

REACHING UNION FAMILIES:  
COLLECTIVE IDENTITY, UNION ADVANTAGES AND THE AMERICAN ETHOS

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ABSTRACT

The present study examines the beliefs of union family members. Through analysis of qualitative interviews with union members and their wives and adult children, I investigate three main themes: 1) the benefits of unions, 2) the relations between corporations and unions, and 3) subscription to the American ethos. Generally speaking, I found that all participants focused on lifestyle and consumption advantages to union membership. Many also noted the fringe benefits associated with union coverage such as health insurance and job security. Moreover, many of the participants cite the ongoing struggle for power between unions and corporations. In addition, while most of the participants profess a strong belief in individualism and the ability of individuals to make it on their own in American society, there is also a tendency to articulate a moderate sense of collective identity and the importance of structural constraints on economic opportunity.