page, the page of another user, or through a private message to another user. The most 'shared' UNA Facebook posts is one linking a video of Rick

Mercer featuring one of his Rick Mercer Report Rants dealing with nurses in Canada from 2014[8]. This specific post was shared over 2,200 times from the UNA Facebook page. The second most shared UNA Facebook post is a meme stating:

> Definition of a nurse: to go above and beyond the call of duty. The first to work and the last to leave. The heart and soul of caring. A unique soul who will pass thru (sic) your life for a minute and impact it for an eternity. An empowered individual whom you may meet for only a 12-hour period, but who will put you and yours above theirs. (UNA 2013b)

This post was shared over 670 times. After that, the next most shared UNA posts were the two letters from nurses published in local newspapers that was previously mentioned as the most 'liked' Facebook posts with 460 and 390 shares.

The UNA Facebook post with the most comments from other Facebook users was a post with 84 comments from 2014 stating,

> There was a lively discussion at the UNA AGM today about Registered Nurses and Registered Psychiatric Nurses wearing white to identify themselves in the workplace. What do you think? Should RNs and RPNs wear white to show pride in the nursing profession? Do you wear white at work? (UNA 2014b)

The post also includes a picture of four nurses wearing white uniforms with their full names included in the text of the post and three names hyperlinked to their own Facebook profiles. This

[8] The video can be found: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qVdKlckSLQ. The video focuses on Rick Mercer's reflections as he watched a graduating class of nurses at York University in Toronto. He reflects on how nurses as an occupation are there for people when they are sick and in need of care, and often when there are new and frightening outbreaks (e.g. AIDS, SARS, EBOLA). Overall he praises nurses for running to help in situations where others would not and finishes by talking about the need for nurses to have the equipment and training to do their jobs safety, ending with 'we should be there for the nurses because they are always there for us'.

Facebook post included over 80 different comments, and it is not surprising that it is one of the top comments to elicit comment responses considering it directly asks for comment from those reading the post. Many of the posts from other users agree with the idea that nurses should wear white or comment directly to the nurses featured in the photo in the post. Other comments note how the color white is not practical for the activities that nurses carry out, and how the 'RN pin' should be sufficient to differentiate nurses from other medical staff.

The next most commented on UNA Facebook post, with 82 comments, is a letter published in the Calgary Herald, and was previously mentioned as the most 'liked' and one of the most 'shared' Facebook posts. The majority of the comments seemed to be from other nurses who relayed how their work experiences were similar to that described in the letter and / or to express their overall support for the letter.

The third most commented on UNA Facebook post is the recommendation from UNA to ratify a mediator's recommendation for the 2014 province-wide negotiations. The post included the recommendations from the mediator related to wages, days of rest, the PRC process, and safe staffing. With 53 comments, the majority of comments from other Facebook users supported wrapping up this round of collective bargaining.

Twitter

Similar to Facebook, Twitter also has unique attributes as a distinct online social media platform. Twitter allows users to interact with tweets by 'liking' a tweet which again is similar to giving a tweet a thumbs up, as well as 'retweeting' which means a user can post UNA's tweet on their own Twitter page, and the ability to reply to a tweet. The UNA Tweets with the most 'likes' was first a tweet celebrating Nursing Week from 2015 that was 'liked' 25 times. The second most 'liked' tweet was one congratulating UNA Scholarship recipients with 24 'likes'. The third most

'liked' tweet from the UNA account was a tweet thanking the Health Minister, Sarah Hoffman, for being a speaker at UNA's AGM in 2015 with 22 'likes'. The UNA Twitter account tweet with the most 'retweets' is a Tweet thanking all the frontline nurses and emergency workers who were working during the 2013 Calgary floods. Similarly, the second most 'retweeted' tweet was a thank you to all the nurses on shift for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. The third most 'retweeted' tweet was a more political tweet that quoted the President of the Alberta Federation of Labour — 'Demonizing public sector workers is inappropriate and doesn't address the situation' (UNA 2015d)— in relation to, then Premier, Jim Prentice trying to tackle Alberta budget issues through labour negotiations. The majority of UNA tweets from the study period did not have any replies and only two tweets had 4 replies. Overall, replying did not appear to be a significant way for Twitter users to interact with UNA during the period of study.

YouTube

As of January 2016, the UNA's YouTube account included 125 subscribers. The top viewed video is from the 2010 UNA AGM which is the first of a 3-part video featuring Maude Barlow from the Council of Canadians speaking about her book *Blue Planet Project* with just over 13,500 views[9]. The second and third most viewed UNA YouTube videos were UNA-made videos explaining *Robert's Rules of Order*. These videos include a person going over some of the more common rules, video recordings from past UNA AGMs showing the procedures in action, and skits by sock puppets explaining the procedures.

[9] Generally, it is accepted that YouTube counts a view after a video has been playing for around 30 seconds. However, if a user plays a video multiple times in the same day not all of the views will be counted or if a user displays robot-like behaviour (example: watching videos for only 35 seconds and rapidly moving from video to video). Generally, YouTube will not count videos that are embedded on another site and automatically play for views. These are all general rules, as Google, the owner of YouTube, does not openly publish how views are counted since these rules could then be abused to monetize videos.

Although the YouTube videos do have comments enabled, as well as the ability for users to 'like' or 'dislike' the videos, there were very few instances of users participating on this media platform through these interactions. The ability to 'like' or 'dislike' a video is limited to users who are logged into their YouTube accounts, which may account for the low levels of participation. The videos with the most 'likes' are the same three videos with the most views, with the first Robert's Rules videos having 27 'likes' and the next Robert's Rules video and the Maude Barlow video both having 22 'likes'. The videos with the most 'dislikes' were the second Robert's Rules video and the Maude Barlow video with 2 'dislikes'.

Outside of the Maude Barlow and Robert's Rules videos, the majority of UNA YouTube content is related to some aspect of collective bargaining and the provincial government. There are a number of videos showing rallies, information pickets, or strikes that were current or in UNA's past, including their 1988 strike. Other videos, often featuring UNA staff, focused on specific aspects of collective bargaining such as staffing. There were also a number of videos done in response to provincial government budgets or legislation the provincial government was introducing. Overall, the YouTube content on the UNA channel presents a union that is politically engaged with politics in Alberta.

UNA Website

Previous research examining union websites (Ward & Lusoli 2003 adapted from Gibson & Ward 2000) have developed different coding schemes to handle the vast amount of materials websites have, including four areas: (1) information, which focuses on the information of the union including organizational information, policy documents, conference information, news updates; (2) participation and campaigning, which includes any online recruitment efforts of the union or documents that would encourage members to participate, for example, chat rooms or bulletin

boards (this is the two-way communication section as well as being able to link and download campaign material); (3) service provisions, with the site being used to promote or deliver union services, including any commercial training or education or purchase services; and (4): networking, which promotes other campaigns or activism through hypertext to affiliated groups.

Similar to Ward and Lusoli's (2003) groupings, UNA has the same general structure as other trade union websites, including the four areas previously mentioned. For the first item, information, UNA has an 'About' section that gives a brief history of UNA, the main functions of the union, how the organization is funded, a summary of how UNA does collective bargaining including how bargaining priorities are selected, and lastly a section on the 2015 Supreme Court of Canada ruling protecting the rights of nurses to strike. The 'About' section also includes a summary of the organizational structure of UNA into Locals, Districts, and the Executive Board. The Provincial Executive Officers and the District Representatives are also listed by their name and the UNA Local they are from. The last section under 'About' includes PDFs of the UNA Constitution, bylaws, and procedures such as UNA's committee structure, UNA funding, policies for UNA meetings, and position statements. UNA also has a 'News' tab that includes PDF copies of the NewsBulletin, as well as news posts related to UNA, and an archive tab where past posts are archived by month and year. The news posts include updates on UNA activities and events, along with news directly related to UNA or nurses in Alberta that are updated regularly with content being cross posted across multiple platforms including the website, Facebook, and Twitter. Users using Facebook, Twitter, or email can share these news posts. UNA also has a 'Resources' tab where they highlight their educational offerings, their role in OHS, PRC, scholarships and grants, and cover specific industrial relations areas - such as maternity leave, layoff and recall, disability benefits, prescription benefits, and seniority and retirement - for their members. UNA even has an 'Agreements' tab that list PDF hyperlinks to all of the collective bargaining agreements. This tab also includes 'Spotlights' that

covers some of the most common issues nurses have under the collective agreements, as well as joint statements to resolve issues arising from the collective agreements, more information on collective bargaining and lastly a chart of nursing salaries in Alberta from 2013-2017. UNA does an excellent job explaining their structure and highlighting elected officials responsible for running UNA through their website. This is consistent with the findings from Ward and Lusoli (2003) that health professional unions tended to provide this information clearly for their members.

For the second item, the participation and campaigning category, UNA provides a number of ways to interact with UNA at the head office and Local level on their website. While the elected executives and the district representatives do not have contact information listed on the website, there is a permanent header on each page of the website that includes a 1-800 number, and links to UNA Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and both the Google Play Store and the IOS App Store for people to download the UNA app. UNA does have a 'Locals' tab on their website that lists each Local, their district and hyperlinks the social media page and/or website if the Local has either or both of these platforms. The email addresses for the Locals are not included on the website but the formula for each of their emails is written at the top of the website page. At the time of analysis, there were 168 Locals listed, 29 had Facebook pages hyperlinked, and 10 had UNA-hosted websites hyperlinked - nine of which were functional. The Locals with their own website tended to be larger hospital-based sites and the community nurses of Edmonton and Calgary. Although not directly part of the website, a UNANet link is included as part of the permanent header that leads to a sign-in and help page with information on how to sign up for UNANet. UNANet is a two-way communication platform separate from the website and is private and exclusive for members and staff that have been granted access. Another tab on the UNA site is 'Joining UNA' which walks users through gaining a UNA membership. And the last tab, dedicated to participation, is the 'Events' tab that brings users to a calendar showing upcoming events such as District Meetings,

educational sessions, and Executive Board Meetings. Aside from the tabs on the UNA website, there is also a feature on the main page under 'Report a Concern' that allows UNA members to report PRC, OHS, and contract issues directly to UNA online.

With respect to the third item, service provisions that unions are known to offer, such as insurance, holiday discounts, and credit cards, there are none readily available on the UNA website. Ward and Lusoli found in 2003 that 84% of the union websites they reviewed dedicated some of their websites to this kind of information. UNA does have a sponsored insurance program with Johnson Insurance that provides UNA members with discounts on home and auto insurance; however, there is no dedicated website space for this benefit. This may suggest that unions might be shifting away from highlighting these kinds of perks on their websites, or rather that UNA is a different from other unions.

The last section from Ward and Lusoli's (2003) categories is networking. Similar to the vast majority of websites studied in 2003, UNA provides hyperlinks to other websites. Under their 'Resources' tab is a page titled 'Links' that groups together hyperlinks to external organizations such as other nurses' unions in Canada, other nursing organizations, long-term care associations, public interest organizations, links to relevant trade union organizations, Alberta Government and Alberta health links, and what it calls other useful links (Alberta Labour Relations Board, Labour Pension Coalition, Local Authorities Pension Plan, and Workers Compensation Board). For internal organization, as previously mentioned, UNA provides links for websites and Facebook pages of Locals.

Overall, UNA's website makes excellent use of the internet not only as another communication channel but in providing a wealth of information about the union, its structure, and the various ways that members can get in contact with the union at both the central and local levels.

Framing

Through the analysis of all of the social media, website, and newsletter data, I identified two central frames that UNA repeatedly makes use of. These frames are used across all the media platforms and seemed pivotal to UNA messaging. The frames include: 'nurses as distinct health care providers' and 'nurses as advocates'. This latter frame branches into two distinct forms of advocacy — first, nurses as advocates for their patients, clients, and residents, and second, nurses as advocates for a good health care system in general.

Nurses as Distinct Health Care Providers

A central frame for the UNA messaging was that nurses are distinct from other health care professionals, especially from non-regulated health care workers (e.g. health care aides). This message was repeated in videos where elected officials discussed evidence from studies that show there are better health outcomes when patients are cared for by an adequate number of registered nurses. The message also features in UNA videos that emphasize the lack of extensive education for health care aides. Several Facebook posts and tweets repeated this message. For instance:

> Are you wearing white today? Each Wednesday, UNA members are encouraged to wear white or wear their Registered Nurse, Registered Psychiatric Nurse and Licensed Practical Nurse pins to show their patients, residents and clients that they are a Nurse (Facebook, UNA)

> [Employers] are replacing educated skilled nurses, whose profession is regulated, with non-professional and unregulated Health Care Aides. This contradicts all evidence of the best way to run a safe and effective health care system. Eliminating nurses and replacing them

with non-professional aides lowers quality of health care and increases risk for patients. (Facebook, UNA)

Stop nurse job cuts, replacement by unregulated aides, @CFNU President Linda Silas tells #unaagm delegates: http://bit.ly/1h5MAfZ #abhealth (Twitter, November 21, 2013)

In this frame, important players such as Linda Silas, the President of CFNU, are identified and also include groups such as nurses, health care aides, and health care employers. Nurses are presented as a highly skilled group that are more skilled and prepared for care work and are held accountable for the care they provide patients because they are a regulated profession. In contrast, health care aides are presented as less skilled and as a potential hazard to quality patient care since they are not a regulated profession. Occasionally, Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) are discussed in these communications and they are also presented as a more skilled group than health care aides and their regulatory bodies are also noted. This nurses-as-distinct frame is flexible enough to include LPNs under the heading based on them being a regulated group unlike health care aides.

With this frame, health care employers are routinely presented as the ones having power, in this case the power to hire a specific mix of health care employees within legislative minimums that would require specific staff to patient ratios. Although not done explicitly, UNA is also typically positioned in this frame as being an organization that helps to ensure that nurses are there for patients to provide quality health care. UNA is given a role in supporting nurses who, when supported by UNA, can provide the unique care that nurses as a regulated, skilled profession are equipped and able to provide. Acceptable actions for UNA members in this frame include filing PRCs when staffing is not appropriate, rallying, taking part in information pickets, and wearing white to identify themselves as a nurse to patients and their families, and thus set themselves out as distinct from other health care workers.

Nurses as Advocates

Nurses-as-advocates was a frame repeated across all the media platforms. This frame branches into two divisions of advocacy work that nurses are encouraged to be involved with—first, as an advocate for their patients, and second, as an advocate to improve the health care system in general.

This frame was presented in YouTube videos on the UNA channel when there was confusion over a potential AHS ban that would punish nurses for publicly criticizing AHS. In this video the message was clear that nurses needed the ability to be advocates for patients as well as the health care system and their employer should not silence them. The frame was repeated on Facebook with posts such as the following

> Alberta's nurses are dedicated to your health and the health of your family. We advocate for a properly staffed and supported public health care system, so that we can always provide the care you need, when you need it. (Facebook, UNA).

> Members of UNA Local 301 stood up for safe patient care by holding an information walk outside of the University Hospital yesterday. The walk was held to raise awareness about the impact that ongoing nurse layoffs will have on safe patient care in Alberta hospitals. (Facebook, UNA)

> If you have a concern about patient, client or resident safety or staffing levels in your workplace, you should fill out a Professional Responsibility Concerns (PRC) report as soon as possible. Through this process, the concerns of Registered Nurses and Registered Psychiatric Nurses are documented and can be addressed at the highest levels of your organization. (Facebook, UNA)

> In good times and bad, that's exactly what United Nurses of Alberta and it's 30,000 members do: Advocate for quality care when Albertans require it, properly funded and universally accessible. (Facebook, UNA)

These messages were repeated in the Newsletter as well with heads lines such as, 'UNA's Superheroes lead the fight to make sure Save (sic) Staffing Saves Lives' (December 2014) and 'File a PRC! When it's unsafe, protect your patients, protect yourself!' (January 2011). These frames were repeated on Twitter with tweets such as, 'Alberta's nurses are committed to the best care for our patients, and to public health care, available to every Albertan' (May 9, 2011).

Nurses were also occasionally presented as advocating for specific changes to improve health care for their patients, such as advocating for a pharmacare program in tweets such as, 'A national prescription drug plan could save Canada +$1 billion in admin costs' (UNA Twitter).

In this frame the major players are UNA, nurses, and the government or employer. Nurses are positioned as an intermediary between patients and the government or employers and they are given a guardian role in ensuring patients receive quality health care. The government and employers are positioned as having the power to give or restrict the quality of care to which Albertans have access. UNA is then positioned as backing up nurses and helping them ensure they can be advocates for their patients and themselves. Acceptable or recommended activities for people to take under this frame are limited to labour relations activities such as filing PRCs, grieving collective bargaining agreement infractions, rallying, and taking part in information walks to educate the public. Often these acceptable forms of action are accompanied by motivations for the nurses—for example, that if nurses take action to advocate for themselves, they are by extension advocating for their patients; or if they take steps to advocate for a better health care system, they are advocating for their patients as well. The most often recommended activity was to tell patients you are an RN. The union did not

often suggest nurses talk to their families, friends, or neighbours as advocates, rather the focus was on communication with patients. On the rare occasion, a labour strike is presented as an acceptable way of responding to the power of an employer or government. However, strikes are almost always presented as the option of last resort, once all other options have been tried and failed. It is clear in this frame that UNA's relevance as a union is firmly grounded in the organization's ability to empower nurses in their role as advocates and defenders of health care.

While nurses advocating for patients may be a 'safe' form of advocacy that people have come to expect from nurses, and therefore is seen as an acceptable task, the other forms of advocacy for the health care system in general may not be seen as acceptable. Joining advocacy for patients with advocacy for the health care system may help to depoliticize advocacy solely for the health care system that often involves lobbying at the federal and provincial government levels. This political lobbying may be seen as too overtly political and therefore inappropriate for nurses and even their unions to engage with. By intertwining these two different kinds of advocacy, UNA is pushing the boundaries on what is acceptable for nurses to undertake in their advocacy by expanding nurses' duty and responsibility 'to care', while also justifying their own political advocacy efforts at the same time. UNA is also promoting the different forms of advocacy as potentially helping patients. So, nurses are motivated to advocate for themselves and to advocate for a better health care system in the political realm, all in the name of providing better care for their patients.

Conclusion

Overall, both the structure of UNA, and the nature of their communications materials, demonstrates the emphasis that the union has placed on keeping their membership well-informed and using outward-facing communications material to help frame the union's actions for the public. UNA has used a number of publicly available communications platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) as

well as several of their own internal publications and platforms (e.g. UNANet, NewsBulletin), to provide spaces for members and the public to become and stay informed about the union. In their communications UNA deals with a variety of issues including promoting the connections the organization has to other organizations, to the government, and even the activities of its own members. The various connections that UNA has to different organizations and associations suggests that they lean more towards social unionism and have gone beyond purely negotiating and servicing collective bargaining agreements. These findings echo Briskin's (2012) research that found that nurses' unions in Canada tend to be well connected with other social groups which demonstrates their social unionism practices. Despite pressure with respect to government cutbacks and some pressures for unions to focus on 'bread and butter issues', UNA still remains engaged in issues beyond their union.

Industrial relations activities are also commonly reported in UNA's communications including a number of issues related to collective bargaining, staffing issues, and pensions. It is clear that UNA's main focus is on negotiating and servicing collective bargaining agreements for their members and UNA often uses their communications platforms to update members on these negotiations. Whereas most of UNA's communications across different platforms focus on the collective bargaining agreement, it is noticeable that UNA's Twitter account focuses more on UNA member's public demonstrations through rallies and informational pickets related to collective bargaining.

UNA also routinely communicates about the nature of nurses' work and how this work is related to standing up for safe patient care. Health care is commonly mentioned in the UNA communications material especially in reference to defending the health care system from private interests, calls to fix long-term care in Canada, and calls to introduce a pharmacare program. It is not surprising to find UNA dedicates a sizable portion of their communications to the role of nurses

and how this relates to health care. Prior research by Manthous (2014) demonstrated how nurses' unions have successfully connected patient and health care advocacy to nurses' industrial disputes.

The two clear frames used by UNA for their communication are 'nurses as distinct' and 'nurses as advocates' for both patients and the Alberta health care system. UNA repeatedly uses these frames across all of their media platforms, across different messages and campaigns. Nurses are presented as distinct from other health care providers, most often being compared to unregulated providers such as health care aides, and are praised for their education and skill. Nurses are also framed as advocates for patients and the public health care system who serve as intermediaries between patients and politicians and health care administrators.

Finally, the issue of union relevance is directly and indirectly mentioned in several UNA communications as the union attaches and compares its own relevance to the work nurses do for their patients and the general public. As discussed, this can be found across all of the UNA communication material. Often UNA's relevance is directly justified in how they help create the conditions for nurses to be able to fully do their jobs – including creating conditions that allow nurses to become advocates for patients and the health care system. Although the collective bargaining agreements that UNA negotiates and services are commonly brought up, the large focus is not on increasing wages or benefits as some people may assume unions would be focused on. Rather, even when promoting the collective bargaining agreement, the main goal is to ensure that nurses are able to do the important work they do for patients in the Alberta health care system.

Overall, UNA often uses social media and communications material as one-way communications to their members; for example, as a source of information members can go to rather than a place where members can contribute their own ideas. Only occasionally were members encouraged to 'join the conversation' in an online social media platform in the newsletter. Even when members were invited to join the conversation, there were often warnings for members to be

careful about being a nurse and making public statements about their working conditions. Despite technological changes and developments, most of UNA's communications are still one-way rather than two-way. This would suggest that UNA and its leaders are still reluctant to allow a lot of two-way communications and also that members have not shown a great demand for such communications. Traditional expectations around communications appear to be continuing as well as traditional expectations about the role for unions and their members as outlines by a more business unionism style also seem to be continuing in this case.

Chapter 6: Results – Producing and Receiving Communications

> You know, we are there for the public. It's not just about us. We are their advocates. Yes, we advocate for our members. We advocate very strongly for our members, but we are advocating for the public as a whole. (UNA Staff, Interview 3)

Introduction

One of the key questions in this research focuses on the intent that UNA staff have in their communications and how UNA members interpret these communications especially in regards to union relevance. To have a comprehensive understanding of UNA and its communication, it is important to talk with the people who create and influence the communications and to the different people who receive the communications. Semi-structured interviews provide this key insight to complement the analysis of UNA communications materials.

This chapter contains the results of interviews with UNA staff and elected officials, highly involved members in the union, and UNA members. Beginning with findings from the interviews that focus on the work done by UNA, I explore the kind of unionism practiced by UNA and how UNA members have come to learn about unions in general and UNA specifically. The second section focuses on the work done by nurses and how this affects UNA's work from the perspective of UNA staff and highly involved members. The third and final section presents results from the different interview groups that focus on UNA's communications with a specific focus on what each group considers the best forms of communication. Overall, the interviews for this study demonstrate the important role union communications and activities play when it comes to a

member's understanding of the union and highlight other key factors such as family members' experiences and education backgrounds for how union members evaluate their unions.

UNA Staff and Perceptions of UNA

UNA

During the seven interviews with the UNA staff and elected official group, all of the participants described UNA's primary activity as negotiating and servicing collective bargaining agreements for their members, most of whom are registered nurses. Aside from the collective bargaining agreements, UNA staff also referred to specific activities related to occupational health and safety (OHS), professional responsibility concerns (PRC), and UNA's education work - all areas to which UNA has staff specifically dedicated. Staff highlighted UNA for representing registered nurses with the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CARNA), which is unique among nurses' unions in Canada. Representing nurses in front of CARNA was considered a natural fit for the organization as advocates for their members and ethically the right thing to do. Representing nurses before the licensing body also helped ensure that nurses had access to lawyers who were knowledgeable in the area and good case law was developed that could potentially help future nurses.

Beyond these activities, participants mentioned roles that UNA has related to social justice issues and political activities. These include lobbying for provincial legislative changes that were considered important to the overall goals of UNA and pushing for a federal pharmacare program. One participant described the need for UNA to be involved in politics in order to effectively represent nurses, stating, 'it's my belief there is no way a union cannot be political. We need to be involved in things like legislative change or at least lobby for changes to legislation, regulations, the

way things are done with government' (Interview 1). For this participant, UNA has a vital role in being politically engaged and lobbying for changes to legislation and regulations that affect nurses' working conditions. A different staff member elaborated, that one of the messages they want to get across to UNA members is that UNA is always there for them but also is there for the public. As they explained: 'You know, we are there for the public. It's not just about us. We are their advocates. Yes, we advocate for our members, we advocate very strongly for our members, but we are advocating for the public as a whole' (Interview 3). Another participant agreed with the general sentiment that UNA must be politically engaged and lamented that the organization did not keep their own members up to date on the various political activities UNA is engaged in on their behalf, stating, 'I don't think we do a good enough job in informing even our own membership sometimes, you know, of the work we do [for them related to politics]' (Interview 2).

Elected officials also discussed how the union was able to work towards different goals with the aim to improve issues for families in Alberta through their connections with other social justice groups and unions. Through campaigns with organizations like Friends of Medicare, Public Interest Alberta, and the Aspen Foundation for Labour Education[10], UNA was able to move beyond goals of simply servicing their members through the collective bargaining agreements.

Unionism

When specifically asked about the kind of union that UNA is, and when provided with definitions of different kind of unionism[11], the vast majority of staff discussed how UNA leaned

[10] The Aspen Foundation for Labour Education advocates for and provides educational materials and teaching resources that cover labour and social justice initiatives for Alberta schools and post-secondary institutions (Aspen Foundation n.d.).

[11] Business unionism focuses almost exclusively on job rewards and material gains (Krahn, Hughes & Lowe 2020), with a narrow focus on collective bargaining (Camfield 2007), and in a top-down style that positions workers as consumers of union goods and services (Martin 2004, p. 38). Social unionism focuses on worker

more towards social unionism than business unionism. Staff talked about the various connections that UNA has to other groups and organizations, as well as the resolutions they had passed during their AGM to support different social initiatives, and the education they provide to UNA members that goes beyond a focus on their collective agreement. This work was justified as 'benefiting [members] in a bigger way' (Interview 7), and staff recognized that '...success on the broader social initiatives is success for them and their families…' (Interview 7).

Some staff members even went so far as to discuss the desire for more social unionism aspects in the future for UNA and other unions. One staff member connected social unionism to union renewal efforts saying, 'if unions are going to continue to grow, we have to be out there in the community. We have to be involved in other issues, other than those that affect our working conditions' (Interview 2). Another staff member lamented how 'the union movement lost the ability to tell a compelling story [when it began to move away from] being a social movement and started focusing on being a business' (Interview 6). In this case, moving beyond business unionism is thought of as one way for unions to stay strong in Canada and presented as a potential avenue for union renewal by union staff.

Highly Involved UNA Members and Perceptions of UNA

When asked what UNA does all six of the highly involved members interviewed first focused on the importance of collective bargaining. Many spoke about how UNA ensured their workplaces were 'fair' and 'equitable' and that workers received 'fair treatment' from the employer. After the negotiation and servicing of the collective bargaining agreement these participants also mentioned the specific work UNA does related to the PRC process and OHS. One participant

participation (Schenk 2004; Tattersall 2009) and connecting unions with other social movements (Hrynyshyn & Ross 2011).

stated that UNA helps make 'sure we have a fair and equitable workplace so that we have all the tools as nurses to take care of the patients that we serve' (Interview 9). Another elaborated further on the connection UNA's work has to patients: '[UNA advocates] for safe client care as well because one of the mottos is 'At Your Side, On Your Side' kind of thing. So, it's not only that they represent nurses, but it's for the betterment of the patients that we deal with' (Interview 10). Two participants went beyond how UNA's work benefits nurses and patients to the community beyond, claiming that UNA prides itself 'on being advocates for both nurses, the working people, and the people in general' (Interview 11) with another stating that 'we want a safe workplace for our members, but we want a safe environment for our patients but we also want the community to be better' (Interview 12). Half of the participants in this group also mentioned UNA's connections with other groups like Friends of Medicare and Public Interest Alberta and the aims of those groups for improving society in general. All of the participants felt that UNA was not just a business union, but one involved and dedicated to improving society for all people.

UNA Members and Perceptions of Unions and UNA

Learning About Unions

During the 10 interviews with UNA members I first asked them how they had come to learn about unions in general before discussing the specifics of UNA. Many of the UNA members interviewed for this research were already knowledgeable about unions from their previous work experiences. Half of the participants had held jobs that were unionized, and the other half had direct family members that had previously been or currently were working in unionized workplaces.

For the members that had held previously jobs that were unionized, most were not really invested in or worried about learning about the unions during their employment. Rather, the members viewed these previous jobs as temporary until they graduated and became nurses. One participant did recall coworkers talking about their pensions and thinking how far off retirement was for her as she was far more concerned about her upcoming university exams.

One member talked about their parents repeatedly encouraging them to find employment with a union, stating, 'I was told repeatedly it encourages job security and that you're going to be treated fairly. And there's going to be someone looking out for your best interests' (Interview 15). Although this encouragement was not the reason this member went into nursing, they did acknowledge that the encouragement was the reason they applied for certain nursing positions over others including only applying for public sector work instead of private or not-for-profit work. Other members discussed how they had a general idea of what unions did for their family members but that their family members never explicitly or actively encouraged them to find unionized employment.

One UNA member reflected on the experiences their family members had with unions and how the general union values aligned with the family's values of taking care of people as a collective and fighting for workers' rights. Still, this person's family tended to associate unions with primarily fighting for their own wages and benefits and not overall improvements for all working people or society. This UNA member, however, did associate unions with improving conditions for all workers as they themselves had experienced some of the rights that unions had fought for outside of workplaces. This member also reflected on the contradiction between their family's values related to unions and their historic voting patterns, saying, 'my parents have always thought unions are great and turned their heads and voted conservative' (Interview 19).

Several members first learned about UNA while they were in nursing programs in school. A few UNA members recalled someone from UNA coming to their classes to discuss the union along with a representative from CARNA. In fact, one member 'credited' their university education for helping prepare them to understand unions and some of the politics in health care. During a class this UNA member learned about unions, particularly about UNA, what the organization 'looks like and where to find it, and obviously, interpretation of policy, procedure, what they're there for' (Interview 22). Still, she felt even though her classes stressed the need to take care of herself to prevent injury and burnout, the union information was 'add-on' information and was not connected to nurses advocating for themselves; instead, as she stated:

> That wasn't really a part of teaching when it came to unions. It was like, 'Hey, just so you know, this exists. This is where you would look if you have an issue related to this'. Period, that's the end of the conversation. Whereas, I would have liked, 'This is what you need. And if you have, let's go through some case studies in what would you do. How would you do it? Let's walk through it'. It would have been nice but didn't happen. (Interview 22)

One UNA member recalled a video[12] about UNA they had seen during a class at university, 'It was a really good video. I actually do remember it quite well' (Interview 20). The UNA member recalled the video covered a general history of the union including larger industrial relations fights and the resulting rights and benefits that nurses in Alberta now enjoy. This instance demonstrates the potential for UNA to be working with post-secondary institutions to communicate their relevance to nurses during their training.

Overall these participants highlight a potentially valuable communications opportunity for UNA to reach nurses while they are in school and before they enter the workforce fulltime. This may be a pivotal time for nurses to learn about the relevance of their union.

[12] The participant described a video UNA had made for an anniversary event.

Another member learned about unions in general through a play about the Winnipeg General Strike that UNA had sent them to. The experience of this play, along with her personal interaction with UNA had even changed this member's understandings of unions:

> I think when I first started working, I was more against unions because I felt they protected workers who weren't as good or allowed everyone to be an equal wage when they weren't necessarily deserving of equal wage. But I see that more as - that may still be true but on a whole, I think they have far more benefits than they do downsides. There are people who are protected by the unions who maybe shouldn't be working in their respective fields. But at the same time, our workplaces are far safer and far more pleasant places to be and the - your average person has benefited more because of the unions than has been harmed. (Interview 14)

Overall, the interviews with UNA members demonstrates the importance of UNA reaching out to members in different ways in order to educate them about UNA and the labour movement in general. Many UNA members have previous experience with unions, although none in this research were actively involved with their previous unions. Many UNA members also had family members that were or are union members although only a few were encouraged to find unionized work based on their family members' experiences. One UNA member highlighted the impact of general labour movement communications in the form of art, more specifically a theatre production, that UNA sent them to. The experience of this union member is significant as they credited this theatre production as helping change their view of unions completely.

UNA

Fairness/Advocate

Generally, the UNA members who participated in this research project have a good understanding of what UNA does in relation to their collective bargaining, especially as it relates to their shift scheduling, benefits, and wages. One participant noted that UNA has done well in 'advocating with [their] collective agreement [to make] sure that we have good benefits and wages' (Interview 17). Another participant noted that UNA protects our 'rights and kind of our jobs so that we can't be wrongfully dismissed or wrongfully taken advantage of by the employers or [they] protect our rights as employees, [and UNA] keeps our managers from being able to walk all over and do whatever they like' (Interview 18). A different participant spoke specifically about how UNA helped monitor employers, stating:

> I think they bridge the gap and kind of like monitor to make sure that Alberta Health Services is treating us properly. I think it's very easy to kind of go over the lines of like - we have the contract and the big thing. I know that the union kind of vouches for us to write that contract, make amendments based on what the nurses are saying and then present that to Alberta Health Services and then monitor that throughout the life of the contract and then write a new contract again. (Interview 16)

Another participant even described UNA as a 'professional parent' in that 'they looked out for you and primarily you and only you' (Interview 19). This role for UNA was juxtaposed to the role this participant felt their managers have, to look out for workers but 'also the bottom line' (Interview 19) of their department financially.

Several UNA members spoke about UNA as their own advocate, acknowledging the role the union has in representing nurses legally and trying to maintain a standard for them across different

working environments while also serving as 'an advocate for [nurses'] rights' (Interview 20). Another participant directly stated that UNA is an advocate for safe patient care claiming that UNA is there to speak for 'nurses and making the work that registered nurses do known to the public as well as advocating for safe patient care and safe workplace environments or our student nurses' (Interview 14). Another participant talked about knowing they could turn to UNA if they ever faced employment issues, 'if I ever have difficulties with my contract or how I've been treated at work in terms of what was provided to me or expected of me I would be able to contact them' (Interview 15).

Even members who had never had any personal contact with UNA were aware of UNA's role in establishing protections stating that they were 'really thankful for the things that they do to fight with policy making to ensure that we're getting fair treatment' (Interview 20).

One UNA member also brought up the role UNA played in advocating for RNs in the face of deskilling specifically. For this member, UNA 'certainly help to advocate for RNs in the workforce as far as entering our scope of practice and the discussion with RNs being replaced by LPNs. I think they're helping to advocate to ensure that our role maintains a strong position in the Alberta health care system' (Interview 17). Another member took this further and talked about how UNA even advocated and helped translate the work RNs do for the public stating:

> the union are the ones that portray the image to the public of why nursing is an important profession and why people trust nurses because they kind of take a - I feel like they take that image where people believe that nursing was a calling or some sort of, kind of angelic gift from the heavens - and they render it a lot more accessible and make us look more capable and more professionally trained and intellectually capable people. (Interview 19)

Multiple UNA members discussed the experiences their colleagues had under different unions and how they felt their collective bargaining agreement gave them better protections and

benefits in the workplace. Some UNA members talked about the experience their family members had with unions in different sectors and how UNA was seen as the 'gold standard' for unions and collective agreements in Alberta. A few members also had experience with nursing unions in different provinces and spoke positively about how UNA, stating, 'I was excited when I came back [to Alberta] because I've heard amazing things about UNA' (Interview 19).

The majority of UNA members in this research had a positive view of UNA. Generally, UNA members were able to describe the role UNA had in collective bargaining, the process for bargaining, as well as describe how UNA services the collective agreement. Some members also described the PRC process or how UNA represents RNs during CARNA investigations. The more a UNA member understood about UNA, as demonstrated by their description of UNA's activities, the more they appreciated the work that was being done and had a positive view of UNA. As well, members that had faced issues and gone to UNA for help generally came away from that experience with a better understanding of the organization and in most cases an appreciation for UNA: 'The more I learn about them, the more I appreciate the role that they play for us' (Interview 16). Overall, UNA members believe UNA makes sure that nurses are treated fairly at work and the organization is there to advocate on behalf of UNA members in different situations.

Confusion

A small minority of UNA members in this research seemed to have out-dated, inaccurate, or a partial understanding of some aspects of UNA's work. One member was confused about changes in legislation from 2011 that affected nurses' ability to go on strike, believing that prior to this legislation nurses had the full ability to go on strike. This member believed that UNA no longer had much capacity to bargain for nurses in Alberta as a result of the legislative changes prohibiting nurses from striking.

Several UNA members also spoke about their confusion between CARNA and UNA. Although most participants understood UNA is a union and CARNA is a professional association, they were unclear about some of the roles and responsibilities of each organization, how they interacted with each other, and their respective newsletters. Any confusion between CARNA and UNA however did not seem to correlate with a negative view of either UNA or CARNA.

Negatives

Three UNA members discussed what they viewed as negative aspects of unions in general when talking about UNA. One member discussed how UNA protected nurses that should no longer be working as nurses. This same member also discussed how UNA was only around their work unit when a nurse was getting in trouble with either the employer or CARNA and how this resulted in a negative association with the union and improper conduct of nurses. Another UNA member mentioned, 'I feel like some of the protections around unionization can sometimes promote people maybe not doing their best as well' (Interview 20). For both of these cases, the union was positioned as the reason bad nurses were able to continue to work as nurses.

Another member mentioned how UNA was not very present on their unit even though the RNs on the unit were facing issues. This member talked about their unit having a lot of scheduling issues and when the members reached out to UNA the person they reached out to seemed hesitant to help. Eventually UNA did become involved and the scheduling issues were resolved but the whole process left the member feeling hesitant to contact UNA again.

Two members also brought up issues they faced regarding seniority and scheduling and attributed these issues to UNA. One member mentioned how she worked full-time alongside other members who worked part-time. When the part-time workers were brought in on their designated days off, they are paid at a higher rate according to this member which left her feeling frustrated that

she was doing the same work but not being compensated at the same level. This same member also assumed she was paying more in union dues because of her full-time status than the workers who were classified as part-time. Another member reflected on being passed over for a job that she applied for because her seniority did not count since she had previously only worked casual positions, whereas someone who she had trained successfully got the job because this other person was already in a full-time position. When this UNA member followed up with human resources, she was told this was a UNA rule and not an employer rule.

Two members also discussed their displeasure with the amount of money taken from their paycheque for what they considered union dues. One member stated:

> To be honest with you, I don't think unions are the best things. I mean it helps like I said with pay and nobody is going to complain about that. But I think that - I think there is a lot of money in my honest opinion, I think there's a lot of money spent - like comes off my paycheck - every paycheck, every month - for things, and I don't think I get that in return. I don't get value in return for what I'm paying for. (Interview 21)

These members that expressed displeasure at the amounts being taken off of their pay were also, at times, confused about the amounts being taken for UNA and the amounts being taken for their pension plans.

Several members brought up their desire to become more involved with UNA; however, one discussed their hesitancy to become involved for fear that they would be turned down for potential future management positions in AHS. As they explained: 'I'm hesitant to get involved with unions in some way because if ever I want to move up to management, I don't want it to be viewed as a detraction from an application' (Interview 23).

Another member who wanted to be involved felt uncertain where they could fit in with UNA after an experience they had during a disciplinary meeting. This member felt one UNA representative was more aggressive and had a 'larger than life presence' that may not allow enough space for them to make the kind of contributions to UNA they would like.

Although a minority of members had some negative opinions about UNA, many thought there was immense value in having a union and tended to focus on the services the union provided to them, including ensuring that they are treated 'fairly' by their employer. Despite the numerous communications avenues that UNA uses, interviews with the general members demonstrate that there is still a breakdown in communications with some members on a number of fronts, including dues amounts, seniority rules, the right to strike, UNA's relationship with CARNA, and how members can become involved with UNA. Overall, these communication breakdowns are great opportunities for reflection and a chance to help inform members and potentially get more members involved with the union.

UNA Staff and the Nursing Profession

Nurses

When discussing the work nurses do, many UNA staff and elected officials repeatedly stressed that the care work done by nurses was different from the work done by other workers in health care. Some stressed that 'the care that is delivered by a registered nurse is unique, that it's not the same care that can be delivered by all health care people' (Interview 2). Others emphasized that each care provider has a different 'role', and that there was a 'role' for all different people, 'We see a role for the registered nurse. We see a role for registered psych nurses, nurse practitioners, LPNs,

health care aides, but you can't clump them all together and say that each one is capable of doing the same job' (Interview 1).

During our conversations, staff also touched on issues that nurses sometimes face when people draw distinctions between different health care providers—for instance, feelings of inadequacy for workers who are presented as less skilled and less educated. While addressing some of the tensions that UNA members sometimes feel, staff were persistent in presenting RNs as unique among health care providers and noting that RNs needed at times to defend their status and ensure that other health care providers were not misrepresented as RNs. Said one:

> It doesn't matter what your qualifications are. You worked hard to achieve them, and you should be proud of them. And to say you're an LPN, it's not something to be ashamed of. It's something you should be proud of. At no point should you ever try to pass yourself off as a registered nurse or to think that you have the same qualifications as a registered nurse. (Interview 4)

One participant noted the difficulty in getting RNs to emphasize their skills and education over their coworkers, stating, 'some RNs have a sense of guilt almost that, well, 'I'm talking bad about my coworkers'. No. You're not talking bad about your coworkers' (Interview 7). This participant shifted the argument though to center on patients and their rights to know which health care group was providing them care, stating 'That every single patient has a right to know how many registered nurses, how many licensed practical nurses are providing care for that group of patients, ...[patients] have a right to know [who is providing care]' (Interview 7).

Another theme that came up repeatedly in talking about the work that nurses do was how overworked nurses are and how this impacts the quality of care that patients receive. It was widely recognized by UNA staff that nurses were often overworked. When talking about workloads a 0.8

full time equivalent (FTE) was considered 'physically and emotionally exhausting' (Interview 3). Some staff even spoke about how 'employers don't really care how overworked the nurses are', rather this staff member felt employers only cared about 'the quality of care a patient is receiving' (Interview 2). According to this staff member, employers would only be motivated to change workplace conditions once they understood the connection between working environments and the quality of patient care. Recognizing that employers cared about the quality of care that patients receive was one of the reasons that UNA stressed the connection between quality of care and working conditions of nurses in their communications materials.

The UNA staff and elected officials also believe that communicating this connection between working conditions and patient care resonates with UNA members. Participants talked about how for nurses 'it always will come back to the delivery of safe patient care' (Interview 2) and that nurses are 'there for the patients, ultimately' (Interview 7). This was one of the 'key messages' UNA returned to again and again, stating that 'members feel very strongly about [this]' (Interview 5) and that 'Advocating for patient care, for patient safety is a huge part of their role as they see themselves as a profession' (Interview 5). Staff would consistently bring up the PRC process as an effective tool nurses had to advocate for their patients that is backed up by the collective bargaining agreement that UNA negotiates.

Some staff suggested that the message of nurses as advocates needed to be pushed further than it currently is to include how important nurses are when it comes to policy decisions affecting health care. These staff members felt that nurses were an important profession that should be consulted by government and employers when it comes to health care policy (Interviews 6 & 5).

Women

Some of the participants noted the importance of nurses in Alberta being a profession dominated by women. According to interviews with UNA staff, a sizable portion of nurses in Alberta - about 25-30 per cent - are technically categorized as part-time workers. Even among UNA staff, there was some debate over the reasons why so many nurses have opted for part-time work. As mentioned in some of the previous interview excerpts, some staff suggested that the daily workload was too much for nurses and this resulted in high levels of burnout and nurses choosing to take on fewer hours of paid nursing work. Other staff suggested that nurses opted for part-time work that was more compatible with their workload at home, noting: 'because they're predominately female and they have all sorts of other obligations that predominately male unions don't have – their members don't have to, you know, make sure supper is cooked tonight and all of that sort of thing. So, it's a lot easier for them to day to day – a lot of nurses prefer to work part time' (Interview 4). These suggested explanations are not mutually exclusive, as a stressful workload at work could also be incompatible with a worker's home life and workload at home. However, it was noted that since nurses are predominantly female, they do often have a substantial workload at home, and that this may impact their choice to work part- or full-time beyond workplace stressors.

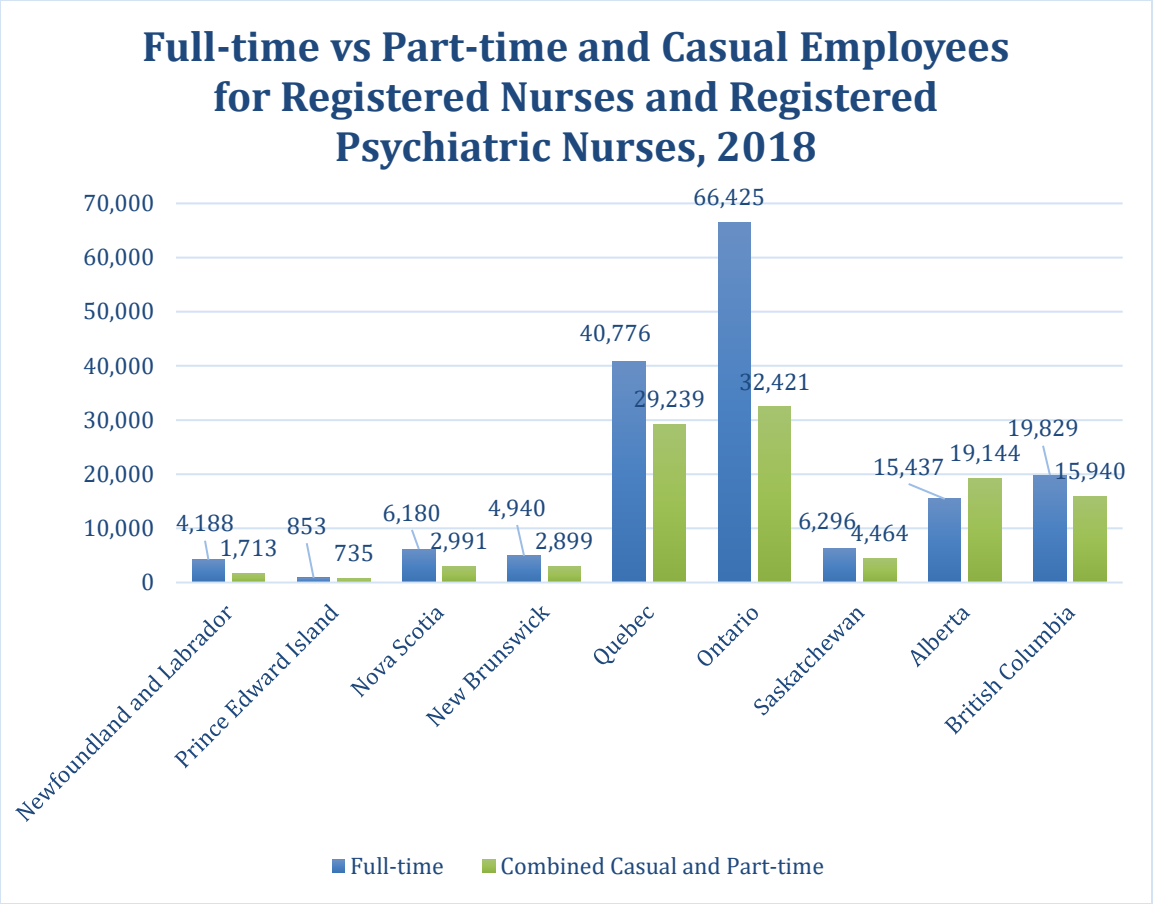

Figure 4 Full-time vs Part-time and Casual Employees for Registered Nurses and Registered Psychiatric Nurses, 2018

(Canadian Institute for Health Information 2018)

Data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) would suggest that there is something else happening in Alberta compared to other provinces. Compared to the other provinces, Alberta is the only province with more registered nurses working casual and part-time comprising just over 55% of the Alberta nursing workforce. The CIHI figures also suggest that more nurses are working part-time and casual than some UNA staff are aware of. Other provinces also have a predominantly female workforce as RNs, yet, they do not have the same rates of part-time employment in this field as Alberta. The potential reasons for the larger rates of part-time nurses in Alberta are well beyond this dissertation but may include employer or employee factors

(which positions are created and offered to workers or the positions that attract the most workers) or external to the employment relationship (for instance, the availability of childcare).

Highly Involved UNA Members and the Nursing Profession

Nurses

When discussing the work that nurses do with participants that are highly involved with UNA, there were two general themes. The first was the distinct education and skills that a registered nurse brings to health care and how this compared to other health care workers, and the second was the representation of what a nurse looks like to the general public.

Similar to the findings from the UNA staff, one highly involved participant explained how RNs brought a specific skill and education to the health care setting that was different than what other health professionals brought, saying, 'RNs have the ability, the assessment skills and the training and the education to do that right job' (Interview 9). This participant also echoed what UNA staff had said regarding each health care provider having their role but went further in delineating out specific leadership roles for RNs, stating 'although our support team, such as the LPNs, the HCs, the OTs, PTs and everything have their place in our team, but we believe that the RNs are at a level that they need to be in charge and they need to make a lot of the decisions as far as care goes' (Interview 9). Another participant described how she goes around her unit and tries to ensure that all the RNs have written their designation after their name on the whiteboards in patient rooms: 'You worked hard for that. You should be proud of it. Put it on the board. Let them know that you bring something special' (Interview 8). These whiteboards are designed to introduce the care provider to patients and have a general spot labeled 'nurse' where RNs, LPNs and health care

aides will write their names. In response to this participant's action, she said a lot of the RNs will roll their eyes, but she just tells them that she is proud of them.

As previously acknowledged by the UNA staff members, the highly involved participants talked about their discomfort in differentiating themselves from other health care providers. One participant talked about how differentiating themselves from the other health care providers based on their education made them personally uncomfortable and they did not want their coworkers thinking they thought they were better than them. One participant felt it would be degrading to the LPNs if she walked around all the time talking about how she was an RN and that was special compared to the LPN's training and skills.

Some of the participants also described there being a hierarchy within registered nurses where nurses in highly technical, urban, fields were often thought to be better than nurses in rural and more generalist, fields. For example, nurses in intensive care units were generally thought to be better and more skilled nurses than those in long-term care settings. For the members that pointed this out, this hierarchy of nurses seemed to be connected to the hierarchy of health care providers that put nurses on top. Distinctions drawn outside of the RN group seemed to make it easy to also draw distinctions within the RN group.

The other theme that came out when talking about the role of nurses with the highly involved UNA members was how nurses were presented to the public. At times the participants felt that UNA's communications, especially around the collective agreement, tended to only apply to those that worked for AHS or Covenant Health[13] or nurses in urban settings. These nurses talked about the provincial updates regarding collective bargaining that only focused on the largest collective bargaining agreement and not the many other agreements that UNA is also party to. These

[13] Covenant Health is a Catholic health care provider in Alberta. Covenant Health runs 17 hospitals and nursing homes across Alberta (Covenant Health 2020).

participants stated they felt 'left out' of the UNA's communications. One participant that had previously worked in public health highlighted how UNA communications often focused on nurses wearing scrubs and stethoscopes, which excluded nurses working in community and public health settings that often do not wear scrubs. This person focused on how visually excluding the variety of roles RNs have has limited the public's understanding of what nurses do in their communities and outside of hospitals. The focus on hospital-based nursing also seemed to reaffirm the hierarchy within the RN group that prioritized specific types of nursing over others.

UNA Staff and UNA Communications

Communications

Nurses as distinct and advocates

Two central themes in UNA communications concern nurses as a distinct profession in a health care setting and the idea of nurses being advocates for their patients. UNA staff and elected officials often framed their activities around enabling nurses to provide safe patient care as this was presented as the ultimate goal: 'at the end of the day, it's what it's all about, is safe patient care. Even much of our bargaining really at the end of the day is about safe patient care' (Interview 1). This participant elaborated specifically that money and vacation days are not the ultimate goal for UNA collective agreement negotiations, rather 'it's about providing safe patient care' (Interview 1).

Two campaigns were mentioned during interviews with staff and elected officials, the Wear White Wednesday campaign and the At Your Side, On Your Side slogan as further evidence that the ultimate goal is safe patient care. Wear White Wednesday was a campaign that promoted nurses wearing white on Wednesday so that patients and their families could identify who was a nurse and

who was not. The idea behind the campaign was to draw attention to how few nurses were actually working in some of the health care settings and promote nurses as distinct for their education and skills compared to other health care workers. This campaign directly addresses what Adams and Nelson (2009) found in their research, that RNs are often trained to make their work, and by extension themselves, invisible in the health care settings. When discussing the Wear White Wednesday campaign, one staff member said the campaign was about 'getting back pride in our profession' and for the public to be able to distinguish what a nurse looked like (Interview 7). Wearing white was seen as one way for RNs to stand out among other health care providers. Overall there were conflicted evaluations of the success of this these campaigns with some staff touting the Wear White Wednesday success and the organic uptake across different locals, and other staff lamenting the lack of uptake across the province.

The At Your Side, On Your Side was more of a slogan used across various UNA communications to relay that UNA was at the side of nurses and on their side as advocates in the workplace and beyond, similar to how nurses were at the sides of their patients as well as on their sides as advocates for their care. UNA staff felt the At Your Side campaign 'resonated' with UNA members but also with the public and government decision makers who could also understand how nurses were there for patients and then how UNA was there for nurses. Another participant even remarked that the slogan 'meant advocating in the broader political context' (Interview 7) suggesting that UNA was there for nurses beyond their immediate working conditions to affect change at a broader level. Another staff participant went further, talking about the goal of 'convincing policymakers that nurses are stars' and 'that nurses should also be involved in the policymaking process and the policy decision process' (Interview 5). Nursing as a profession was also used by this participant to help justify a role for nurses in health care policy, stating that:

> … nurses are valuable to the health care system, but registered nurses are also a profession. And they're not only valuable on the frontlines of health care, but they're also valuable in terms of determining the future of health care, determining the future of policy. They should be a group that is consulted by government, for example, when changes are being made and improvements are being made to the health care system. (Interview 5)

Importance of Communications

The importance of communications is clear in how UNA is organized. UNA has two communications officers, and they also have their own Information Technology (IT) Department. The dedication to IT has enabled the union to incorporate and use different technology including the in-house creation of their own app (UNA), and redesign of their own website. Some staff recalled how UNA created a Director of Information System position in the 1990s before other peer unions and the role this department had in connecting UNA members. When UNA members were elected as Local presidents a representative from this department would 'go down to their house and say, 'Congratulations. Here is a computer. Here's a modem. Here's the printer and this is how you work it' ' (Interview 4).

UNA understood the value of computerized communication and worked to ensure their local executives had the technology and education to take advantage of it. Another participant discussed how UNA was an early adopter of computer communication and that it was the first nurses' union in Canada with their own app: 'We've certainly moved, not necessarily at lightning speed, but we caught up with things like Facebook and the app and all that. But we were very early on' (Interview 7). Having staff dedicated to communications and technology has allowed UNA to use these tools to better serve UNA members as a union. For example, in developing the UNA

app[14], staff focused on lowering barriers for UNA members to report concerns which was seen as giving back the 'ability to say you're got your collective agreement in your pocket if you got a question' (Interview 7). The ability to have the collective bargaining agreements quickly on hand for UNA members is seen as 'reducing barriers to people being able to access either information or people' (Interview 7) in regard to the union.

Having different options, like the app as well as Facebook and their own website also gives individual UNA members the ability to have information across different platforms and for them to use the platform they are most comfortable with. One staff member also noted that UNA recognized 'that a lot of our members are online already. So instead of getting them to come to us, we need to go them' (Interview 5). By creating 'online communities' or 'online destinations' (Interview 5) UNA was meeting their members where they already were to provide another avenue for potential connections and information through Facebook and Twitter.

The same principles of lowering barriers were also described as influencing the redesign of the UNA website. The website redesign placed a 'Report a Concern' button on the front page where any person with an employee number with an employer that UNA bargains with can report an OHS, PRC, or collective agreement issue to UNA. This is opposed to the paper forms that some unions still require their members to fill out in writing and then submit to the union or employer.

UNANet

UNA's dedication to using technology to advance the goals of the union also extends to their early development of an intranet. Many of the UNA staff mentioned that UNANet was unique to UNA especially among other nurses' unions in Canada. Overall UNANet was touted as 'a great

[14] UNA App was largely modelled after the most popular features of the UNA website and includes collective bargaining agreements and the ability to report OHS, PRC and agreement concerns. At the time of the interview UNA had 4,000-5,0000 downloads for their app.

source of information, a great source of education, and a great source of communication' (Interview 2). It was talked about as a way for union leaders to learn what was happening at other worksites and connect with different locals over similar issues being faced. The system was also discussed in terms of how convenient it was for shift workers to stay up to date and have access to confidential information whenever they had time available. To ensure timely information staff were generally expected to answer questions within 24 hours which showcases the creep of social media into their work lives as well as the pervasiveness of organizational life and expectations about work delivery with new technology. Several staff described UNANet as the best form of communication that UNA had with its members. Overall UNANet was seen as a great resource; however, one that was predominantly used by union leaders and activists rather than the general membership.

Social Media

UNA staff generally thought of Facebook and Twitter as having different audiences. Facebook was seen as speaking more to UNA members and a place for members to publicly discuss ideas. Many members were already on Facebook when UNA decided to really engage with social media back in 2009-2010. The audience for Twitter tended to be more external to the organization. Twitter was seen as an 'outside voice' that tended to not have as much interaction with UNA members. The focus of Twitter was generally sharing news stories, retweeting articles from labour and health care partners, and promoting campaigns. The Twitter audience was thought to be made up of media, politicians, policymakers, and organizations with connections to UNA.

Censorship

When discussing censorship or the need to delete remarks on any of the communication pages staff remarked how infrequently this actually happened: 'I've had a few things removed in

[UNANet], but I will follow up with the local and say we're removed this and this is why. I don't spend any time thinking about it because it happens so rarely for us' (Interview 1).

For the publicly-facing communications there was not a great fear over what UNA members or others may say, rather UNA staff felt 'As long as you're being respectful, I don't see any problems with people disagreeing in the comment section of a Facebook page. That's the whole point of the comment [section]' (Interview 5). Rather than fearing any disagreement or dissidence from UNA members, Facebook comment sections were actually seen as a place for people to agree or disagree in a respectful manner. Generally, comments were only deleted if there were thought to be libellous or profane, or they were clearly spam. If a comment was deleted the UNA staff generally addressed it in the comment section asking people to keep the discussion respectful and a reminder that the UNA Facebook page is public. Generally, there was an understanding that people can become 'passionate' about issues and there is not an intention to cause problems.

Highly Involved UNA Members and UNA Communications

Communication

When discussing communications with the highly involved group of participants, their general comments could be divided out into two categories: communicating with central UNA and communicating with UNA members. These participants tended to use different tools and methods for gathering information from UNA central and then for communicating with UNA members who are part of their locals or districts.

Communicating with Central UNA

All of the participants said that UNANet, and by extension their access to UNANet through the app, was the main form of communication between them and central UNA. For those participants that were at the district level, UNANet was also the main form of communication with the locals for which they were responsible. Generally, these participants believed they were expected to check their UNANet at least daily if not more often. Participants overwhelmingly praised the many positive features of UNANet including the ability to post questions, send emails that can be tracked for who reads them and when, and how much information the site has in general. As one person noted: 'I actually post my question and it gets answered. That's one aspect of [UNANet] that is just phenomenal' (Interview 11).

Ironically, participants also lamented that the site has so much information that it can be difficult to handle at times. Said one: 'I love it because everything is there. I hate it because it's sometimes really difficult to find [specific information]' (Interview 12). It seems that the abundance of information available on UNANet was considered simultaneously great 'because there is so much information' (Interview 12) but also, 'difficult to navigate and it can get overwhelming' (Interview 12) at the same time. Another participated noted the abundance of information could also take up a lot of time if people were not able to prioritize which information was important for them, 'We have a lot of access to a ton of information as far as members and or executive teams. You could be reading all day and never get the rest of the work done just because there is so much information that's offered' (Interview 9).

Many participants said they and others they know had a difficult time learning to use the UNANet interface. Some participants recalled the training they received where a person from UNA would walk them through the program and show them the various features. However, that training was not completely adequate, as one participant noted, 'I did have somebody who helped me, but

they didn't know what I didn't know. I didn't know what I didn't know. Again, I had to learn the hard way, that kind of thing' (Interview 10). Other participants talked about people who have used UNANet for decades and were still learning about new features on the program when educational sessions were offered. Another participant described how they try to train other UNA members on how to use UNANet by going over it with them for an hour or two. And although many participants felt the program was not 'user-friendly' and a bit dated aesthetically, it was still identified as the most useful form of communication they had at their disposal. One participant commented that UNANet provided 'Many opportunities just to go to a conference just to find out what people are thinking of and what kind of questions that they have asked and what kinds of answers they are getting from our labour relations officers or direct or people in finance' (Interview 13). Also, one participant mentioned how UNANet provided an avenue for the union to '...have our ducks in a row…' behind the scenes before having a unified front for the public (Interview 11). In this sense, UNANet was also a tool that helps ensure that highly involved UNA members have access to the same information and messaging.

Communicating with UNA Members

Most of the participants gave positive remarks about the quarterly NewsBulletin that UNA produces. For the highly involved group, however, most of the information was considered dated as they had usually seen reports on the same topics through other communication avenues such as UNANet, noting that 'a lot of the stuff we already get and we should be aware of because we're the executive team before it comes out in the newsletter' (Interview 9). Two participants said they still flipped through the bulletin when it arrived at their home just to check out the pictures. One even had their mother ask for a copy when the participant was featured in the bulletin. There was also a clear message from interviews with this group that this form of communication was more valuable

to them before they became involved with the union and started using other communications methods with UNA such as UNANet.

Another important way three participants communicated with UNA members was with their own phones - some of which were funded through their locals - to keep their members updated through text and different messaging services such as Facebook Messenger or What's App. However, when these participants discussed using their phones, they also described their members as being 'spoiled' for having such an easy way to contact them. Even then, one of the participants said, 'So I don't mind [the texting] so much, but I don't always love feeling like I'm on call.' (Interview 8) Other participants tended to avoid texting or calling as their main way of communicating with their local(s).

Social media, mainly Facebook, was one of the key ways this group of participants communicated with their locals, especially if they were the president of a local. As previously mentioned, many of the highly involved participants, did not rely on Facebook for their own communications with UNA but rather used UNANet. Speaking about the main UNA Facebook page, one participant mentioned that UNANet worked well for people involved with UNA whereas Facebook was better suited for general UNA members, 'I think Facebook actually works really well for them. I think they use that more than they would actually go to the [UNA] website' (Interview 13).

Some of the participants had their own Facebook pages for their own Locals where they would post information they felt was relevant to their Local. At times this was also connected with a Local's own website. The majority of participants from this group used the private group and chat functions on Facebook to communicate with members rather than have public-facing pages. In the private groups, people gave updates about the union or PRC processes and also the nurses used the private groups to trade shifts. Most participants said that Facebook was an easy platform to use; they

had instant notifications on their phones that made it easy to interact on the site in a timely manner, and most of them were already using it in the first place: 'I'm already there anyways' (Interview 8) said one UNA member who has been involved for over a decade.

One participant described Facebook as turning into yet another avenue of communication they felt obligated to check when they would rather have members email them directly. There was also a concern with Facebook being a public interface:

> It's just more to navigate. I've got an email. I'm on my email 24/7. Send me an email, call, or contact us somehow. But then now I have to then go to Facebook to see what was posted on Facebook for that - as well, because Facebook is quite public, right? It's a public venue. We can control. We can delete. We'd just prefer not to. It's just one more piece of work for us but we're busy, we don't need to do that. (Interview 10)

Very few of the participants used Twitter to communicate with either their members or central UNA. When the locals did have Twitter accounts, they mainly kept connections with other nursing organizations.

UNA Members and UNA Communications

Communications

Introductions and Informal Conversations

The main way UNA members learned about UNA and received updates was from casual conversation with their coworkers. One member said she was not even aware that she had to sign up to be a UNA member and that if she gave her email, she could also get regular updates sent to her until a co-worker informed her.

Several UNA members recalled their unit representatives talking to them in person shortly after they began working. Often during these exchanges, the unit representatives would offer some options for staying in touch and informed. Some unit representatives simply gave the UNA members their cell phone numbers and instructed the member to contact them if they ever had any questions. Other unit representatives would add new nurses to email list or private Facebook groups.

Several of the UNA members were not aware if their units had representatives at the time or who the representative may be. These participants without unit representatives tended to rely more on informal conversations with their coworkers to learn about UNA or relied on unit representatives from other units.

Local Meetings and the AGM

Local meetings have the potential to be a good source of interactive, back and forth, communication between UNA leaders and members but many of the UNA members had never actually attended these meetings. Members talked about how the meetings were often scheduled either right before or right after long shifts and they simply could not fit them into their schedules. In one Local, some members asked for meeting times to be changed but nothing came of it. One UNA member recalled not feeling welcome at the meetings when they tried to attend, stating that the meeting seemed 'like more of a club' (Interview 15) that did not include them. Members who did attend their local meetings found that, overall, the meetings were poorly attended, and they were not motivated to attend again.

Locals in community nursing put on educational sessions for their members that usually included dinner and, at times, some form of entertainment. Several members who had been in these locals talked positively about these events, the information they gained, and the people they met

through these functions who they consider to be resources if they have questions related to the union. Overall, the UNA members who attended these dinners found them to be valuable and well attended by other members, which was opposed to the Local meetings.

Two of the participants had previous attended UNA's AGMs and found these meetings were generally a good way of learning more about UNA. Still, the two people had different experiences in the value of the AGM. One UNA member did not find much value and described the AGM as time off work for some people, where 'they bring their knitting and their snacks' (Interview 23) and listen to UNA elected officials talk about the work they have done over the year. For this participant, what was missing was the chance for newer and younger members to really talk with elected officials about the issues they are facing and the needs they have as UNA members. Rather, older nurses who were already quite involved with UNA seemed to be able to have their concerns heard at the AGM, and executive officers had plenty of actions to recommend to the general members. But this member felt frustrated overall with the lack of change in the issues that nurses were repeatedly facing: 'I didn't really think that they were really listening to what anyone was saying. It was what was on their agenda' (Interview 23). Overall this participant found the AGM to be a one-sided form of communication— from central UNA out to the general members — when it was an excellent opportunity for two-way communication and was left frustrated. Even when general members did have an opportunity to bring forth their concerns, this member did not think they were listened to in a meaningful way with adequate follow-up to address their concerns.

The other participant who had attended an AGM found the meeting to be very informative and it motivated her to attend more than once. This participant also noted that people at the beginning of their nursing career seemed to be missing from participating in the union, that generally 'it was a lot of older people' who were involved (Interview 16). For this participant, the AGM was a chance to really learn about the union and understand how it functioned.

Newsletter and Email

At least three participants confirmed that they do receive and read the UNA newsletter, one of those participants considered this the main method of communication with UNA, and when brought up during the interviews two participants expressed a desire to start receiving the newsletter. The newsletter was noted by a participant as particularly effective because they received a physical copy, 'When you mail something to me like their newsletters, I actually do read them. I like to see what's going on. I find those are interesting. Something in my hands is just better than anything on the phone' (Interview 16). Even when UNA members did not fully read the newsletter, the majority who received it spent some time flipping through it and looking at headlines and photos. Two participants were not aware that a newsletter existed but expressed a desire to start receiving it.

Several UNA members talked about how it was at times difficult to differentiate which communications came from UNA and which communications came from CARNA. Several people had trouble recalling which newsletter or magazine they were receiving and if it was the UNA one or the CARNA one. Multiple participants brought up the CARNA magazine when asked about the UNA NewsBulletin. One participant (Interview 15) needed clarification if the newsletter they received came from CARNA or UNA. And another participant (Interview 19) first said they did receive the newsletter from UNA but during the interview checked their mail and realized it was actually the magazine from CARNA that they were receiving and reading.

Half of the UNA member participants talked about receiving email communications from UNA. Three participants reported that email was one of the main ways they stayed up to date and their preferred this method of communication. For these three participants, their unit representative is the one that sends out information and usually will ask the UNA members for their preferred email when they introduced themselves in-person during working hours. One UNA member reported their UNA representative simply used the workplace listserv to send out emails.

UNANet and UNA App

Less than half of the UNA members in this study were aware of UNANet. Of those that were aware, most used the system to apply for funding, leave of absences for union business or training, or for the AGM. For the UNA members who used UNANet, they found the system to be dated and cumbersome to navigate. Some participants found the information on UNANet tended to be for people heavily involved in UNA and the sheer amount of information available was overwhelming. When asked if they found UNANet easy to navigate one participant responded no 'because it's not my first go-to' (Interview 18). For this participant they simply did not have the time to learn the UNANet system and would rather rely on other sources of information if they had a question, such as talking to their coworkers. The same sentiment was echoed by another participant who talked about using UNANet for the most basic features stating 'I know it's capable of other things but I haven't really [looked into] at this point…I find it cumbersome to kind of get into' (Interview 14). This participant also described the content on UNANet as being 'intricate union business' (Interview 14) and not really something that may interest the general nursing population.

Just over half of the UNA member participants were aware that UNA had an app. Only one of those participants reported using the app to search the collective bargaining agreement but they found the formatting on their phone to be confusing. Another participant reported using the app for the UNA AGM and then deleting it because it was taking up space on their phone. Overall, the app was not well known or commonly used by the UNA members interviewed.

Social Media

About half of the UNA members interviewed used Facebook or Twitter as their main method of keeping up to date on UNA activities. Only one person actively followed UNA on Twitter while the others received their information through Facebook. Of the participants that used

Facebook as their main way of keeping up to date, only a few actively followed the main UNA Facebook page. The other participants followed the Facebook page for their Locals or were in a private group or chat with other RNs from their unit. Some participants could not recall if they were connected to the main UNA Facebook page or that of their own Local.

When units or Locals have their own private chat or group on Facebook UNA is not the main focus of the group - but rather the unit they all work on. The group chat is used to update people if they need to be updated in regards to new things from UNA, but it also used to exchange shifts, talk about skills training opportunities, and other work-related information.

Best UNA Communications

All three interview groups were asked what they considered the best and most important form of communication that UNA currently uses. Just under half of all three interview groups— the staff and elected officers, heavily involved UNA members, and the general UNA members – included people who preferred in-person conversations over other forms of communication, despite the difficulty of reaching the tens of thousands of UNA members. UNA staff and highly involved people found these conversations helped keep them informed with what was going on with members and UNA members often found these kinds of conversations the most informative as they could ask questions that directly related to their working conditions. One highly involved participant described the practice of their Local to go around different sites with a coffee cart for the purpose of talking with members and seeing how things were going. This participant found this practice was especially effective during evening and night shifts, stating, '[the nurses are] really receptive and because when management isn't around, they talk a little bit more' (Interview 9). Another similar face-to-face practice was meet-and-greets that a community-based local would host that were

previously mentioned. These events allowed dues-payers to come out for an evening where they would have an educational session along with dinner.

One UNA member (Interview 15) suggested that the ward reps or shop stewards on each floor should make more of an effort to introduce themselves to new hires so that people had a local point of contact if they had questions about the union: 'I think it would be really nice that I know who to go to if I have questions rather than having to send a formal email or call, I think' (Interview 15). Other UNA members echoed this desire, stressing the importance of in-person communication, especially for the unit representative to make an effort to meet new UNA members in person in the first few weeks they join a unit.

A few UNA members wanted to see some changes to the meetings their locals put on to facilitate more in-person communications. Some wanted the dates and times changed to focus more on lunch hours or breaks so people who were already working could attend. This could include offering 'mini meetings' or updates during lunch hour for members who were interested. Another member wanted the locals to use video-conferencing and online messaging so they could participate without physically attending the meeting. Another member wanted the locals to try to make the meetings more welcoming and easier for new people to participate in without feeling intimidated. Some of these suggestions are feasible but largely depend on local leadership to implement and at times central leadership to make governance amendments allowing such changes.

The NewsBulletin was highlighted in interviews with UNA Staff as one of the most important forms of communication that the union had with its members. This was because the bulletin is sent to every member that UNA has an address for, which gets past any barriers for members having to sign up, download, or print items from online. It was acknowledged that many people may not read the NewsBulletin in its entirety, but that the paper still served a purpose of reminding members that UNA was active and present if they needed it. Interviews with UNA

members confirmed much of this to be true, despite relatively few people who indicated they read it, but for some members this was the most important form of communication that UNA offered. Interviews with highly involved UNA members also confirmed the importance of the newsletter before they began to depend on other communication avenues like UNANet.

Some UNA staff participants felt that UNANet was the best communications method because it allowed members a private area to discuss their concerns and allowed UNA to be quickly responsive. Although, as mentioned before, it did sometimes result in issues where UNA staff have to remain connected and responsive to member concerns within 24 hours. Many of the highly involved participants confirmed that UNANet was an invaluable resource for them but not suited to general UNA members who may not have the time or desire to wade through all the information available on the site. The majority of UNA members participating in this research did not use UNANet as a regular source of information and those that did use the site found it outdated and not user friendly.

The best communication practices at the Local level varied by the size of the Locals. Small to medium-sized Locals tended to rely on more informal communication practices that involved more face-to-face contact whereas larger Locals relied on more official communication practices to reach a larger audience. Locals that were extremely small tended to rely on other communication platforms to send messages to each other such as Facebook Messenger or phone texting. Often workers in the extremely small Locals would work opposing shifts from each other making face-to-face contact difficult.

When asked about ways UNA could communicate one UNA member talked about their desire for a bare bone update on what was happening on a monthly basis. This person wanted this kind of communications to help keep them up to date but to also let them know how they could become involved in things that interested them – for this member there was a desire to become

more involved with the union but a clear uncertainty about how to go about doing so. The member envisioned this as an online document where people could click a link for more information if they were interested. Another member talked about a previous unit she worked in where the unit representative did put together such an update as a monthly digest and sent it out through an email list the representative had created. According to the UNA member, the email updated focused on 'stuff that your general population or general nursing population might be interested in and not necessarily all of the intricate union business that you find on UNANet' (Interview 14).

A minority of UNA members expressed a desire for UNA to reach out to new members in multiple ways in addition to having local representatives introduced, especially when they first start their jobs. By reaching out to new members, one member thought the union could make 'sure they are aware if they haven't signed up' (Interview 15) of what the union offered and what the union's role was. This member suggested that UNA should follow up with new members after sending out any initial orientation packages to make sure the information was received and understood as new members may be overwhelmed with their new positions to notice information from UNA.

External UNA Communications

UNA Staff

Another area of focus for all of the interviews across the three groups was any external advertising that UNA does which would be available to the general public. Generally, UNA focuses its external advertising on Nurses' Week, Labour Day, and the Christmas Holiday season. Occasionally the union will take on other issue-specific advertising if they see a need and location-specific advertising if an issue is isolated to one region. The union also participates in external

advertising through connections with other groups, such as campaigns done through the Labour Coalition on Pensions.

One of the primary goals of external communications is to educate the general public on UNA. UNA Staff members praised UNA's external communications in helping educate not only UNA members, but also members of the general public and governments at all levels. UNA tends not to focus on specific collective bargaining issues in their external advertising, but their work is always supportive of nurses having a strong presence in the health care system.

Anecdotally, the staff and elected officials mentioned they have received positive feedback from members on UNA's external communications. Some participants mentioned that UNA members would sometimes question why UNA does not do as much advertising as some of the other health-based unions in Alberta. The cost of advertising in Alberta was seen as too prohibitive to be used too often and some people felt that UNA did not have the same need to communicate the importance of their members to the public as the other health care unions.

Several UNA staff mentioned that the fact that nurses were a respected profession helped in the union's ability to serve their members. Specifically, in regard to communications, it was mentioned repeatedly that nurses are a profession that already has a positive reputation with the public. This meant that UNA did not have to convince the public that nurses were an important part of their health care team - that work, in a sense was already done for them. Staff noted that UNA 'members are doing such a great job. So, we don't have to convince anybody that nurses are valuable' (Interview 4). On the other hand, some staff felt that UNA rested a bit too much on the positive reputation that nurses have with the general public. One participant noted that 'UNA's approach to advertising as very conservative and quite infrequent' (Interview 6) because they did not have to try and gain public support for the work nurses do.

Highly Involved

Most of the highly involved participants recalled either seeing or hearing an external advertisement for UNA at some point in their lives - even if they had to actively search for the advertisement. Overall, participants were pleased with the advertisement and found they were 'a very effective tool' (Interview 11). Participants focused on two main frames they understood from the different external advertisements. The first was that nurses are there to advocate for patients and their health care and that UNA enables nurses to do this advocacy work. Participants thought the advertisements let the public know that nurses were standing up for them and let nurses know that UNA was standing up for nurses so nurses can 'give the best care we can and the safest care we can' (Interview 9). In order for nurses to advocate on behalf of their patients, UNA 'negotiate[s] the different things for our members to make sure that our work environments are safe so that we can take care of the patients the best we can' (Interview 9). Another participant stressed the importance of patient safety, stating that for UNA 'our priority is patient safety. That is always at the forefront of what we're trying to accomplish' (Interview 8). Elaborating on patient safety one other participant noted the importance of safe staffing levels to ensure patient safety, 'because that's really what the priority always boils down to and what it's really about' (Interview 12).

The second frame from UNA's external communications is that nurses bring important skills and education to patient's health care teams that are distinct from other health care workers. Participants noted that UNA was 'trying really hard to really put [nurses] out there as what makes a registered nurse different' (Interview 8) from other health care workers. 'RNs have the ability, the assessment skills and the training and the education to do that right job' (Interview 9), according to one participant. Another participant noted how UNA stressed the importance of RNs 'because of the critical thinking' capacity they have from their training that some other health care workers did not, 'Because me versus an LPN, they say that RNs are taught better how to have critical thinking

skills and how to critically think. You know, why is this blood pressure low? Why is this happening? Versus the LPNs just kind of like, 'Oh, it's low.' " (Interview 13).

One participant was disappointed with an UNA advertisement she heard, as it referred to nurses instead of registered nurses. This small distinction really stood out to her as a large oversight on behalf of the union because 'we're really trying to advocate hard for registered nurses and what the registered nurse does' (Interview 11). Overall this participant felt that the general public probably would not have noticed the difference between 'nurse' versus 'registered nurse'.

Many of the highly involved participants also stressed the high cost of doing advertisements in Alberta as being prohibitive for UNA, echoing what UNA staff had also said. Advertising is considered 'extremely expensive' (Interview 11), and some participants felt it could be best used for other areas (Interview 8). There was also some caution as UNA funds are 'member's money' (Interview 9) and it needs to be used where it will provide the best benefit for members.

Overall participants were generally happy with how UNA uses external media, stating that the advertisements were limited but it was still okay. When there was an important issue one participant noted that the UNA advertisements were effective, 'they're everywhere. You hear it on the radio, you see it on TV, you see it in print. If we have a push going on, it's very visible' (Interview 12). Even though the advertising is generally considered expensive, this participant thought UNA was striking a good balance for only using external advertising when they really needed to: 'I think it's appropriate that we don't have ourselves plastered all over the place all the time just as a norm. But when there's something important that needs to be addressed, then it's there. It's visible, and in all of the different media forms' (Interview 12).

Aside from the distinction of a registered nurse versus a nurse that was highlighted by one participant, this group brought up two general issues with UNA's external advertisements. One highly involved participant mentioned the external advertising that is done by some of the other

Alberta-based health care unions and thought that UNA should be doing more advertisements similar to the other unions, such as Health Sciences Association of Alberta[15] and National Union of Public and General Employees[16] (Interview 10) that ran humorous ads showcasing the positive contributions unions have made to society. Another participant also wanted UNA to do more to represent the diversity of nurses, not only demographically, but also in terms of the variety of work nurses do. This participant felt that UNA's external communications tended to focus on nurses in scrubs and generally the work that hospital-based nurses did which could limit the public's understanding of the work nurses do, especially nurses that work in community settings.

UNA Member

Slightly over half of the UNA members interviewed recalled hearing or seeing an externally focused advertisement from UNA. When thinking about the purpose and value of the external advertisements UNA member's views were split. Some of the participants appreciated the advertisements while others thought there was little to be gained from having them. One participant thought the advertisements had an important educational function for the public, stating, 'I think it's important. A lot of people don't understand what registered nurses do' (Interview 14). Building from this, another UNA member felt the public needed some help understanding that RNs are different from other health care workers, stating 'A lot of people don't know the difference between an LPN versus an RN versus the nursing aide versus, I don't know, like a porter or somebody'

[15] The Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA), along with the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) had previous run a campaign called 'caring hands' in 2014. In this campaign health care members were featured highlighting their skill and their passion for their work. Featured in the campaign were spotlights on individual health care workers. The campaign included commercials on television and the Internet and was promoted on both unions' social media pages.

[16] The participant described a campaign that actually came from NUPGE called 'Unions are Great' that focuses on benefits unions bring to their members and the general population of workers. This campaign included two videos along with a website outlining the benefits of unions. For example in one video, the minimum vacations in employment standards are credited to unions while a health care workers looks over a patient who is badly sun burned and parental leave is highlighted for a new mom with six babies.

(Interview 18). Some of these members wanted both UNA and CARNA to do more public advertising to help the public learn how RNs are different from other health care workers. Another participant just appreciated what they referred to as a 'shout out to nurses' (Interview 20) and felt good when she saw the UNA adverts.

Three participants, however, did not see any value in UNA having external advertisements and had a difficult time understanding what the union would even advertise about itself. For one member (Interview 16) there was no point for UNA to be communicating to the general public, unless they were trying to recruit people to becoming nurses. Another participant agreed there was little value in external advertisements unless those advertisements focused on new things related to UNA and the current membership. This participant thought there was little value in reminding people that unions exist and what they do as this was considered 'common knowledge'. Rather the participant thought it may be valuable for advertisements to focus on recent achievements or gain that UNA had made, and what they are currently fighting for. In her words: 'That would be nice or helpful, I guess. Good information to disseminate to the masses' (Interview 22).

One participant reflected on the financial cost of high-quality external advertisements and noted that it was 'hard to justify the impact of - that a media campaign is going to have. It's such a hit or miss kind of thing. When you're investing hundreds of thousands of dollars of the union money that comes from your union members, it's hard to justify that to your union members by saying this is the kind of impact it'll have' (Interview 20). This same member thought there might be value in UNA being more proactive instead of reactive, for example: 'I would love for UNA to be a little bit more proactive, like [advertising] this is what nurses do. This is why we fight for better wages, better benefits for nurses that are literally busting their backs to take care of people on a daily basis' (Interview 20). For this participant, it was important for UNA to help the public understand

the role nurses have in health care and try to highlight the education and skills nurses provide that may not be obvious to the public.

Conclusion

This chapter contains the results from interviews with staff and elected officials from UNA, UNA members that are highly involved with the union, and lastly, general UNA members. Interviews with these participants provide insight for one of the key questions of this research - what are the intents around UNA's communications and how do UNA members understand these communications? These questions are pivotal in exploring the role that union communications has in relation to union relevance. The empirical evidence from these interviews provides important insights into how UNA defines itself as a union, how UNA's communications lay out the union's relevance in terms of their key focuses, and how members in turn understand this relevance.

Several themes developed across all the interviews, including the work that UNA does, how UNA bargains and services collective agreements, as well as dealing with OHS and PRC matters, and several other initiatives branching out from industrial relations matters. Overall UNA staff and elected officials were far more likely to describe UNA's practices as social unionism whereas approximately half of the highly involved UNA members and all of the UNA members tended to focus almost exclusively on UNA's negotiating and servicing of the collective bargaining agreements that help ensure nurses are getting a 'fair' deal. How staff and members described UNA gives important insights into whether, and how, they see UNA as having or not having relevance in their lives and really helps lay out how UNA is evaluated by members. For instance, people that talked about UNA as practicing more business unionism tended to evaluate the union solely on the bargaining and servicing of the collective agreement and from there tended to see UNA's relevance in their lives when it came to their wages and benefits.

First, the interviews covered the work nurses do in their profession. Interviews with UNA staff and highly involved members touched on the unique education and skills that nurses have compared to other health care workers and the unique role that nurses have in the Alberta health care system. A minority of UNA staff wanted this messaging pushed further to stress the importance of including nurses in health care policy development. Interviews with highly involved participants also brought up a concern from a minority of participants that UNA tended to stress one kind of nurse who works in a hospital setting leaving out nurses that work in community and health clinic settings. These interviews echo some of the framing that UNA uses for its communications, especially the frame of 'nurses as distinct' from other health care providers.

Second, when talking about UNA's various forms of communications, all interview groups stated a clear preference for in-person and face-to-face contact for educating and learning about UNA. Different participants had different preferences for communication avenues, with members relying more on the newsletter and Facebook, and highly involved members and staff using UNANet more. Twitter was highlighted by UNA staff as being an 'outside' voice focused more on policy and targeted more to media and policymakers. Overall it is clear that UNA makes a great effort when it comes to providing different avenues of communication for different audiences and they have historically been early adopters of new communication technology while still maintaining reliably traditional forms of communication. Still there are opportunities to try and connect more UNA members with the current communications.

Third, interviews with UNA members showcased the value for UNA in connecting with nurse education programs, making repeat attempts to reach out to new members and the important role of Local executives when it comes to members learning and keeping up to date. Overall, there is an opportunity for UNA to focus on communicating specific information that would help their members better understand the union and perhaps become more involved.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

> You know, at the end of the day, it's what it's all about, is safe patient care. Even much of our bargaining really at the end of the day is about safe patient care...I mean, nurses want to provide safe patient care. Our sole interest isn't money. Our sole interest isn't getting our vacation. None of those are our sole interest. It's about providing safe patient care. (UNA Staff, Interview 1)

Introduction

This chapter will cover a final discussion of the results as they relate to the key research question: What is the relationship between union communications and union members' understanding of their union's relevance? I will also review the sub-questions including: What are the union activities and kind of unionism practiced and communicated by UNA? How do members consider UNA's relevance to their lives? In answering these research questions, I summarize results from across the interviews and communications data moving from the impact of Locals, to different communication technology, and then UNA's external communications. I then analyzed the findings through the lens of feminist political economy analysis and collective action frame perspective. I conclude this chapter by reviewing how UNA presents its own relevance and the impact these findings may have for the future of union renewal. Overall, this case study provides valuable insights into the activities and communication practices of a unique and important Canadian union, and its implications for perceptions of union relevance and thus also provides a solid groundwork for future studies examining the role of union communications and how union members evaluate their unions and the union relevance.

UNA and Unionism

UNA uses a wide variety of communications platforms to communicate with their general membership, their union leaders, and the general public. These communication platforms include a newsletter called the NewsBulletin; social media including YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter; their own intranet, UNANet; and their own publicly available website. UNA also has their own app for smartphones where people can gain access to collective bargaining agreements, email, and UNANet. To communicate externally UNA uses the typical forms of media communication including newspapers, billboards, and radio advertisements among others.

It is clear that UNA's main tasks are focused on negotiating and servicing their collective agreements. This was consistent throughout all of the data for this project including all the interviews and communications material. There were two main parts of the collective bargaining agreements that were repeatedly emphasised in the communication materials: The Professional Responsibility Concern (PRC) and occupational health and safety (OHS). The emphasis on these two areas is also clear from UNA's internal structure that has specific PRC and OHS staff.

Moving past the collective bargaining agreement, it is clear that UNA is active beyond the basics of industrial relations and is involved in areas that would be associated with social unionism including advocacy and lobbying for women's rights, for adequate public funding and services, and for maintaining a public health care system. These findings support Armstrong and Silas (2014, p. 172), who note that nurses' unions have moved beyond a sole focus on collective bargaining and grievance filing to issues with the health care system and social justice. Notably, while UNA Staff, elected officials, and those heavily involved with the union all recognized UNA's role beyond collective bargaining, only a few UNA general members recognized this role and discussed it when describing UNA. Rather, most UNA members were primarily focused on the role UNA has in

negotiating and servicing their collective bargaining agreements and there was little discussion of UNA's role outside of their workplaces.

UNA's social unionism also comes through the variety of communications methods and tools they use to engage and connect with members. There are real attempts to ensure that members have the most up to date information in a variety of ways including UNANet, social media, and the NewsBulletin. UNA also tries to use its current communications methods to engage with members and create a back and forth dialogue with Web 2.0 technology, a trend previously found in research from Fowler and Hagar (2013) and Hodder and Houghton (2015). Despite UNA's commitment to a variety of communications methods that engage members in a back and forth dialogue, the communication methods that seemed to interest general members the most were also the communications that aligned most with business unionism and were largely one-way communications i.e. the newsletter. This is not to say the newsletter cannot be used to engage people or offer opportunities to become more involved, but most members talked about the newsletter as a form of one-way communication.

Overall, the members participants in this research did not show a great desire to engage in Web 2.0 communications with the union. For those participants that were interested in becoming more involved, they seemed to desire more opportunities for in-person communications at the Local level rather than opportunities to engage with the union on Facebook or Twitter for example. In this way, UNA still controls the message across their communications materials but not against the wishes of their members; rather, it appears to do so with their members' implicit support. With this implicit support, existing power structures are thus maintained and very little debate, or censorship takes place – if ever – with communications tools used by general members. The more engaging communication methods, such as UNANet, seemed to be aimed at members who were already engaged with the unions such as District Representatives and Local executives. These more

engaging, two-way communication-focused avenues may be locations where existing power structures are challenged but were not readily available during the time of this research.

UNA tends to embrace new technology and has historically been an early adopter of new communication methods compared to other unions. At the same time, UNA has taken its time to develop the communication methods they use to be meaningful to the members. UNA's staffing structure highlights this dedication to communications and technology where they dedicate far more resources to both these areas than do other unions of their size. This parallels findings from research by Lucio, Walker and Trevorrow (2010) who found that union communication is affected by internal structures, as well as the forms of unionism practiced. Overall, the unionism UNA practices, their internal structures, and staffing all align with the various communication practices they have chosen to develop and maintain.

Focusing on some of the attributes of registered nurses also reveals the potential reason for some of UNA's communication practices. This group of workers tends to be educated and are increasingly exposed to technology in their workplace. Panagiotopoulos (2012) found that union members who are more familiar with technology, and with greater access to and knowledge of new technologies, tend to support its use more than workers who are not familiar with it. Nurses' formal education experience and exposure to new technology may relate to the willingness of UNA as an organization and their members to adopt new technology for communications. UNA has also dedicated time and resources to keeping their leaders up to date with the technology available to them for communicating to central UNA as well as their general members understanding that technological communication is not available to all people. As well, the nature of nursing work is that most direct care tends to be 24-7, meaning that members may run into issues any time day or night. UNANet specifically allows users access 24-7 and allows users the ability to electronically communicate with UNA staff semi-privately in a way that overcomes time and space differences.

It seems that even though UNA practices tend to emphasize a social unionism approach, and their communications methods reflect these practices, the actual content of UNA's communications is more of a hybrid between business unionism and social unionism. UNA's communications have a fairly large emphasis on the role UNA has in negotiating and servicing the collective bargaining agreements which offer some real material gains for their members. The emphasis on the collective bargaining agreement in UNA communication is often justified as helping nurses to effectively carry out their duties and their role as an advocate for patients and the health care system rather than solely on the material gains the union has made. These communications that focus primarily on business unionism are also the ones primarily taken up by UNA's general membership and this was particularly evident during interviews with this group. The general members who participated in interviews for this research still tended to evaluate UNA based mainly on negotiating and servicing the collective bargaining agreements, and whether or not they are getting enough in return for their dues. If UNA were to attempt and expand their communication practices and push themselves to practice more social unionism, or fail to highlight some of the material gains they achieve for their membership, they may find their own members pulling them back to focus mainly on the basics of being a union. There may also be a pull towards more business unionism for Alberta-based unions, being in one of the most conservative provinces in Canada, where governments may try to limit the official activities in which unions have legal standing to participate. Overall, the more UNA attempts to publicly engage in social unionism, the more it may face both internal and external pressures to 'get back to basics' and pursue a more traditional business unionism approach.

Communications

Generally, the interviews with UNA members provide important empirical support that communications are important for how members learn and understand their union – and therefore for their perceptions of union relevance. Through various communication methods, UNA members at all levels are able to stay up to date on current events and issues, to communicate with other UNA members and staff, and to further understand what their union does. In this section I elaborate on the specific communication practices that are central to UNA's approach, notably the role of Locals for union communication, highlight some of the communication technologies that UNA uses including UNANet, their app as well as their newsletter and the different social media platforms, and review findings based on UNA's external communications.

Understanding the Role of Locals in Union Communication

Similar to other research, such as Markowitz's (1995) study that highlighted the importance of intermediaries such as union stewards in framing unions to potential members, this research confirmed the importance of Local leaders for union communications. Communications at the Local level is incredibly reliant on the individuals who are the unit representatives and the Local executives. Some of these individuals have embraced new technology when it comes to communicating, while others are more resistant. Some have received help from central UNA to coordinate the different communication methods and streamline their work, whereas others have navigated the various platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Websites) on their own. Each of these decisions seems to come down to the personal preference of the individual responsible for the unit, with limited oversight from central UNA. Moreover, the structure of Locals influences their communications - with larger Locals depending on more official forms of communication, medium

and smaller Locals depending more on word of mouth, and extremely small Locals depending more on technology for communicating with each other. Members of the extremely small Locals simply do not physically see each other enough to depend on word of mouth and mainly rely on technology to communicate. There was also a variety of experiences when it came to members attending Local meetings – some finding them too exclusive, or being held at difficult times to attend, or not taking advantage of different technology that could encourage more member engagement.

This lack of consistency between Locals has produced varied results and from there a variety of experiences for members when it comes to understanding UNA and staying up to date. Similar to Kerr and Waddington (2014)'s findings, this research confirms that just because the main union is using various communications methods does not mean that Locals are following suit. Overall, units with representatives that have embraced more modern technology, and put an emphasis on maintaining a communications channel with members, seem to have members that are more up to date, more knowledgeable, and overall have a more positive view of UNA. The communications channels that worked well for people tended to be private Facebook groups or chats, as well as monthly digests curated by local representatives.

For one local leader there is also some tension between the ability for members to directly communicate with central UNA or their local executive. The greater use of technology to communicate in general has allowed individual members greater access to central labour bodies, which has allowed them to bypass local representatives. Upchurch and Grassman (2015) recognized this trend and the ability for new communications to allow union members to potentially disrupt traditional power relations at the Local level. For example, UNA members can use UNANet to ask questions or call or email UNA staff directly or use avenues like Facebook to connect directly with the UNA head office. Overall the ability for members to communicate with UNA centrally does not seem to have disrupted traditional power balances between the main union office, Local executives,

and union members which is similar to the findings of Schardie (2005) and Hodder and Houghton (2015). This previous research by Hodder and Houghton (2015) found that even with Web 2.0 technology communications can be monitored to ensure that official messages are maintained and Schradie's (2015) findings suggesting that the internal politics and organization of the union has a greater influence on how they use communication channels, what they communicate than the actual channels unions choose to use.

Consistent with Schradie (2015), as well as my own study, technology at UNA has not been used to democratize all areas. Rather, a great deal of power is still vested in traditional union roles and practices, such as having in-person Local meetings. One UNA member talked about their desire to participate in local meetings remotely using new technology. However, it would seem that UNA's policies and procedures would need to be amended to allow such participation. Another member even felt attending the UNA AGM was an exercise in frustration that allowed an illusion of member participation and influence on the union but in practice it was mainly a social event for nurses and not a chance for them to impact the future of UNA.

Still, for some units at the Local level the use of new communications has allowed more involvement by more people. For example, the use of group chats for entire units moved the communication towards a collective where not only is information moving back and forth between official UNA representatives and members but circulating more widely among members. Overall, the communication channels that yielded the most positive responses from general UNA members tended to be those offered by external companies that members are already using in other capacities such as Facebook or messenger programs on member's personal phones.

During interviews with UNA members, it was not uncommon for members to be unable to differentiate communications from their own Local or from central UNA. Members were not always clear if their social media following included their local or central UNA and often attributed any

social media communication they came across as being from central UNA. Because of the blurring between Local and central communication it may mean there is a larger role for central UNA to help create communication content for Locals to use which may allow Locals to focus on member engagement at the local in-person level and trying out different strategies for Local meetings.

Member engagement at the Local level is an extremely important way for members to learn about UNA and eventually become an active member if they desire. Currently, there seems to be a missed connection for ensuring members are aware of the variety of ways to become involved with UNA. This is illustrated by interviews with UNA members who had a desire to become more involved with the union but were unable to find an avenue for that at the Local level and were often unaware of communications from central UNA such as the newsletter. Without finding ways to participate actively at the Local level, these UNA members tended to opt out of any interaction with the union even if they wanted to become more involved. In summary, despite central UNA using multiple methods of communication, in-person communications at the Local level still play a very important role for union members in terms of their knowledge of the union and their willingness to participate in union activities.

UNA Communication Technologies

UNA has chosen to incorporate as many communication channels as they can in a meaningful way. They have not taken on every available media format they possibly can and although they have been relatively quick to take on new media platforms, they do so with intent. For example, when they were developing their app, they used information related to their website usage to incorporate the most commonly used functions first, rather than simply having an app for the sake of having one. Also, when expanding and adding new communications methods, UNA seems to understand that the new forms of communication are not necessarily replacing older versions -

for example, Facebook has not become a replacement for the NewsBulletin. Rather, the different communications avenues are complementary and are serving different, and sometimes overlapping audiences. Complicating matters further, each of these different platforms requires different formatting to properly convey the same information. For example, Twitter has a hard character limit, while Facebook users are accustomed to shorter headlines and the ability to find more information if they choose to engage. So, UNA staff must tailor their communications depending on the platform they are using, and they have been quite successful in using multiple platforms for communications. Overall the interview participants at each level of engagement were generally satisfied with the communications coming from UNA and in turn their own ability to communicate with UNA.

By offering a variety of communication avenues, UNA is working hard to meet members where they are and lowering barriers to accessing union information. Still, there is a disconnect between some of their members and the multiple communications methods UNA uses. This disconnect suggests that more work needs to be done to connect UNA members to existing communication channels rather than change the communication channels or the information that is being communicated.

App and UNANet

While the app and UNANet are seen as vital and important for UNA communication by staff, elected officials, and highly involved members, these communications methods are not viewed as important by the general membership. UNANet provides a level of detail and information that empowers the UNA leaders to stay up to date; it also provides semi-private and private forms of communication to ask questions directly to UNA staff. Similar to the findings from Rego, Alves, Naumann and Silva (2014) online platforms like UNANet allow UNA to overcome issues related to

time, distance, and finances, especially for their executive members. The platform is generally free to any member who already has a device that can access the platform, and messages can be left and addressed from any location at any time of the day or night. This communication avenue is extremely well developed and seems to be serving central UNA and its Local leaders very well. Yet, outside of UNA leaders, this platform was described as 'overwhelming' and required too much investment for the average UNA member to learn and use effectively. Even for some of the highly involved UNA members the site was seen as containing far too much information that was not always organized intuitively; a few participants commented that they had a difficult time remembering where they had previously found information on the site. The development and growth of UNANet has served UNA well, especially in keeping Local leaders up to date on important issues and ensuring all leaders have the same access to accurate information. More could be done to create a more intuitive and user-friendly interface, provide ongoing training opportunities for Local leaders, and perhaps include features that would allow members to save information or search the site more effectively.

NewsBulletin

Overall the NewsBulletin is considered a very important form of communication for UNA and a particularly important one for general UNA members. The newsletter was seen as the primary form of communication from central UNA to the UNA general membership by UNA staff. It was the one form of communication that bypassed many barriers that the other forms of communication have, such as technological access and knowledge. It also does not suffer the same competition for attention as social media can when using for-profit media platforms. UNA's continued dedication to a printed newsletter also seems to be a recognition by UNA that access to, or willingness to engage in new communication technology is not universal or evenly distributed. This echoes research from

Bryson, Gomaz and Willman (2010) who found that access to new forms of communication, such as online and social media, are still not universally accessible or evenly distributed across populations.

Despite overcoming multiple barriers many UNA members did not read the NewsBulletin, but rather glanced at it. So, while it is not a perfect form of communication, the barriers for engagement with the NewsBulletin are experientially different from the barriers to engagement for the others forms of communication, especially social media. Traditional media requires the upkeep of fresh articles to keep readers engaged each month and must fight to break through other priorities in a person's life for their attention and time. However, while a person is reading the newsletter, the stories are more focused and less distracting - they are not littered between other stories of wildly different topics from friends, families, acquaintances, and business advertisements, as on platforms like Facebook. Overall the NewsBulletin seems to have a different audience of less involved UNA members than other platforms like UNANet that seemed to be targeted at more involved UNA members. Still more opportunities to enroll to receive the NewsBulletin should be made to relatively new members. Some UNA members who had been working for years were unaware the NewsBulletin existed but immediately expressed a desire to receive it once they found out during the interviews.

Social Media

UNA has overall embraced social media platforms as a way of communicating with their members. UNA staff recognized that many of their members were already using social media and the union's engagement with the platforms was a way of meeting members where they already are. As previously mentioned in Chapter Six, at the Local level, social media often played a pivotal role in keeping members up to date through private groups and chats for some of the more engaged Locals.

Only a few UNA general members followed UNA's central Facebook or Twitter page in order to stay up to date and these members tended to come from Locals that did not have a strong communications method set up for their members. This seems to suggest that when members are interested in learning more about UNA they will fall back on central communications, or even communications from other more active Locals, if their Local has not organized its own communications. None of the UNA members in this research used any social media platforms as a way of communicating with UNA though, rather these platforms were used solely to receive information. Given the small sampling it may be that the importance of social media was not adequately captured in the interviews with general UNA members and further research into this area may yield different results.

The analysis of UNA's communication on social media also highlights the differences between social media versus other communication platforms. For instance, social media allows for far more repetition than the traditional media forms. On social media you can repeatedly advertise an event, then post during the event, and lastly follow-up posts after the event. You can even post the reporting of the event from traditional media on social media after the event has taken place. Traditional media allows one to advertise the event, if enough time is given beforehand, and then to report the outcome of the event. So, there is far more repetition of a single issue or event with new social media compared to the traditional media.

Social media not just allows for this repetition, in a sense it also demands it. In order for social media accounts to be followed and featured on the social media platforms they have to produce enough engaging content, with sufficient frequency, to remain relevant and to maintain attention in the vast social media field. There is an 'upkeep' to social media that is required every few days; otherwise, an account can be lost amongst the vast field and rapid cycle of posts. As well, an event or incident may require multiple posts and advertising so that it does not get lost, requiring

more effort and investment of time on the part of communications employees and volunteers and often the use of automated programs.

UNA staff and elected officials also identified different audiences for different communication platforms. The newsletter and Facebook page were considered to be of more value for general UNA members, which was confirmed during interviews with this group. Twitter was identified as a platform targeted more at media and policymakers and was described as an 'outside' voice of UNA. YouTube was not really identified as an important communication platform but more of a video library that could be used in other circumstances. As previously discussed, UNANet was highlighted across interviews with the different groups as extremely important and targeted towards highly involved UNA members.

UNA's External Communications

Overall, UNA have focused most of their attention with respect to communications on how they communicate internally rather than externally. The chief reason given by UNA staff and heavily involved members as to why UNA does not engage in more external communications was that the cost for such advertisements is prohibitive.

UNA member opinions on the external advertisements were split. Some members felt the advertisements were not warranted and money could be spent elsewhere. These members tended to not see a role for UNA beyond servicing their current members through the collective bargaining agreements. There was concern expressed that it may not be good practice for UNA to spend the dues of current members to benefit future members as may be the case in a large advertising campaign that does not have an immediate focus or outcome it is trying to achieve. Rather, these members thought that UNA should spend their money on where it was most useful, where useful was defined as having the largest impact on current members and tended to reflect traditional

business unionism practices dedicated to negotiating and servicing the collective bargaining agreement.

Other members thought external advertisements were money well spent. Two UNA general members even support the idea of changing external advertising to be more proactive. These members suggested the advertisements could be better used to be more proactive and convey the importance of nurses in the health care system, nurses' role with health-related policy matters or leadership roles, and the role UNA has in improving society for people. Without explicitly stating this, the members supportive of UNA's external media advertising were interested in UNA using these adverts to push the boundaries on the role of nurses as advocates for the health care system and from there the role of unions in society. They seemed supportive of UNA creating more space for nurses to participate in the political realm as nurses and saw this as an important role for UNA in terms of the union's relevance. These two participants saw UNA as having relevance outside of the basic union functions and more of a role in helping nurses to advocate for a better health care system for all people, leaning more towards social unionism.

Feminist Political Economy and Collective Action Frames

Moving from these concrete findings to existing scholarship, it is clear from this study and other available indicators that UNA is a successful union in terms of union density, despite being located in Alberta which is historically one of the least friendly provinces to unionization (Yates 2007; Foster & Barnetson 2011). A feminist political economy lens highlights the social, economy, and historical realities that effect the current situation in Alberta for health care based unions and emphasizes the power dynamics that these workers and their union operate within. UNA's success may be due to the fact that the union is occupation-based. This allows it to focus energy and efforts towards one set of workers, which is also an occupational group that has historically maintained high

levels of unionization across Canada. Part of the unionization success may also be that UNA tends to operate in the public sector that has experienced higher unionization rates across Canada as well. When participating in the private sector, UNA has also unionized workers who tend to be difficult to replace because of legislation setting required minimums for staffing, and difficult to offshore or outsource because the nursing services generally must be delivered in-person and on-location. The majority of UNA members are employed in the public sector under their provincial agreement which can help pull other members up by setting higher wages and better benefits as a benchmark for the province. Non-unionized individual registered nurses in Alberta are able to leverage the high density the union has in the province against the power imbalance they face with employers, at times being able to use the provincial collective bargaining agreement to negotiate comparative wages and benefits. The power imbalance between workers and employers persists despite UNA's strength in the province. It is made most clear by the struggle of UNA's members who are employed in private for-profit care centers, as they fight for wages and benefits that keep pace with nurses employed in the public sector. The gendered history of nursing as an occupation and profession also cause nurses in Alberta to struggle for fair pay and good working conditions as they deal with a history of their work being undervalued and made invisible causing them to be seen as less important than other health care workers such as physicians and less knowledgeable than health care administrators. Regardless of the employers, these employment relations are still affected by power imbalances related to gender, class, and race. Moreover, the impact of these social inequalities in employment relations are still present despite union strength.

During the course of this research, the Alberta government changed from a right leaning to a left leaning party, with the Rachel Notley NDP government replacing the Progressive Conservative government in May of 2015. This change was quite historic and ended almost 60 years of governing from a right-wing party. This political change did not appear to have a large impact on UNA's

communication, judging from the various communication data and interviews with UNA staff. One of the more subtle changes in UNA's communication was that there were generally fewer campaigns fighting to prevent incoming legislation. This did result in less overall communication asking members to be engaged with their political representatives and less activities such as rallies and protests. The general messages communicated by UNA though seems to have stayed the same regardless of the political party in power. This may suggest that the fundamental power relations in a capitalist state between workers, government, and union did not change with a different government – at least not a change that manifested in different communications strategies from UNA. Rather, we are reminded by feminist political economy that care work, such as that done by UNA nurses, is still bound within political, social, and economic forces that operate globally, as well as locally, and are not solely controlled by provincial political parties. The effects of the history of Alberta, being a conservative province, and the nursing profession cannot be undone by shifts in political power alone. More change would be needed to address how women's work is undervalued in formal capitalist economies and how nursing work is perceived in the Alberta health care system.

As discussed in Chapter Five, UNA uses two frames to organize their communications, specifically the frame of 'nurses as distinct' in the health care setting, and the frame of 'nurses as advocates' for patients and the health care system. These two frames reinforce the power dynamics that nurses and the union operate within, including the political, economic, and gender dynamics highlighted by feminist political economy (Armstrong 1993) as well as the recommended courses of action available to the parties, echoing how Monahan (2013) describes frames as articulating goals, values, solutions, and strategies. The courses of action recommended by the frame tend to fall well within the parameters set out by Alberta industrial relations legislation including rallies, lobbying, informational lines, pickets, and strikes all of which promote collective actions. This promotion of collective action reinforces Benford and Snow's (2000) description of social movement frames that

aim to achieve collective action. The specific collective action promoted also reinforces the power structures between the state, workers, and their unions, by following the prescriptive steps set out in Canada's foundational labour relations laws (Wells 1995).

Most of Alberta's nurses have historically not been legally allowed the right to strike and still UNA maintains strike activity as a legitimate response to actions by employers and governments. UNA's willingness to engage with strikes – as a last resort – has also been cemented by their history of using strikes despite legislation banning them – although it has now been almost 40 years since Alberta's nurses have experienced a large-scale hospital strike. Now all nurses, outside of arrangements made under essential service legislation, have the legal right to strike. Still this legislative change will most likely not have an impact on UNA's communications practices. This is because they have conducted themselves as if their members have the same legislative rights as other unionized workers regardless of the legal, social, and political context. The other actions recommended in the collective action frames used by UNA are not necessarily selected because they are the ones chosen by nurses or because these are the best collective actions to addresses nurses' concerns. In fact, Brown et al. (2006) research demonstrated how nurses can come to see union responses to industrial relation issues, such as strikes, as something forced upon workers by the labour relations laws. The fact that the frames UNA uses most often recommend activities that align with the typical responses unions have, such as information pickets, is most likely a reflection of Alberta's labour relations framework than the nursing profession.

The 'nurses-as-distinct' frame emphasizes the education and skill that nurses have along with their professional regulation to differentiate the work they do from other health care workers, in particular from health care aides. This frame is often used to counter moves by government and employers to replace nurses with health care aides who are paid less in wages. This frame harkens back to some of the same messaging that was historically used when nurses were first forming their

professional associations – mainly that they were a distinct profession because of their skill and education (Gray 1989; Ross-Kerr 1998; Armstrong & Silas 2012).

Despite some of the potential benefits of this frame, UNA staff and elected officials are aware that some UNA members are uncomfortable differentiating themselves from their coworkers based on their RN designation. Although it was never explicitly stated how the UNA staff and elected officials were aware of UNA member's discomfort in differentiating themselves, the interview data for this project does highlight UNA's staff awareness of the discomfort and UNA member's discomfort with this framing. In reality, this frame does not always sit well with nurses in their actual practice, especially when they are part of collaborative health care teams or when they have been trained to be invisible in the workplace, as argued by Adams and Nelson (2009). These findings also connect back to those of Armstrong, Armstrong and Scott-Dixon (2008) and issues with the Romanow Report which attempted to parse out health care workers who are critical for care and those who are not. Armstrong et al. (2008) highlight how the predominately female and racialized workforce that was, and is still often, considered 'non-direct' health care workers has valuable skills that are attributed to their gender, skills that are often learned outside of official education institutions. Because of these inequalities, and the work done to make 'non-direct' care workers and their contributions even more invisible, it is often easier to undervalue these workers, the skills they have, and the important work they do – especially in comparison to the 'direct care' done by registered nurses who often have post-secondary educations and credentials.

The use of this frame also appears disconnected from the experience of some nurses in this research who discussed a hierarchy within nursing that privileges nurses in highly technical fields over those in more generalist fields . The frame of 'nurses-as-distinct' in a sense also pushes the idea of nurses as homogeneous. Although not discussed by any of the research participants in this project, other research by Boateng and Adams (2016) found intra-professional conflict in nursing on

the basis of race and age. Boateng and Adams (2016) specifically found that racialized and young nurses had their professional experience and knowledge discounted by other nurses and were vulnerable to workplace bullying and discrimination. Still, the union uses this as a frame for communications, especially when communicating outside of the union. UNA pushing the frame that nurses are distinct may be to convince their own members as much as it is to convince the general public.

That said, a few of the staff members would like to see this frame extended to include the input from nurses on health care policy as important and distinct from other parties. The desire by some UNA staff to try and position nurses as experts when it comes to health care policy attempts to promote nurses' skills and knowledge – and by extension, the skills and knowledge that come from 'women's work' (Armstrong, Choiniere & Day 1993) – as distinct, valuable, and important. In some ways, this frame pushes back against a common narrative of doctors as the only health care system experts. Pushing nurses as experts in policy also moves them to be more visible in the health care system which may be something some nurses are comfortable with, but many others may not be, having internalized self-sacrifice and the desire to be invisible (Adams & Nelson 2009, p. 8). Still, there are not many UNA communications that focus on the importance of nurses being decision makers in the health care setting, or the need to consult with nurses before decisions are made about changing health care.

The 'nurse-as-advocate' frame builds from the larger social and political context of the public health care system in Canada. The foundation of the Canadian health care system prizes the collective over the individual through the pooling of resources to ensure certain forms of health care are available to all people regardless of their ability to pay. In this frame, nurses have been cast as guardians of health care for the public. Nurses are seen to be there not only to provide direct care to individual patients, but to also keep the system functioning effectively, and hold politicians and

bureaucrats accountable to the public to ensure a quality standard of care for patients. Overall UNA condenses what is a complex matter of quality health care into a simple message which promotes supporting the union and promotes collective action to defend nurses - thus, encouraging them to be seen as advocates. As found by Benford and Snow (2000, p. 614), condensing and simplifying complex matters into collective frames allows social movements to promote their goals and more easily engage potential supporters. This frame also plays well with common rhetoric of nurses and women as caring, and self-sacrificing for their patients which has historically been associated with the profession.

Similar to the other frame, the 'nurse-as-advocate' frame does not always pan out in reality. Not all nurses are advocates for their patients at all times, nor are all nurses advocates for the health care system at all times. When there are inconsistencies between how nurses are framed by their union and nurses' actions it can cause issues for the general public who may come to expect all nurses to behave or carry themselves in a self-sacrificing manner. This may also cause issues for nurses who feel pressured to maintain this advocate role despite pressures from their employer to not push back, to save costs on supplies, and to finish tasks quickly, or nurses who have limited interest in being an advocate on top of their nursing duties.

The first frame is really about nurses as a profession while the second frame is really about the advocacy role that nurses have. UNA uses these frames in such a way to make them work together – that nurses are a distinct profession and, on the basis of this distinctness, that they are able to be advocates for their patients. In these frames the role of advocate could be seen as code for caring, an attribute that has historically been associated as natural for women and devalued in the public sphere. Changing the language from caring to advocate may actually make caring more compatible with being a professional. Being an advocate, although perhaps still drawing from predominately feminine characteristics, is a recognized role in the public sphere complete with

compensation and at times legal standing in certain systems. These findings echo those from Dahlke and Stahlke's (2016) — namely, that nurses are often not given the proper vocabulary to talk about their knowledge skills alongside their caring skills— and thus the use of advocate could be UNA's attempt to provide a different vocabulary. Using the term advocate may be a step in providing a different vocabulary that is more compatible with presentations of what a professional nurse is and is also compatible with the role that UNA has for its own members. However, pushing the frame of 'nurses as distinct' and building to 'nurses advocates' may actually move nurses further away from them being conceived of as a worker for actual UNA members and the general public. An advocate role, although different from the role of a caregiver, still risks playing up traits such as self-sacrificing and going above and beyond, regardless of compensation, which is arguably not ideal for any worker in the power imbalance often found in employment relationships. Playing up the advocate role may indeed make it more difficult for nurses to assert their rights as workers, especially in the face of pressure from management and perhaps the general public for them to always be going above and beyond for their patients. Overall, a conception of nurse as worker is arguably better for nurses (Liaschenko & Peter 2004) and more aligned with the overall goals of the labour movement.

A feminist political economy perspective really highlights that these frames, particularly the frame of nurses as advocates, are not selected at random or even selected as the most beneficial for registered nurses in Alberta. Rather, these frames work within the political economy of Alberta and build from a long history of representing nurses, and other women workers, as caring, selfless, and going "above and beyond" for their patients as UNA's social media posts highlight. The frames used build from this history of nursing rather than challenging these notions with ideas that nurses are valuable workers in the health care system who deserve better pay and working conditions.

Union Relevance

In order for unions to be seen as organizations that are important for workers and important for industrial relations in the modern times the organizations must be framed as relevant. As previously mentioned, union relevance in this research is a combination of several previously used terms, including 'union instrumentality' which focuses on member's evaluation of services in exchange for union dues (Tetrick et al. 2007), 'perceived union support', which highlights whether, and how, workers feel valued for their contributions to the unions (Shore, Tetrick, Sinclair & Newton, cited in Aryee & Chay 2001) and 'union commitment', which stresses efforts to continuously build commitment and participation with the union (Tetrick et al. 2007). I have also included in my analysis the legal, political, and personal dimensions for how UNA makes itself relevant to its members. According to Franzway and Fonow (2011), it is important for unions to present themselves as organizations that are relevant to workers' lives as this presentation of relevance has been found by Monahan (2013) to be a key motivator for workers to become involved in their unions. UNA uses its communications to stress and define the union's relevance.

Examples of UNA's relevance include how the union repeatedly talks about the collective bargaining agreements that stress the relevance the union has for workers in the legal realm. UNA also stresses its legal relevance in communications related to filing grievances on behalf of nurses, filing intervener status during court cases that have the potential to affect their members, and filing their own court cases when needed. The political relevance is stressed by UNA's communications that focus on the lobbying efforts of UNA elected officials and members. These lobbying efforts include advocating for a new federal health accord or a national pharmacare plan or communicating the positive results from campaigns they have run such as the campaign to prevent legislative changes to provincial pension plans in Alberta.

UNA also stresses the quality of their collective agreements, which demonstrates union instrumentality. Although UNA clearly practices several aspects of social unionism, their communications across the different venues still mainly stresses UNA's union instrumentality. The interviews with UNA members also seem to suggest that members tend to evaluate the union according to union instrumentality by focusing on the service value members received by the union in exchange for their dues. This is how unions are often presented in the media and can be a challenge for unions that want to have value beyond the basics of industrial relations and want to work towards a more engaged general membership. The few interview participants who felt they were not getting 'value' for the amount of money being deducted from their pay for the union had the view that UNA had low union instrumentality. Both the members who are, and who are not, satisfied with UNA tended to rely on the NewsBulletin to learn about the union but these members also talked about not having enough time to read the NewsBulletin. It is difficult to say if non-satisfied members would change their view with more communications focused on UNA dues and pension contributions.

UNA conveys union support and union commitment by showing engagement of nurses in campaigns like the Wear White Wednesday campaign and through their social media posts and articles in their newsletter. A considerable amount of UNA's communications across the different platforms focuses on the activities of UNA members, especially as they pertain to UNA during events like information pickets. This perceived union support was slightly questioned in the interviews where at least three members expressed a desire to get involved and become engaged but are not certain how they can do that or if their contributions will be valued by the union.

UNA's personal relevance is stressed through things like promoting the PRC and OHS process and generally reminding UNA members that UNA is there for them so they can effectively do their job. While PRC and OHS matters are clearly in the realm of industrial relations activities,

UNA often presents these issues as addressing 'personal issues' faced by nurses. For example, PRC is often presented as helping nurses continue to be advocates and alleviate the moral distress nurses can feel when they are unable to provide quality care to their patients because of how an employer has arranged their workload or the staffing (Jameton 1984). OHS matters are also presented as a way that nurses can continue to safely do their jobs by ensuring they themselves are kept safe while working. Both PRC and OHS are often presented as personal issues facing nurses that UNA can help with. UNA also stresses its relevance to UNA members' personal lives when it comes to retirement planning and UNA's role with their pension plan. Similar to PRC and OHS, retirement planning is often presented as an individual personal issue facing nurses.

The frames used by UNA help shape how nurses understand themselves and this shapes the services the nurses think they need from the union – which is reflected in how UNA positions itself as relevant for its members. For example, by presenting nurses as advocates for patients and the health care system, the union may actually be helping construct the role of a nurse and in turn the relevance of the union as they provide services to support UNA's version of a nurse. A key example of this is the PRC process the union pushes that allows members to identify concerns around nurses' workplaces that do not allow them to live up to their professional requirements. As previously mentioned, UNA at times talks about the PRC process as a way for nurses to alleviate their moral distress caused by the incompatibility of their professional expectations from CARNA and the reality of their working conditions structured by their employer—for example, being unable to provide adequate care because of short-staffing. At the same time that UNA is providing a tool for nurses to use, they may also be pushing a frame of 'nurses as advocates' that calls for nurses to go above and beyond what typical workers are asked to do. In fact, UNA has positioned the PRC process as another way they can advocate for their patients and ensure they are providing safe patient care. Yet, the PRC process is typically done during a nurse's personal time. It is difficult to

say with absolutely certainty which pushes and pulls have led UNA to encourage processes such as PRC, which play into the 'nurses as advocates' frame and thus move nurses away from being conceived as workers and more as selfless advocates. With current industrial relations legislation, the collective bargaining agreements, employer policies, and workplace structures there is limited, if any, time that nurses could do this work during regular working hours. The reality is that many of the challenges meant to be addressed by the PRC process goes beyond the worksite, if not physically then emotionally. It is difficult to fully untangle if the traditional work of nurses or the responses UNA has developed are actually what is pushing this kind of work beyond the traditional work hours for nurses.

Union Renewal

The main research question for this project was to examine the relationship between union communication and members' understanding of their own union and how this can be connected to union renewal. The ultimate question for this research was how UNA members consider UNA's relevance in their lives with the idea and assumption, based on existing research, that relevance offers a path to union renewal. The results from this analysis confirm that individual experiences and understandings of union relevance appears to be an important facet for union renewal efforts and, importantly, that these individual experiences are mediated by union communication activities—an issue that has received fairly limited research attention to date.

When examining the role of union communication in relation to union renewal efforts, we see that rates of unionization are dropping and fewer and fewer people have direct experience with unions. As a result, a growing number of people rely more on the experiences of friends and family, as well as how unions are presented publicly, to understand the role that unions play. Even though union members' experiences with their own unions are clearly important ,and influenced by the

union communication practices, individual unions may not be the most ideal path to union renewal, despite the importance of individual union members' experiences. Perhaps individual unions are not the correct vehicles to be promoting the values of unionization and union relevance alone to the general public.

Certainly, individual unions have an important job in ensuring their members are satisfied with the services provided by the union. Typically, in Canadian industrial relations, unions are often left out of important policy and legislative decisions that impact their members and therefore are often left in a position of reacting to legislative or workplace changes, rather than being part of such decisions, as can be the case in other countries with tripartite governance systems (Goddard 2003). Given the success of various campaigns that UNA has participated in with other organizations, it may be the role of other labour-related bodies to advocate for the value of unions, while individual unions focus on ensuring their organizations have good union instrumentality reviews from members and provide ample opportunity for member involvement. Previous research has found that larger labour bodies are considered quite weak as they rely on dues collected from local unions (Briskin 1994, P. 92; Yates 2007, p. 61) and union affiliation with the larger labour movement is not always a given. As previously acknowledged, the Canadian labour movement would benefit from a more coordinated approach (Yates 2007, p. 68; Camfield 2011) and perhaps even organizing unions similar to a social movement through social unionism (Hrynyshyn & Ross 2011). By practicing more social unionism, trade unions could open up the areas and issues they can become involved in and from there build greater union relevance for their members outside of immediate occupational and worksite concerns as found by Briskin (2011), Bentha (2007), and Ross (2011). It would seem that potential power for organizing unions more like a social movement could be vested with these larger labour bodies at the provincial level, for example, with the Alberta Federation of Labour and even at the federal level with the Canadian Labour Congress. Given support from member unions, and the

ability to coordinate amongst the various unions, these provincial and federal bodies would be well positioned to take on this additional work.

The reality is that UNA is doing well in terms of union density, in terms of political and legal power in the province, and in terms of its own communications with its members. Still UNA may benefit from tweaks here and there. There could be changes in the bylaws around quorum and voting at Local meetings to allow electronic participation. Also, there could be changes in how new UNA members are approached, with the recommendation of follow ups to ensure members are receiving information about the union. Potential new members could also be approached by UNA working more closely with post-secondary institutions in Alberta as a majority of their members would graduate from a nursing program in the province. One general finding is that people who are not receiving communications from the union were interested in receiving more information but were not certain how to go about it and what communication options are available to them. Another finding of note is that new communication technology is not necessarily replacing older communication technology. Instead of communication venues being replaced, we are really seeing the options being expanded. There are currently audiences for all kinds of communication technology, although this may shift with a new generation of nurses who are more used to online and social media platforms. Obviously, results of any changes are not guaranteed but UNA's willingness to hear from their membership and make changes may serve them well as they move forward.

Lessons for Other Unions

The findings from this research may help inform future communication practices for other unions. The main lesson that other unions can draw from UNA is that it is important to take internal and external communication seriously and pursue a variety of modes of communication.

Unions could look at how to support their Locals to best communicate to their unique communities by offering support for a variety of tools both online and off, as well as ensuring avenues for in-person communication and ample opportunities for member involvement. These supports could include ways to make union meetings more flexible to allow more participation across time and space, such as using teleconferencing technology, or allowing voting to take place over days instead of a single meeting, or even having repeated mini-meetings around break and lunch times. It may also be fruitful for unions that do not have an internal communication system for members to evaluate what opportunities such a system offers for union leaders to stay up to date on information and keep a record of institutional memory for future leaders. Lastly, it is important for unions to review their orientation materials and practices around connecting with new members.

A key finding from this study is that union members repeatedly mentioned the desire to have greater access to learn more about their union and a desire for different avenues to participate in union activities. This research suggests it is worth the union's time to follow up with workers who have had limited contact with the union to ensure that they know more about the union and what communication options are available. It may also be fruitful for unions to evaluate different ways that union members could become involved with the union, perhaps creating different opportunities than the official positions that currently exist.

Overall, this research suggests that unions should periodically examine their communication practices, who the different audiences are that are being served by their current practices, and if there are ways to connect their current members with their current communication offered. Unions should also evaluate if their communication practices are consistent with the kind of unionism they practice and if their members have a good understanding of the activities and direction their union has from what is communicated.

Limitations of the Study

This study provides an examination of one case in rich detail that can then be used for comparisons to other case studies (Ryan 2004; Kumar & Schenk 2006; O'Neill 2007; Sullivan 2010; Foster & Barnetson 2011; Fowler & Hagar 2013; Ott & Milkman 2014). Certain delimitations should be kept in mind when comparing this case study to others such as the selection of the case, which is a union mainly involved in public sector rather than the private sector, as well as a union dominated by women rather than other compositions of workers. The case is geographically located in Alberta, Canada, which not only has different labour legislation but also a different social, political, and economic context than other places. Also, a number of general UNA members interviewed for this project were younger, and in the first ten years of their career, which could impact their knowledge of UNA and industrial relations. Lastly, this research focuses on a 5-year period from 2010 to 2015 for the document and material analysis and does not capture all of the rapid changes in social media communications.

However, these unique attributes are also what made the case study approach a good choice for this research since this study highlights some distinct features. The results of this research still provide transferable knowledge that can help other research projects and further our understanding of the role of social media in union relevance and communications. This case study is also well positioned to serve as a comparison to other existing case studies, or future case studies of different occupations or industries, jurisdictions, or national contexts.

Suggestions for Future Research

A number of interesting questions emerge from this study, especially given how little research has been conducted on issues of union communications and union relevance. Future

research should usefully examine if similar results or patterns are found through examinations of different unions, or in different jurisdictions or national contexts. More specifically, it would be fruitful to examine other nursing unions in different provinces in order to see if the provincial context has a large impact on union communications and how unions are defined as relevant or not. Beyond that, research could also focus on unions in the private sector, given that their overall communications and framing may be distinct and how they define union relevance for their members may be drastically different from public sector workers – perhaps focused more on material gains than being defenders of public organizations. Having multiple case studies across different sectors, and employing a comparative approach, would help to tease out patterns of communication technologies that are used, precisely what is communicated, the different kinds of unionism that the various unions practice, and how union members perceive the relevance of unions in their day to day working lives. Further, there are interesting questions that could be explored looking at the relationship nurses' unions have with their professional association; in UNA's case, this would be CARNA. Both UNA and CARNA cooperate on campaigns such as those around nurses' work weeks. Yet, these two organizations may have different goals in how nurses are presented to the public. Overall the relationship between UNA and CARNA is not fully explored here and may be an important relationship for union communication practices and goals in future research.

Although it is beyond the scope of this current research, future research may also benefit from considering the growing trend of trolls and bots and their impact on social media – both its creation and consumption. Clearly this issue is very germane in certain realms at present, such as political campaigns. At the time of this study, as noted, UNA did not face major issues when it comes to trolls or bots and most of their members were not strongly engaged with key social media such as Twitter. However, in the future trolls and bots may have a larger impact on union

communications, especially as it relates to the role unions may have in the political realm. Perhaps new generations will be more skilled in spotting inaccurate social media content, perhaps bots and trolls will become savvier in their ability to not be identified as a bot or troll, or perhaps their impact will shift users away from these kind of communication venues. Even as demographics of UNA's membership, and the membership of other unions change, the overall impact of bots and trolls on social media communications may impact how unions engage with these platforms.

Multiple case studies or case comparisons would also be useful to show how the theoretical approach developed here, which incorporates feminist political economy with collective action frames, holds up in other contexts with other unions. Future research could also focus more on the union Locals levels, given their importance, posing a variety of questions such as what exactly union Locals communicate to their members, how Local meetings function, and how members evaluate their Locals compared to the larger union. A focus on the Local level may also lend itself to a survey within a union, in order to cover the multiple Locals, their executives, and from there the broader membership. Such an approach could be complemented with other methods, such as participant observation at Local meetings, to add richer dimensions to our understanding of the role of union communications as it links to union relevance.

While I have highlighted some of the key questions that emerge from this study, there are certainly other issues around union communications that researchers may wish to explore. What this study makes clear, however, is the important role that communication plays, and the need to understand the role it plays in relations to union relevance and union renewal efforts.

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Appendix 1: Interview Protocol

Reminders:

- Informed consent
- Signed consent form
- Any questions from participant
- Permission to record interview

1. Can you tell me about the work you do here on a daily basis (e.g. usual job duties, responsibilities – how does it compare to other jobs you have had?)
    a. Setting you work in?
    b. How long you have worked as a nurse?
    c. Part-time? Full-time?
    d. Casual? Permanent?
    e. Geographical location?
2. And how are you involved with the union? What are the usual tasks you do?

3. Can you tell me about how you are involved in the union?
    1. How did you become involved in the union?
    2. Have you ever been involved with the union or gone to them for support?
    3. Before you become involved did you know what unions did? How?
    4. Have you ever had prior experience with unions? Through previous work
    5. Family members or friends?

4. Can you tell me about what your union does?

1. Values, mission, mottos, reputation…
2. How about in the workplace?
3. How do you know these things?

5. How do you find out up to date news about the union?
    1. Do you find it effective? Why or why not?
    2. Are there other ways of communication you would prefer?

6. What kinds of things does your union communicate? (Example: events, bylaw changes, fundraisers)
    1. How would you like your union to communicate with you?
    2. Are there things you would like to know from the union?

7. What sort of ways do you like to communicate with union members? Tell me about how it works. (Involved members)
    1. How would you like to communicate with union members?
    2. Do you think the way the central office communicates with members works?
    3. Does it differ from what you do locally?
    4. Are there other ways you think members would like to hear from the union?

8. Have you ever seen publically available communications from the union? Like a commercial or flyer? (Around strikes or other labour disputes?)
    1. What did you think of these kinds of communications? Effective? Why or why not?
    2. What messages did you get from these communications? Intensions?

9. Has your opinion of your (1) union or other unions, (2) what they do, or (3) their communications changed as you have worked here?

10. Is there anything else you would like to add before we end?

Appendix 2: Communications Code Count

Connections

	Internal Connections	External Connections
Twitter (1,590)	579	1259
Facebook (2,221)	658	1078
Newsletter (28)	42	537
YouTube (46)	8	52

Government

	Alberta Government	Federal Government	Legislation
Twitter (1,590)	727	95	73
Facebook(2,221)	377	49	26
Newsletter (28)	215	44	50
YouTube (46)	31	5	2

Health Care

	Hospitals	Long-Term Care/Senior Care	Public vs Private	Wait Times	Pharmacare
Twitter (1,590)	156	138	66	23	54
Facebook (2,221)	21	96	106	44	86
Newsletter (28)	3	31	67	48	26
YouTube (46)	7	6	11	3	2

Industrial Relations

	CBA	Staffing	Industrial Disputes	OHS	Pension	Collective Action
Twitter (1,590)	174	157	94	20	48	246
Facebook (2,221)	250	208	62	56	114	112
Newsletter (28)	136	109	20	95	38	15
YouTube (46)	12	32	7	0	1	38

Nursing

	Advocate	Caring	Patients	Profession	Safe/Safety
Twitter (1,590)	66	58	90	26	74
Facebook (2,221)	87	102	168	106	69
Newsletter (28)	55	58	88	34	43
YouTube (46)	14	28	38	5	4