

UC Berkeley

Recent Work

Title

New Approaches to Organizing Women and Young Workers: Social Media & Work Family Issues

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6697b78b>

Authors

Firestein, Netsy
King, Deborah
Quan, Katie

Publication Date

2010-07-01

New Approaches to Organizing Women and Young Workers

Social Media &
Work Family
Issues



Labor Project for Working Families

Cornell ILR Labor Programs

UC Berkeley Labor Center

July 2010

New Approaches to Organizing Women and Young Workers

Social Media and Work Family Issues

This report was conducted by Netsy Firestein, Labor Project for Working Families, Deborah King, Cornell ILR Labor Programs and Katie Quan, UC Berkeley Labor Center, with assistance from Legna J. Cabrera, Jenya Cassidy, and Jocelyn Mazurkiewicz.

This report was funded by a grant from The Berger Marks Foundation.

Special thanks to our Advisory Committee:

- *Larry Bertoluzzi, 1199SEIU-UHE*
- *Denise Dowell, Civil Service Employees Association, AFSCME Local 1000*
- *Jocelyn Mazurkiewicz, New York Union Child Care Coalition*
- *Brenda Munoz, formerly AFSCME*
- *Maggie Priebe, Working America*
- *Margaret Shelleda, California Federation of Teachers*
- *Mandie Yanasak, UFCW*

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
SOCIAL MEDIA	1
WORK FAMILY ISSUES	2
RECOMMENDATIONS	2
INTRODUCTION	4
BACKGROUND	5
WOMEN, WORK, AND FAMILY	5
YOUNG WORKERS	6
USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND OTHER NEW TECHNOLOGY	8
METHODOLOGY	9
FINDINGS	10
USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG UNIONS	10
USE OF WORK AND FAMILY ISSUES IN UNION CAMPAIGNS	12
USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG WORK AND FAMILY ORGANIZATIONS	13
FUTURE RELATIONSHIPS	16
ANALYSIS	17
RECOMMENDATIONS	19
CONCLUSION	20
NOTES	22

Executive Summary

Perhaps the most significant demographic change in the workforce in the past 50 years is the presence of women, who very soon will outnumber men among those who work outside the home. Another significant demographic change in the workforce is the presence of young workers. Over 70 percent of those ages 16-34 are part of the civilian labor force, but only 8.2 percent of them belong to unions. The future of the labor movement depends upon fresh approaches to organizing, and some of the most exciting and innovative strategies and tools are being developed by young organizers using new technology and social media. We interviewed 23 young organizers to understand how they use social media to organize, and whether they have focused on work and family issues in these efforts.

Social Media

Our interviews showed that organizers use internet websites to provide information and credibility to organizations, Facebook and MySpace to help workers to connect with each other and express opinions, and Twitter and texts to remind workers to take action. However organizers who have used these tools also caution that new technology and social media should not be substituted for personal contact, and precautions should be put in place to ensure security and privacy for the workers we organize.

The use of social media and new technology for organizing has been particularly effective among young workers, many of whom have grown up with computers and the internet their whole lives. Statistics show that young workers who join unions have substantially better wages and benefits, but young workers are less likely to be in unions. Therefore much more needs to be done to reach out to them and make their concerns union priorities. To be effective, unions also need to make unions appealing to young workers through a cultural shift and promoting young workers and young staff to leadership positions.

How social media is used:

- an on-line presence enables workers to **check out** the union for themselves
- social media helps younger workers see the union as **hip**
- YouTube or blast texts got people talking about the union by creating a “**buzz** around the campaign”
- unions should now ask for **cell phone and email** information on union authorization cards; **home phone numbers are practically useless** for contacting young workers
- organizing committees **communicate** through Facebook or blogs and/or texts

- social media and the internet allow people to communicate in *flexible* time, which helps people with family responsibilities
- social networking helps people connect across geography and jurisdictions

Users Need Union Support

- labor movement must become *skilled* in using these ways of communicating
- organizers need *technical support* from their unions
- frontline organizers need *authority* to respond rapidly

Work Family Issues

Not only women are concerned about work family issues today. Young workers are also concerned about work family balance, and rate the importance of this issue even higher than their older counterparts. Organizers told us that members' concerns were not necessarily expressed as work and family issues. Rather caregiving responsibilities were often the real reason why workers wanted jobs security, health benefits, less overtime, knowing their schedules well in advance, and other traditional bargaining topics. This speaks to the need to consider whether work and family issues should be framed differently.

- Members needed more support for paid family and medical leave, childcare assistance, flexible hours, etc.
- Work and family issues were major causes of stress for the women they are organizing, whether or not they were framed as work and family issues.
- Mandatory overtime made it impossible to pick children up from childcare, which indicated disrespect and insensitivity to family demands.
- Retail workers need to know their schedules far in advance so they can plan childcare and school.
- The need for paid time off was frequently mentioned in the context of the need to spend more time with family.
- For low wage workers, inadequate health insurance was a family concern.
- For single parents job security is a family issue because not having a job means there is no way to pay bills and put food on the table.

Recommendations

We hope that this research will be the first step in bringing attention to the need to organize women and young workers through use of social media and work and family issues. Organizers are using new technology and social media successfully. The immediate challenge for unions will be how to provide

organizers with these tools, the skills to use them and the budget to maintain them. The longer range challenge will be how unions use these tools strategically and create a new union culture that is attractive to young workers.

Work and family issues are highly important to women workers and young workers today are even more concerned about work/life balance than previous generations, however they are not priorities at most bargaining tables. Issues like job security, health benefits, work scheduling and other commonly recognized core union topics actually relate to work and family issues. Therefore an effort should be made to reframe work and family issues as core labor issues. We recommend **that unions and funders advance the dialogue around work and family issues and young workers; unions begin to include work and family and young workers' issues in their campaign plans; unions experiment with the use of social media through pilot projects that are planned, implemented and evaluated; and that young workers in unions be engaged, supported, mentored, and given opportunities to lead.**

Introduction

For American workers, labor unions have historically been a ticket to the middle class. Through negotiating higher wages and benefits, unions achieved high standards and protections that lifted exploited workers out of poverty. However today unions are on the defensive, facing a myriad of challenges that are driving standards down, related to changes in the economy, politics, and demographic shifts in the workforce. Unfortunately many unions have been late to adapt to the changing environment, which has led to the unfortunate image of union leaders as being “pale, male, and stale.” How unions change this image and transform themselves to meet these challenges may well determine their survival and growth into the 21st century.

Perhaps the most significant demographic change in the workforce in the past 50 years is the presence of women, who very soon will outnumber men among those who work outside the home. Women bring different issues and priorities to the workplace: they are paid less than their male counterparts and are more likely to take a “non-linear” career path due to family responsibilities.ⁱ Though men are increasingly taking on family responsibilities, women are still the primary caregivers,ⁱⁱ and balancing work and family issues is a major concern. One recent study showed that women in unions are much more likely to have job security and benefits that help them balance work and family concerns.ⁱⁱⁱ

Another significant demographic change in the workforce is the presence of young workers. Over 70 percent of those ages 16-34 are part of the civilian labor force,^{iv} on average they earned 10% lower wages in 2007 than they did in 1979 when adjusted for inflation. Only 8.2 percent of young workers belong to unions, compared to 13 percent of all workers, but those who do belong to unions earned 12.4 percent in wages more than their non-union counterparts, in addition to having health insurance and pensions.^v Clearly when young workers join unions they benefit however most unions are only beginning efforts to reach out to young workers, understand their issues, recruit them into their ranks, and promote their leadership. An important start was the recent AFL-CIO Young Workers Summit held in June 2010 where young labor organizers gathered to form a NextUp constituency and called for greater focus and attention to their issues, positions of leadership, as well as “rebranding” of the labor movement to reflect their message and culture.^{vi}

Outside the labor movement, some groups have placed strong emphasis on work and family issues and organizing young workers, and their successes point to important lessons. Community organizations have used work and family issues to win childcare benefits, paid family leave, paid sick leave, and other supports that are now recognized as a key priority by the White House Task Force on Middle Class

Families led by Vice President Joe Biden. And young people have shown that they are enthusiastic and energetic about issues that matter to them, as they energize and mobilize through vast, dynamic online communities that are regularly tapped by commercial, social, and cultural groups, as well as by the Obama presidential campaign. In fact the ability of the internet, social media, and other new technology to connect people to people and people to information, easily and cheaply, has helped to overcome some age-old barriers to organizing and has become one of the most exciting organizing tools of our times.

Given the rise of women and young workers in the workforce, the new issues they bring to the table, and the new methods of organizing they use, how can unions transform themselves to be more responsive, relevant, and effective?

To answer this question, we interviewed 14 union and 9 community organizers, mostly young women, to understand how they currently use new technology and social media tools to organize, and whether they have focused on work and family issues in these efforts. We selected interviewees known to be organizing among young workers, and found that they had developed exciting and creative uses of social media, such as finding co-workers in the same workplace through Facebook and creating a “buzz,” but they stress that these hi-tech tools did not substitute for one-on-one in-person organizing. We also found that the use of work and family issues *per se* to build campaigns was not widespread, but that real issues such as knowing one’s work schedule in advance, voluntary overtime, paid leave, job security, and health care insurance should be recognized as work and family issues. We also found that as union staff young organizers had problems balancing work and family responsibilities themselves. From our interviews we drew an analysis and formulated recommendations that may help unions strengthen their relationships with women and young workers, especially with regard to the use of work and family issues and social media that might ultimately help unions be more successful in organizing.

Background

Women, Work, and Family

According to “*The Three Faces of Work Family Conflict*,” a new report by the Center for American Progress and the Center for WorkLife Law, a staggering 90 percent of American mothers from all economic income levels, “the poor, the professionals and the missing middle,” now report “conflict” in a range of work-family issues.^{vii}

Though men are increasingly contributing to family responsibilities, women still provide more than their fair share of caregiving responsibilities at home.^{viii} Sixty-six percent of all informal caregivers are female, and 37 percent of them care for children and grandchildren under the age of 18. These women will also spend 4.6 years caring for elderly family members.^{ix} Caught between care for the young and elderly, working women aged 30 to their 60s are known today as the “sandwich generation.”

Workplace rules often do not provide flexibility that women need to care for their families. For example 40 percent of women face difficulty getting time off for childcare while 36 percent of men report having difficulty,^x probably because men often do not request time off for childcare. Finding childcare is even more problematic when workers have rotating shifts, do not know their work schedule in advance, or otherwise do not have regular work schedules. Work and family difficulties are compounded when there is only one parent at home. Two-thirds of low income families are now headed by single mothers, who often work at more than one job and have even less time for their families.^{xi}

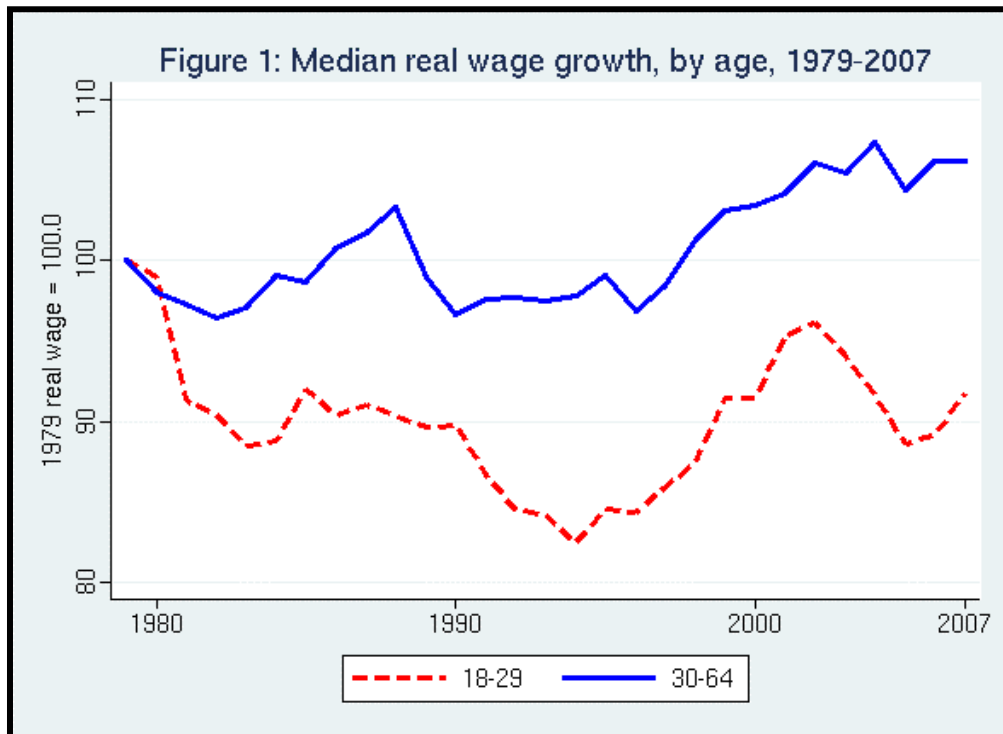
Across the board American workers are finding it difficult to balance work and family responsibilities, and there is widespread desire to have more flexibility in work schedules, paid family leave, and increased child and elder care support.^{xii} Those who belong to unions are more likely to have job security, health insurance that covers the family, various kinds of paid leave, as well as representation to employers and legislators regarding their issues.^{xiii}

Young Workers

In this paper we are defining young workers as those between the ages of 18 and 35, also known as the Millennials (Generation Y) and the younger members of Generation X. Millennials are more ethnically and racially diverse than older generations. They are also more educated, are having children at a later age and are more likely to be single parents.^{xiv}

Real wages for young workers aged 18 to 29 declined by 10% from 1979 to 2007, in contrast to a small wage growth for older workers. According to the Center for Economic Policy Research, even though their educational attainment increased substantially compared to previous generations, wage rates of young workers became vulnerable to the economic and political forces that affected all workers during this period—outsourcing, offshoring, privatization, deregulation, and a decline in unionization. Not only were they affected by these trends, but they were at a disadvantage in competing with older, more experienced workers for the same jobs in a period of high unemployment.^{xv} Often they were hired into a lower tier that has been negotiated as a concession to keep the wages of older workers from falling.^{xvi}

A picture of this shocking decline in real wages for young workers can be seen in comparison to older workers in the table below:



Source: Schmitt, J. (2008). Center for Economic and Policy Research.

Today's young workers not only struggle to earn a living wage in service sector jobs, but they are moving from job to job at high rates of turnover and may work full time and go to school full time—while raising families. Their role as workers has become a “stopgap” to fill the necessities of economic policies that require a mobile pool of low wage workers, which is backed up by a discriminatory and untrue assumption that young workers do not need, nor do they desire, a fair wage.^{xvii}

Young workers are highly likely to demand work family balance and are more open to the concept of unionization. In a recent study, 73 percent worry about balancing professional and personal obligations,^{xviii} and expressed deep fears about raising a family without economic means or health benefits. They value control and flexibility in their lives over climbing the corporate ladder.^{xix} *Fortune* magazine said of Millennials, “when it comes to loyalty, the companies they work for are last on their list—behind their families, their friends, their communities, their co-workers, and, of course, themselves.”^{xx} Young workers also believe that employees are more successful at resolving workplace problems as a group. They want more flexibility, paid family leave and childcare support.^{xxi}

Use of Social Media and Other New Technology

In this section we focus on communication tools that women, young workers, and labor organizers currently use that are considered new technology, like cell phones and the internet, as well as social media programs and technology that enable conversations among communities of people online. Examples of the latter include Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and so forth.

Women use the internet more than men and are more likely to use the internet to connect with other people and get advice from friends. They also send and receive email, get maps and directions and look for health and medical information online.^{xxii} Eighty-six percent of young women ages 18 to 29 are likely to be online compared to 80 percent of men of the same age. Thirty-eight percent of women go online several times a day and 77 percent have a profile on a social networking site. Surprisingly there do not seem to be significant differences by age, gender or race and ethnicity in Twitter usage among Millennials and Generation X.^{xxiii}

Millennials outpace older Americans in virtually all types of internet and cell phone use. Eighty-seven percent of those ages 18 to 32 use the internet, compared to only 70 percent of Older Boomers (those who are 55 to 63 years old).^{xxiv} Teens and Generation Y are the most likely group to use the internet for entertainment and for communicating with friends and family. This age group is more engaged in social media activities than any other generation; 67 percent of Generation Y use social networking sites, compared to 36 percent of Generation X, 20 percent of Younger Boomers, and 9 percent of Older Boomers. In addition, Millennials are more likely to post and watch videos online. Eighty-eight percent of Millennials send and receive text messages.^{xxv} According to a recent report, "Generation Y takes for granted the pervasiveness of technology in daily life. In fact, professionals in this age group may not recall a time without personal computers, cable television, the internet, cell phones and instant messaging. They spend a significant portion of their time online – socializing, shopping, banking, studying, downloading music, watching movies, playing games, communicating, looking for jobs, researching potential employers and seeking information that will help them build their careers."^{xxvi}

Labor unions are increasingly using new technology and social media. Almost all unions now have websites and use email for internal and external communication. Many union representatives are now provided with cell phones by their employers, and some also have laptops for use in the field. A 2008 survey by Cornell University's Labor Program of 59 international unions as well as the two major union federations, the AFL-CIO and Change to Win, showed that 31 unions (54.1 percent) use Facebook, 18 unions (31.1 percent) use Twitter, and 14 unions (24.6 percent) use YouTube.^{xxvii}

Methodology

We conducted two sets of interviews, one set with union staff engaged in organizing campaigns that might involve young workers or work and family issues, and the other set with organizations that promote a work and family agenda. Our hypothesis was that the use of social media and work and family issues would be stronger among community based groups, since a few of them were founded as internet entities, their staff are proportionately younger, and their organizational cultures tend to be more flexible. We expected that these interviews would lead us to best practices in organizing young workers, including the use of social media, as well as best practices in using work and family issues in labor and community organizing. The interviews were conducted in-person and on the telephone.

In the interviews with union staff we were seeking information about 1) general experience with the use of social media 2) using social media with different age and gender groups, and 3) relevance of work and family issues in organizing campaigns. We interviewed 12 staff from four unions: American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Communication Workers of America (CWA), Service Employees International Union (SEIU), United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), and two union affiliated organizations: Working America and the New York Union Child Care Coalition. The respondents were an ethnically diverse group and included two men and ten women. Most respondents were women under the age of 35, were working on organizing campaigns on a local level, and were grappling with how to use social media to support their work. Others had core responsibility for providing communication support to local campaigns (one was providing such support from an international union's headquarters) and had a broader perspective about the current and potential use of social media.

The union interviewees were selected because of their work to organize women, and although their unions did not specifically target young workers they all dealt with a large number of women under 35, except for Working America. Notably, the UFCW organizing targets had the largest number of very young workers—most are under 30 with a substantial number of teenagers.

In the interviews with work and family organizations we sought information about: 1) the organization's target audience—and in particular whether they were targeting women workers under 35, 2) what social media tools the organizations were using and any assessment they may have made of its effectiveness, 3) what work and family issues the organization was targeting, 4) the size of the organization, demographics, geography, etc., and 5) possible interest in partnering with unions around work and family issues. We interviewed staff from the following organizations:

- International Association for Working Mothers/ The National Association For Moms In Business
- Workplace Fairness
- Women Employed
- National Partnership for Women and Families
- MomsRising
- National Organization of Women (NOW)
- New York Jobs with Justice and Jobs with Justice
- Business and Professional Women's Foundation (BPW)
- 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women

Findings

Use of Social Media Among Unions

In general we found from our interviews that experience with the use of social media varied widely, and was particularly useful in organizing young workers. Most union staff used texting and some used YouTube, Facebook or MySpace. Only a few used blogs. Overall those who used social media felt strongly that it provided information and credibility to the union, which in turn created an image of the union being “hip” to young workers. Those who used it in organizing campaigns found that social media helped to create a “buzz” about union organizing, to form organizing committees and to bridge geographic and other barriers. It also allowed workers with family responsibilities to access information and conversations at flexible times. Many organizers expressed the need for support from their union officers for their work on social media. There was a general consensus that use of social media cannot replace face to face organizing but that it is a very important auxiliary tool to connect people to people and people to information. The following are examples of responses about the use of social media:

Information, Credibility, and Image

- an on-line presence enables workers to **check out** the union for themselves
- young workers can **verify** information through social media, as they are accustomed to doing
- social media builds a level of **trust and validity** in our work
- social media helps younger workers see the union as **hip**

Outreach

- texting and YouTube were effective with **all** groups of workers

- YouTube or blast texts got people talking about the union by creating a “**buzz** around the campaign”
- unions should now ask for **cell phone and email** information on union authorization cards; **home phone numbers are practically useless** for contacting young workers
- organizing committees **communicate** through Facebook or blogs and/or texts
- organizers ask target recruits to **become a friend** on Facebook
- workers under 25 were more likely to **relate** to Facebook or MySpace as an organizing tool
- social media and the internet allow people to communicate in **flexible** time, which helps people with family responsibilities by allowing them to work after the family is taken care of
- social networking helps people connect across geography and jurisdictions

Social Media Users Need Union Support

- labor movement must become **skilled** in using these ways of communicating
- organizers need **technical support** from their unions on developing and maintaining social media tools
- frontline organizers need **authority** to respond rapidly, “in time” with messages, without always needing approval from higher authorities

Integration of Social Media with Other Organizing Tools

- Obama’s success was the use of online tools to make **face to face** happen, to get folks to **walk, knock** on doors—**action**

Different types of social media were deemed important for different uses. The following is a sample of responses to questions about what type of media was used for what purpose:

Texting

- Blast texts are effective to quickly **share important news** or to **mobilize workers** to act—i.e. attend a rally which will begin in 15 minutes
- In organizing campaigns it can significantly **reduce isolation and fear** by enabling workers to communicate and support each other even in meetings with employers
- It allows the organizer to **communicate with workers at work** since workers are often unable to answer the phone/make a call
- It can get a **response in 10 seconds**, as people typically respond faster than to texting than to voicemail or email

- It's also an easier and **more comfortable** way for unorganized workers to quickly communicate with their co-workers

YouTube

- It can help promote **communication among workers at fragmented workplaces, shift work, etc.** such as homecare, healthcare, childcare, call centers, etc.
- It can be an effective way for workers to **share their experiences and feelings** in the absence of face to face meetings
- It can help **bring workers' voices to the public, politicians and the traditional media**, especially when workers can't travel because of work or family obligations
- It can be an effective **alternative** to face to face meetings, when face to face meetings are not possible

Facebook

- It can be **easier/quicker** to announce the formation of an organizing committee by posting photos
- It enabled workers to post their own favorite photo, prompting more workers to be **willing to participate**
- Facebook and MySpace can be used to **identify workgroups and leaders** at a worksite
- It enabled organizers to **chart** a large part of the workforce by becoming "friends" of "friends"

Use of Work and Family Issues in Union Campaigns

The respondents in our interviews told us that the issues upon which they based their campaigns were fairly traditional—job security, fairness and respect, wages and health insurance. Work and family issues were not included in the top three issues in any campaign, except for the New York Union Child Care Campaign on paid sick leave. They said that hopes of achieving more economic benefits in contract campaigns were minimal given current economic conditions. Work and family issues as a workplace demand were more common (although not the primary reasons for organizing) among university employees and college educated workers who included issues like clarifying/improving maternity/paternity leave provisions and flexible hours in their reasons for organizing.

However, when queried about what workers' actual interest were, the respondents mentioned that their members and other working parents needed more support for paid family and medical leave, childcare assistance, flexible hours, etc. As one organizer said, "The idea that we could win these types

of benefits from their employer was unfathomable—considering existing conditions—however the vision of a more supportive society was there whenever we had those discussions.”

In fact, every organizer said that work and family issues were major causes of stress for the women they are organizing, whether or not they were framed as work and family issues. Some people mentioned the desire for respect, dignity and fair treatment on the job and gave examples of how mandatory overtime made it impossible to pick children up from childcare, which indicated disrespect and insensitivity to family demands. Workers in the retail industry want to know their schedules far in advance so they can plan childcare and school. The need for paid time off was frequently mentioned in the context of the need to spend more time with family. For low wage workers, inadequate health insurance was a family concern because not having health insurance puts their families at risk, and for single parents job security is a family issue because not having a job means there is no way to pay bills and put food on the table.

We did not ask the organizers whom we interviewed any questions about their own work and family issues, however in the course of our interviews it became clear that union and community organizers face many problems with balancing work and family. This is particularly true in mission-driven organizations like unions that expect staff to work exhaustive hours for “the cause” and tend to downplay individual family concerns. AFSCME organizers mentioned that work and family issues scored high at the “Next Wave” conference for younger members/activists in June 2009.

Use of Social Media Among Work and Family Organizations

Community and advocacy groups focused on work and family issues utilize social media tools to maintain visibility, promote their agendas, build action around their issues, and to direct traffic to their website. They also use these tools reach out to opinion makers and power brokers who might not otherwise be reachable. The social media tools used with the most frequency are Facebook, Twitter and Blogs.

Most of the work and family organizations we surveyed do not specifically target any age group, however different issues attract different age groups. The issues that these groups identified as work and family issues include a broad range of issues that relate to maintaining a healthy balance between work and family such as:

- Affordable Housing
- Discrimination Against Women
- Early Education & Child Care
- Employee Free Choice Act
- Equal Opportunity/Fair Pay Act
- Equal Pay
- Family Medical Leave
- Health Care
- Mitigating the media constructed “Mommy Wars”
- Paid Parental Leave
- Paid Sick Days
- Pay & Hours
- Pay Equity
- Social Justice
- Solidarity with Striking Workers
- Unemployment Insurance
- Work Family Balance
- Workplace Flexibility
- Workplace Standards

While these groups tend to receive the biggest response from younger women through utilizing social media, the experience of MomsRising, Business and Professional Women (BPW), Workplace Fairness and National Jobs with Justice suggests that the “digital divide” between generations may be narrowing. For example, MomsRising is often reminded by their followers on Facebook and Twitter “not to forget the grandmas” in their advocacy and work.

These groups utilize Facebook to post links to blog articles, publicize their website, promote the release of special reports, raise funds and coordinate events. However, Facebook also gives them the opportunity to engage their followers in a more active type of dialogue that includes both comment and response. The National Organization for Women (NOW) finds using Facebook helpful in providing a forum for various chapters around the country to communicate, coordinate and share information. Both NOW and BPW have also developed Facebook pages corresponding with specific campaigns. In addition, MomRising uses Facebook as a barometer to measure how a particular campaign is going to perform.

These groups use Twitter as a means to communicate with their membership about a topic that may not warrant e-mail coverage, to highlight media coverage, or to make announcements about their blog postings. It serves more as a “bulletin board” where they post information to their followers, but the communication remains one way. However, MomsRising has been able to utilize Twitter as a forum for dialogue and a means to deal with backlash. In a campaign operating around last Halloween, MomsRising posted images that included babies with bottles. These photos led to a backlash from the breastfeeding community. Tweets allowed them to address concerns and communicate with this

group publically and in real time. They also have been able to use Twitter as a tool to find people to fulfill a needed campaign function. For example if they needed a mother in Texas to relay her experience about finding affordable childcare for a newspaper article, they will post the request on their Twitter feed.

Blogs are generally used to broaden the scope of each group's message, to grow their audience and to promote events. BPW in particular uses blogs to address topics that women care about, but which could not be incorporated into their formal website material; like the controversy Michelle Obama stirred by wearing shorts.

The groups have utilized YouTube to a far lesser extent, but have used it successfully to promote tools like instructional videos on how to call a legislator, for member driven video contests or videos of testimony representatives delivered by members of their organization before various legislative bodies. MySpace was one of the first social media tools these groups adapted, but it is not utilized much anymore. However it was used in the past successfully to build campaign support. There was also discussion of using the following tools either currently or in the future: Ping, Delicious, text-message blasting, Picassa, Google reader, LinkedIn, Flickr and Friend Feed.

At this point many of the groups have used social media only sporadically, however they feel that its utilization is vital to their organizations future and ability to capture a new generation of supporters. It seems that the organizations that either began as an online movement like MomsRising and Workplace Fairness or are willing to devote resources to developing social media tools like BPW have had more success in their social media campaigns.

The constant maintenance of social media sites and the substantial staff time that must be devoted to it has prevented many groups from participating fully in its utilization. Also the informal, rapid response nature of social media, doesn't work as well in an environment where there is a rigid and formal vetting/approval process for messaging. All groups indicate that social media is just one of the tools in their toolkit, but an increasingly important one.

The integration of social networking sites with more traditional means of mobilizing has ultimately been beneficial to the various groups. It has been their experience that individuals not inclined to react to one mode of outreach are likely to respond to the other. As a result of adapting social networking as

an outreach/mobilizing tool, the organizations have been able to supplement their existing base of individuals/activists. Social media presents groups with an opportunity to reach a younger generation and speak to them in a way that could garner their support and motivate them to take action.

Social media allows an organization to respond rapidly to changing situations more effectively than traditional methods. It also can be more cost effective than printed communication, however organizations still find that traditional forms of communication are more effective in sharing content. Traditional methods of communication are still the best ways of to soliciting donor support, but social media has great potential in creating the environment for getting supporters to take action.

Social media tools provide a good forum through which a geographically dispersed membership can keep in touch and advance their agenda for change. They can simplify the process of communication and let local chapters cater to their regional needs, while preserving uniformity and continuity in messaging.

Future Relationships

All the union respondents said that they would be interested in finding out more about how other unions are using social media for organizing and also connecting with other organizations who are conducting campaigns around work and family issues using social media.

All the work and family groups interviewed indicated (with enthusiasm) their interest in partnering with unions. Additionally most of the groups said that they already collaborate with unions and that labor has always played a key role in advancing their core issues and making their advocacy goals become a reality.

It seems that unions could benefit greatly from collaborating with groups that are pioneers in this movement like MomsRising. At last count MomsRising had over 1 million members around the country and has been a model for launching social media campaigns, by joining networks dedicated to social media like Progressive Exchange, Organizing 2.0, and Metro NY Labor Communications Council and attending conferences on social media like the "Unconference" by Nonprofit 2.0 in June 2010.

Analysis

Though 90 percent of women report work and family conflict, the organizers we interviewed reported that unions rarely prioritize work and family issues because the women they represent have basic needs such as higher income, benefits, job security, and decent treatment. This incongruity could be a sign that unions remain entrenched in a paradigm based on negotiating bread and butter issues, and continue to be averse to taking on social issues and building social unionism. And/or, it could be a sign that the framing of work and family issues is perhaps too narrowly focused on special interests, making them seem marginal, dispensable or extra items at the bargaining table rather than being core and fundamental. The opportunity to strike a chord on work and family issues is evident: the facts show that unionized women get a work family premium and our interviews show that workers care about work and family issues. If unions placed work and family needs as priorities, potential for connecting with women workers and organizing them might be greatly enhanced.

There is also a tremendous opportunity to organize young workers, but addressing their needs will not only require higher priorities at the bargaining table, it will also require a substantial shift in union culture. Young workers are often turned off by established union cultures that do not reflect who they are and what they are want, and unless unions transform themselves, young workers will not look to unions as a solution to their issues. Among these young workers are young union staff who have joined the labor movement and made a commitment to work hard because they believe in social justice. As the AFL-CIO Young Workers Summit revealed, they are idealistic and dedicated to the labor movement, and work very hard. They are the future leaders of our movement, and deserve support.

Concern about work and family imbalance is actually increasing among young workers. Women certainly reported problems with child care, paid family leave, maternity benefits, and elder care since they began to work outside the home in large numbers. But young workers today are even more concerned with work life balance. This may be because new technology allows people to be in touch with work 24/7, allowing us to check email and work at home after work, be in touch with collaborators in foreign time zones in the middle of the night, and mix work friends with personal friends on social networking sites. It expands the blur between work and family, which then intensifies the tension balancing both work and family. Even among workers who don't yet have families there is a fear that they won't be able to control how much work they do and will not have quality time for themselves.

Non-profit organizations have largely been carrying the water on work and family issues. Typically small and not well-financed, these groups have struggled to advocate for work and family issues in legislation and public policy where unions have been ambivalent or not taken the lead. Thanks largely to these non-profits, we have higher paid childcare workers, paid family leave, paid sick leave, and other improved conditions. The supports that these independent organizations have brought to working women are very valuable and could be strengthened with closer collaboration with labor unions.

Not-profit organizations have also pioneered the use of new technology and social media to organize, demonstrating that social media can be used to influence public opinion, mobilize support, generate funds, and communicate in real time. They have also taught us that there are costs in supporting these new organizing tools, and as unions step up to use social media in organizing they must budget for hardware and software support, as well as establish a system of messaging that allows organizers to respond immediately to workers and the public.

Beyond learning how to utilize the skills of using social media, an important question is how social media can be applied to campaigns, strategically over the long run. For example, how can Facebook and similar sites respond to employer intimidation in a way that shows workers how they will benefit from unionization and unite a community of people to turn the tide in favor of the union? How can social media encourage new voices to be heard, especially young workers, immigrant workers, and other under-represented groups? Can online translation tools help workers who speak different languages communicate with each other? How can social media tools be of use in global labor markets and possibly unite bargaining units that might be located across multiple countries and time zones? Social media provides new and exciting possibilities to some age-old barriers to labor organizing, though precautions should be taken to ensure the security and privacy of workers being organized

Finally, our interviewees clearly cautioned about the limitations of social media, and that it does not and should not replace face-to-face interaction with workers. This sage advice is worth emphasizing. Social media does not take the place of real organizing—it is only a new tool. Ultimately the power of workers will be demonstrated in their unity and collective action.

Recommendations

This study was a very limited foray into the complex area of how women and young organizers use social media for organizing, and how work and family issues should be incorporated. While we have come to a preliminary analysis, much more outreach and investigation should be done to provide firm conclusions. The following are our preliminary recommendations:

1. ***Deepen and broaden dialogue about work and family, young workers, and social media.*** Berger Marks and other progressive labor institutions should provide resources for these issues to be explored in depth.
 - Fund, motivate and support young workers to network and share their concerns, including their own work and family conflict
 - Convene a national summit of work and family advocates in unions and community groups to reframe their issues as core labor issues
 - Challenge and fund unions to incorporate work and family, young workers, and social media into their campaigns

2. ***Pilot use of work and family issues, young worker issues, and social media in organizing campaigns.*** Resources should be made available to labor organizers for planning and implementing campaigns that highlight work and family concerns, young worker issues, and use of social media.
 - Develop training curriculum for organizers on work and family issues in the broad sense
 - Develop training curriculum for organizers on young worker issues
 - Develop training for organizers and the use of social media, and provide them with the technological hardware, software, support, and maintenance to use social media effectively
 - Apply social media strategically to shift public opinion, reduce fear, create a buzz about the union, or otherwise make a difference in the campaign
 - Build alliances between labor and work and family groups and young workers groups both at the campaign level and on a permanent basis
 - Train organizers to have greater responsibility for messaging in the social media
 - Assess, document, and disseminate results of this project widely among labor officers, organizers, educators, workers and the general public

3. ***Promote the leadership of young workers and young organizers***
 - Establish a culture of diversity in unions that includes young workers

- Enable young women organizers to design their own convening and share their issues among themselves and with others
- Mentor and support young women organizers, giving them greater respect, responsibility, and authority
- Affirmatively promote young women organizers to positions of formal leadership whenever possible

4. *Encourage further study and action*

- Commission case studies on the successful use of work and family issues in organizing, young workers, and use of social media/new technology
- Investigate limitations and differences in access among different workers; to understand how income level, sectors, occupations, racial/ethnic background, language, and other demographic factors affect usage and may require difference approaches to organizing
- Investigate ways that unions could bridge access to social media, such as providing the hardware, setting up computer labs and training for members, etc.

Conclusion

If American unions once were the ticket to the middle class for male blue collar workers, our research confirms that this is still the case for women and young workers today. Women and young workers have higher wages when they are in unions. We find that young workers are using social media very creatively to organize, and that all workers care about work and family issues even if they don't necessarily frame their priorities in this way.

Our research showed some very specific ways that young organizers are now using new technology and social media successfully. Internet sites provide basic information about the union and lend credibility to it that young workers expect. Cell phones are the main mode of phone contact, not home phones. Social media can connect people by bringing together workers across shifts and geographical divides, charting the workplace through making "friends," making the organizing committee public, and keeping in touch with workers during employer meetings. These sites, along with blogs, can also be used to share ideas, dialogue, and debate. Texting and other forms of real-time communication give immediate information and feedback, and can remind people to take action. YouTube can be used as a way of expressing thoughts to co-workers, employers, legislators, or the general public when the speaker cannot appear in person. These tools can link people to others as well as to issues and ideas, but new technology and social media should not take the place of personal contact with workers.

The immediate challenge for unions will be how to provide organizers with these tools, the skills to use them and the budget to maintain them. The longer range challenge will be how unions use these tools strategically to neutralize employer opposition and win worker support, integrate new technology and social media with face-to-face organizing, and create a new union culture that is attractive to young workers.

Our research also showed that work and family issues are highly important to women workers, but these issues are not considered priorities at most bargaining tables. Upon further probing, it became clear that issues like job security, health benefits, work scheduling and other commonly recognized core bargaining topics actually relate to work and family issues. In addition, young workers today are even more concerned about work/life balance than previous generations. Therefore an effort should be made to reframe work and family issues as core labor issues. Community groups that focus on work and family issues have supported a broad set of labor issues like health care and employee free choice, and greater linkages with unions would mean stronger advocacy for work and family issues.

We also found that young women organizers themselves have problems balancing work and family concerns, and though our research did not focus on them, they are the Next Wave and NextUp leaders of the labor movement and further research and dialogue is needed to document their concerns.

We recommend that unions and funders advance the dialogue around work and family issues and young workers by bringing together workers and organizers to broaden the exchange and form deeper links. The AFL-CIO has recently begun an initiative to do this with young workers, but it is also important for work and family advocates, especially in light of the need to rethink work and family framing as core issues. We also suggest that unions begin to include work and family and young workers in their campaign plans, and experiment with the use of social media through pilot projects that are planned, implemented and evaluated. While these projects necessitate an investment of resources and organizational support, they can demonstrate how organizational change around these issues can be implemented. Well documented efforts with young workers, work and family and social media in organizing can be a useful reference for labor leaders, organizers, and policy advocates. Finally, we strongly recommend that young workers in unions be engaged, supported, mentored, and given opportunities to lead. The young organizers we interviewed are intelligent, creative, and dedicated. They and their cohorts are the future of the labor movement, and they need our support.

Notes

-
- i The Lattice Group. (2010). The Lattice talks: Work-life balance. Retrieved from <http://www.thelatticegroup.org/content/view/51/103/>
- ii Shriver, M. and Center for American Progress. (2009). The Shriver report: A woman's nation changes everything. Retrieved from <http://www.awomansnation.com/>
- iii MacGillvary, J., & Firestein, N. (2009). Family-friendly workplaces: Do unions make a difference? Retrieved from <http://www.working-families.org/learnmore/pdf/familyfriendly09.pdf>
- iv *Current Population Survey* (2009). Washington, DC: Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- v Schmitt, J. (2008). Unions and upward mobility for young workers. Center for Economic and Policy Research. Retrieved from http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/unions_and_upward_mobility_for_young_workers.pdf
- vi AFL-CIO. Young Workers Summit. Retrieved July 19, 2010, from <http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/youthsummit/>
- vii Shriver, M. and Center for American Progress. (2009).
- viii Shriver, M. and Center for American Progress. (2009).
- ix Greenwald, M., & Associates. (2009). Caregiving in the U.S., 2009. National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP. Retrieved from http://www.caregiving.org/data/Caregiving_in_the_US_2009_full_report.pdf
- x Shriver, M. and Center for American Progress. (2009).
- xi Williams, J., & Boushey, H. (2010). The three faces of work-family conflict: The poor, the professional and the missing middle. Center for American Progress and Center for WorkLife Law, University of California, Hasting College of Law. Retrieved from <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/01/pdf/threefaces.pdf>
- xii Shriver, M. and Center for American Progress. (2009).
- xiii MacGillvary, J., & Firestein, N. (2009).
- xiv Keeter, S., & Taylor, P. (2009). The Millennials. PEW Research Center. Retrieved from <http://pewresearch.org/millennials/>
- xv Schmitt, J. (2008).

xvi Greenhouse, S. (2009).

xvii Tannock, S. (2001). *Youth at Work: The Unionized Fast-food and Grocery Workplace*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Retrieved from http://books.google.com/books?id=zYx_GjR8fmsC&printsec=frontcover&dq=youth+at+work&hl=en&ei=zvw_TM-5CIKgsQPgjqmFDA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=oCC8Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false

xviii Yahoo! Hot Jobs, & Robert Half International. (2007). What young workers want: How to attract and retain Gen Y employees. Retrieved from www.hotjobsresources.com/pdfs/MillennialWorkers.pdf

xix Bay, W. (2007, September 10). The Daily Balance. Blog posted to http://www.huffingtonpost.com/willow-bay/the-daily-balancing-act_b_63753.html

xx Hira, N. A. (2007, May 17). Attracting the twenty-something worker. *Fortune Magazine*

xxi AFL-CIO and Working America. (2009). *Young workers: A lost decade*

xxii Taylor, M. (2009, October 7). Women outnumber men on social-networking sites. Blog posted to <http://blogs.wsj.com/digits/2009/10/07/women-outnumber-men-on-social-networking-sites/>

xxiii Keeter, S., & Taylor, P. (2009).

xxiv Taylor, P., & Keeter, S. (2010). *Millennials: Confident. Connected. Open to Change*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <http://pewsocialtrends.org/assets/pdf/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change.pdf>

xxv Taylor, P., & Keeter, S. (2010).

xxvi Yahoo! Hot Jobs, & Robert Half International. (2007).

xxvii Gianin, C. (2008). *Unions and Social Media*. Cornell ILR. Unpublished.