

2021

Decision-Making of Unionized Men toward Work and Post-Secondary Education: A Qualitative Study

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Angela Pesce

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Decision-Making of Unionized Men toward Work and Post-Secondary Education: A

Qualitative Study

by

Angela Pesce

MA, Walden University, 2020

MS, The University of Scranton, 2018

BA, Neumann University, 2015

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Educational Psychology

Walden University

June 2021

Abstract

High school graduates who opt for labor-based unionized positions, versus matriculating, are typically viewed as unable to matriculate, less intelligent and a myriad of other less desirable qualities. Current literature fails to showcase the decision-making experiences of unionized men who did not matriculate. There is also a gap regarding unionized men's perceptions on matriculation, including their reasons for not. This general qualitative study explored the career decision-making experiences of unionized men and their perceptions on postsecondary education through semi-structured interviews with 10 unionized men in Delaware and Pennsylvania. Purposeful and convenience sampling were used for recruitment through posted flyers within local union halls. Applying a modified Van Kaam method to analyze the transcribed interviews, 6 thematic results were found about the career-decision making experiences and perceptions of postsecondary education by these unionized men. These results indicated that unionized men had positive decision-making experiences, chose their paths based on family supports and modeling, and felt a sense of security and satisfaction. Unionized men's perceptions of matriculation were also positive however, financial costs of institutions, lack of interest in schooling, and their chosen fields not requiring college solidified their choice to unionize. Findings from this study can contribute to positive social change by increasing counselor and educator's education on alternate paths beyond matriculating to better enable students to make appropriate career choices. It is also hopeful that this study emphasized the importance of guest speakers, exploratory classes, and planned field trips to union halls in addition to college focused curriculum and school trainings.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedication to all unionized workers, past, present, and future, who have dedicated their lives to a noble career. You are appreciated for all of your hard work, manual labor, and efforts in all that you do each day. Of all unionized workers, special recognition is to be extended to the participants who were interviewed for this study. Without them, this study would not have been possible.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Margaret and Anthony. No two people have provided a better source of education, growth, motivation, and support than the two of you. I am the lifelong learner that I am today due to your devotion to my education and assistance with all the countless hours of studying, reading, and reviewing every single project and paper ever completed. I am nothing without your endless love, support, and understanding along the way.

Finally, to my other half, Michael, for being a major inspiration behind this study. Thank you for your tremendous insights and recommendations along the way to ensure I showcased this population in a fair and accurate manner.

Without all of the above people, this study, and the numerous hours of sweat and tears would mean nothing. This is for all of you.

Acknowledgments

I want to begin by acknowledging, thanking, and appreciating the most remarkable chair I could have ever asked for, Dr. Scotch. Since day one you were willing to hit the ground running with me at full speed. Your wit, insights, patience, and understanding were a true gift to this entire process.

I would also like to extend an acknowledgement and thank you to my other committee members, Dr. Valdez, and Dr. Worthington. Your guidance, feedback and thorough reviews throughout this process made this study the best version it could be.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

As of 2018, enrollment was approximately 16.6 million students across postsecondary institutions in America, showing a decline of 1.4 million over the last decade (Butrymowicz & D'Amato, 2020). America's education and career system are known for predominantly having a one-track mind which entails completing high school, attending college, and then obtaining a career (Carroll et al., 2019; Sawhill, 2013). With more than 53% of careers being of the middle, labor skilled category and not requiring traditional matriculation (Decker, 2019) many students are opting not to matriculate and instead are pursuing alternative careers in labor trade, unionized positions (Hunter, 2018; Christman, 2012). Present literature fails to acknowledge and demonstrate an understanding of the decision-making process and perceptions among these unionized workers that led to their career choice and lack of matriculation.

A strategic literature review, further explained in Chapter 2, made evident the lack of research regarding unionized workers' career decision-making processes and their perceptions on postsecondary education. Therefore, the present study aims to decrease this gap through adding this pertinent information to current literature. This introductory chapter will consist of a background on the present study, a problem statement, a description of the purpose of the study and the research questions being examined. In addition, a report of the theoretical framework will be given, a description of the nature of the study will be done, and an explanation of the operational definitions within the

study will be given. Also noted within this chapter will be the assumptions, scope, limitations, delimitations, and significance of the study.

Background of the Problem

Current literature makes evident the many advantages to pursuing postsecondary education (Baum et al., 2013; Cote et al., 2008; Denhart et al., 2013; Sawhill, 2013). In some instances, these may be financial, health-related, skill related, preference based, career choice driven or because of one's personal perceptions or pressures (Baum et al., 2013; Cote et al., 2008; Denhart et al., 2013; Sawhill, 2013). Pieces of literature even exist that acknowledge the disadvantages to matriculation (Baum et al., 2013; Christman, 2012; Denhart, 2013; Sawhill, 2013; Soule & Warrick, 2015). Despite this, there is a large gap in the current literature on alternative options to the traditional route of postsecondary education, one being unionized work.

Labor trade positions within a unionized career area are ones that fail to be recognized as equal or as worthy of an option in comparison to those requiring postsecondary education (Cote et al., 2008; Sawhill, 2013). Unionized careers and workers are often overlooked despite accounting for over 50% of the jobs in America (Decker, 2019). Though some possible benefits of this route have been addressed within literature (Christman, 2020; Schober, 2020; Toppin, 2018), there is a disparity when it comes to career choice and the decision-making process, with most assuming these unionized careers are chosen only when college is not an option (Schober, 2020; Toppin, 2018).

Literature exists depicting how the career decision making process and career choice may occur, or be influenced (Chen et al., 2015; Germeijs et al., 2006; Jung, 2011; Martincin & Stead, 2015; Menon, 2010; Newmeyer et al., 2008; Oymak, 2018). Nevertheless, a gap in research exists regarding exploration into the direct experiences of these unionized workers during the career decision making process. Through this understanding, an additional gap can also be filled with a description of the perceptions these unionized workers have of postsecondary education, being those who opted not to matriculate.

Problem Statement

When in an educational setting, there is often a push toward postsecondary, 2-year and 4-year degrees because of the school-centered mindset of the staff and faculty. Despite this, as of 2019, almost one-third of students are not continuing to postsecondary institutions, and of those who are, most are still perceived to be under-equipped for their chosen careers once graduation occurs (Carroll et al., 2019). While postsecondary education is deemed a worthy option according to researchers such as Sawhill (2013) and Cote, Shinkle and Motte (2008), people are becoming more open and aware of other avenues that are existent in lieu of, and or in combination with, postsecondary education that lead to new, different, and varying degrees of success, career choices and career outcomes (Hunter, 2018; Christman, 2012).

These other avenues have been chosen, in lieu of matriculating, for a variety of reasons including job demand, schooling requirements, career education, satisfaction levels, financial obligations, and external supports and pressures (Galliot & Graham,

2018; Soule & Warrick, 2015). Within the proposed study will be an exploration of the experiences of unionized men in labor trade positions such as welding, electrical, plumbing, etc., (Christman, 2012; Garcia, 2012; Hunter, 2018).

Current literature lacks the experiences of the career decision making process among those who did not matriculate, such as unionized workers. In addition, there is a gap in the research giving understanding as to what the perceptions are of postsecondary education among these unionized workers that may or may not have aided in their decision not to matriculate. The present study aims to close these gaps through the exploration of the experiences of the unionized workers' career decision making process and their perceptions of postsecondary education.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research is to address the gap in literature through a general qualitative study examining the lived experiences of unionized workers' decision-making process choosing their career path. This research also strives to gain an understanding of the perceptions unionized workers have regarding postsecondary education.

Research Questions

The following research questions were constructed to depict, and gain knowledge of, the career decision-making experiences of unionized workers and their perceptions of postsecondary education.

1. What are the career decision-making experiences of unionized workers?
2. What are unionized workers' perceptions of postsecondary education?

Theoretical Framework

Social Cognitive Career Theory

Social cognitive career theory, developed by Robert Lent, Steven Brown and Gail Hackett (1994), focuses on the cognitive processes that occur within a person and how these cognitions, along with contextual factors, influence one's career choices (Oymak, 2018). Some of the more important focal areas within this theory include the students' role, achievement levels, expectations, decision-making abilities, and self-efficacy (Oymak, 2018). The exploration, via semi-structured interviews, of each participant's achievement levels, perceived contextual factors, and noted self-efficacy, gives greater comprehension of the cause of one's career choice and associated perceptions of post-secondary education (Oymak, 2018).

Nature of Study

The nature of this study is a general qualitative study with the use of semi-structured interview questions to detail unionized workers' lived experiences of their career decision making processes and perceptions on postsecondary education. This methodology is most appropriate as the given population are those who have directly experienced the decision-making process between unionized work and apprenticeship programs rather than post-secondary education (Creswell, 2013). A qualitative approach was best fitting as it is the personal perspective of these lived experiences that is needed to fill the research gap (Moustakas, 1994).

Gathering these semi-structured interviews using the general qualitative approach will enable me to develop thematic analysis of the lived experiences, cognitions, and

beliefs of the decision-making process, career choice and current career paths of the participants. This analysis will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

Operational Definitions

The below operational definitions of key terms were established based on definitions previously found within the literature review. In addition, key terms may have different definitions among a variety of sources; however, for the functions of this research study, all key terms were operationalized in a way that the researcher found most fitting to meet the needs and purpose of the study.

Apprenticeship: A form of paid, on the job education where current unionized workers instruct, supervise and train students to obtain the necessary skills for a job and unionization (Christman, 2012).

Difficulties in Career Decision Making (DCDM): Coined by Martincin and Stead (2015), this refers to a difficulty in career decision-making which occurs in both those who have patterns of indecision and in those who have had no prior challenges in making life decisions.

Labor Trades: Skills jobs that require manual labor such as working in electrical, plumbing, heating and cooling, carpentry, welding, and construction (Toppin, 2018).

Postsecondary education: a form of post high school education that typically includes two-year colleges, four-year colleges, graduate training programs and/or four-year baccalaureate degrees (Brint & Clotfelter, 2016).

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT): A theory suggesting that a person's internal thoughts, feelings, expectations, societal pressures, and familial pressures will influence career choice (Lent et al., 1994).

Unionized Worker: Someone who completes an apprenticeship and successfully passes an exam to be employed in a skilled labor trade by a company belonging to the union. (Garcia, 2012; Smith & Smith, 2005). These unions will protect the workers from discrimination, low wages, and poor work environments (Garcia, 2012).

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

Assumptions

The criteria for this study are that the participants be males between the ages of 18 and 25 who work in a labor-based unionized position, reside in Pennsylvania, Delaware, or Maryland, and did not successfully matriculate. The first assumption of this study is that each of the participant's interviewed accurately fit these criteria. Qualitative research is based on the lived experiences of each of the participants who fit this criterion (Moustakas, 1994). Through this, a second assumption of this study is that generalizability will be less likely due to the specific and narrow scope at hand (Mahoney & Goertz, n.d.). Among the participants, it is assumed that their cooperation and participation is voluntary in nature and that their disclosures were honest to the best of their abilities (Naidu & Prose, 2018).

Limitations

The researcher's background knowledge on this topic and personal experiences could lead to researcher bias. This will be combatted through member checking to ensure

an accurate depiction of information. Keeping the participant informed of the process, having them review all data collected, and being active members in the research process will ensure data is accurate, biases are not present and that everything was done ethically with respect for persons (Naidu & Prose, 2018)

Scope

Participants for this study were males who are residing and employed within the states of either Delaware, Pennsylvania, or Maryland. These participants' employment roles included plumbing, masonry, electrical, mechanical, sheet metal, welding, roofing, etc. The tri-state region was selected due to convenience and ease of access for recruitment and interviewing. While it is hopeful that these interviews will represent the whole population, multiple other states and labor union job roles exist causing some populations and careers to be underrepresented. However, the 10 participants were interviewed until data was fully saturated.

Delimitations

Delimitations in a study are the limitations that a researcher is aware of yet is electing not to address or account for due to their own judgment, preference, or discretion and the goals of the study (Fountouki & Theofanidis, 2018). When determining participant criteria, it was evident that the desired gender, age, and location are rather constrictive. To have data collection solely be done on men was a conscious decision to increase any potential chances of generalizability or relatability due to women being more of a minority within the labor unions. When establishing the age parameters, 18-25 was deemed most appropriate as, despite most labor union members being well above

this range, these ages align with those of people matriculating and will therefore be better for data comparative purposes. In addition, restricting the parameter to only Delaware, Maryland and Pennsylvania can also be deemed a limitation as union positions are global. However, this was chosen due to ease of access and availability for data collection. Finally, sample size can also be regarded as a limitation as 10 people can lack generalizability and will underrepresent multiple people. However, this number was chosen to allow the researcher adequate time to conduct all interviews, transcribe all data and successfully report all results within the constraints of time despite the lack of assistance in the research procedures and reporting.

Significance

It is hopeful that through these developments in research future unionized workers will be aware of all their options. It is also hopeful that educators, families, and employers alike will learn what is driving people to these career paths and how to foster the interests of individuals in the decision-making process. In addition, this research could bring an understanding to parents, educators, and students that matriculating is one option of many. However, this option may not be fitting for all students (Christman, 2015; Cote et al., 2018; Sawhill, 2013). This research aims to bring more education and acceptance to parents, students, and educators of these alternate options, such as unionized work. Through the examination of unionized workers' thoughts on post-secondary education, the study brings experiences and perspectives into the decision-making process of career choice, and whether to pursue post-secondary education, providing a unique contribution to current literature.

Summary

Within this introductory chapter was an explanation of the need for the present study exploring unionized workers' lived experiences of the career decision making process and their perceptions on postsecondary education. The purpose of the present study, a description of the research questions, a general premise of the nature of the study and background as well as an explanation of the operational definitions, limitations, assumptions, and significance of the study were established. In the subsequent chapter will be a richer exploration and expressed need of the phenomenon through an extensive literature review depicting the theoretical framework for the present study, and a synthesis of current literature regarding this topic.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Postsecondary education is a form of post high school education that typically includes two-year colleges, four-year colleges, graduate training programs and four-year baccalaureate degrees (Brint & Clotfelter, 2016). As of 2012, 20 million people were enrolled in one of these institutions with over 70% in public colleges, 19% in private institutions and 9% in for-profit institutions, and this number continues to grow (Brint & Clotfelter, 2016). However, though this large number of students may enroll, not all students will achieve degree or certificate conferral (Baum et al., 2013; Sawhill, 2013).

People who opt not to finish their degrees, or choose not to matriculate at all, have other options available to them, one being unionized work (Hunter, 2018; Christmas, 2012). As of 2019, around 10.3% of workers, 14.6 million people, were union members (BLS, 2020). Of these workers, an average salary among them was a little over 1,000 dollars a week (BLS, 2020).

This chapter will consist of a literature review that supports the foundational needs of the present study and makes evident the gaps in current literature. The literature search included scholarly research that gives insights into the current theoretical framework (Lent et al., 1994). Following the theoretical foundation, literature was thematically categorized to illustrate the literature regarding the decision-making process and career choice as well the career choice paths of postsecondary education and unionized work and workers.

Literature Search Strategy

Within the literature search, academic quantitative and qualitative books and studies were used. The search engines utilized for this academic literature search were Thoreau, PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES, Social Science Database, ERIC, and Google Scholar. In the search for information, key search terms used, in combination with one another and singularly, were *postsecondary education perceptions, unionized work, academic motivation among high school students, academic performance, parental involvement in decision-making, 4-year education outcomes, perceptions of trade unions, self-efficacy, social cognitive career theory, decision-making process, career choice, career choice among high school students, career choice among union workers, career choice in postsecondary education, postsecondary education versus unionized work.*

Studies that investigated the decision-making process, career choice and educational or career outcomes were a major focal point during this literature search. In addition, articles and research that explored perceptions, expectations, and societal and familial pressures, predominantly regarding decision-making, were at the forefront of this search strategy as well.

Quantitative articles were an asset during this search to gain an understanding of the figures and statistics regarding postsecondary education, unionized workers, and career choice. Qualitative literature was applied to add context and meaning behind facts and figures. However, the lack of qualitative resources also demonstrated a greater need for more qualitative studies to give a complete understanding and context from a qualitative perspective.

Theoretical Framework

Social Cognitive Career Theory

Social cognitive career theory, deriving from social cognitive theory, spotlights an individual's ongoing internal cognitions, such as their expectations, and how they interact with contextual factors, such as societal pressures, to influence career choice (Lent et al., 1994, Brown et al., 2000, as cited in Oymak, 2018). Some subcategories within the umbrella of social cognitive career theory, also known as SCCT, linked to the present study include expectations, self-efficacy, decision-making abilities, perceived contextual factors and achievements (Oymak, 2018). In looking at SCCT, correlating aspects to this study, career choice and development, include the formation of career interests, performance, academic pursuits, and choice educational and career options (Lent et al., 1994). The overall premise of this theory notes the significance of personal choice and power in career decision-making as well as the contextual factors that either aid or hinder choice and decision-making processes (Lent et al., 1994).

In exploring a connection between SCCT and self-efficacy, SCCT declares that through not only the development of interests, pursuit, and performance, but also through a certain level of self-efficacy, one's work toward achieving one's chosen path (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2012). In addition, SCCT suggests self-efficacy to be a major influence and mediating factor in career choice and decision-making due to its alterations of intentions, exploration, or abilities (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2012). It has been conceptualized that the

path toward choice and outcome is based on efficacy affecting interest, with self-efficacy being a major predictor of choice, as opposed to the inverse (Angell et al., 2002).

Through the examination of SCCT, literature has made evident the crucial role that self-efficacy plays in career choice and the decision-making process. In addition, SCCT provides deeper insights into possible ways interests and motivations arise among individuals for certain career choices and educational paths.

Nevertheless, there is still a gap in research that brings awareness and education as to the experiences of the individuals tasked with navigating these career interests, contextual factors, and expectations. This involves not only experiences in the decision-making process but the perceptions that may or may not have altered their decision-making process and career choice. This led to a literature search strategy, based on this theoretical foundation, to bring answers and understanding of the career decision-making experiences of individuals, specifically unionized workers who chose not to successfully matriculate, and what their perceptions are on postsecondary education.

Thematic Literature Review

Once foundational research was completed, an extensive literature review was conducted to establish a deeper understanding of the decision-making process, career choice, postsecondary education, unionized work, and unionized workers. This literature is based on general populations, outcomes, and statistics within both the United States, and the world. Furthermore, this literature search did not consider extenuating circumstances, anomalies, or at-risk populations among these findings. To appropriately

assess each of the themes, without bias, both the advantageous and disadvantageous components of each were investigated.

Decision- Making and Career Choice

The literature search analyzed the decision-making process and career choice of an individual. For specificity and differentiation, the literature on the career decision-making process and career choice were examined as two separate entities. To fit the needs of the present studies' purpose, the career decision-making process is being viewed as a progression over time whereas career choice is being deemed a single act or decision.

Career Decision-Making Process

Prior to making a career choice, a decision-making process occurs that leads one to one's conclusion (Germeijs et al., 2006; Wickersham, 2020). For high schoolers, this process is a culmination of tasks; awareness and motivation to make a choice, self-exploration, exploring career environments and atmospheres, narrowing down options and alternatives, deciding on a career, and then commitment to decision (Germeijs et al., 2006). When deciding, there are both short-term and lifetime pathways to examine (Wickersham, 2020). For instance, some short-term decisions may lead to a reduction in financial burdens and good job prospects; however, the lifetime decision may be a different career pathway due to job projections and overall life goals (Wickersham, 2020). With both short-term and lifetime career decision making, the process may be simple; however, many struggle during these task phases due to indecision and uncertainty (Germeijs et al., 2006; Germeijs & Verschueren, 2007; Gnilka & Novakovic, 2017; Martincin & Stead, 2015). Individuals who have better coping skills and a stronger

grasp of these task phases appear to be more prepped and motivated to solidify their decision and achieve their career goals (Germeijs & Verschueren, 2007). Nevertheless, these higher skills and stronger grasps are not guaranteed to aid in solidifying a career decision (Germeijs et al., 2006; Martincin & Stead, 2015).

A difficulty in career decision-making, also known as DCDM, can occur in those who have patterns of indecision or in those who typically have no challenges in making life decisions (Martincin & Stead, 2015). This DCDM can be ascribed to emotional distress, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, few life experiences, lack of insight in self, poor expectations, conflict with others, or a fear of failure (Bullock-Yowell, et a., 2012). On odd occasions, this DCDM is due to amotivation (Jung, 2011). Some students fail to recognize a connection between making their decision and the consequences of making such a decision (Jung, 2011). As a result, many individuals avoid, delay, or altogether refuse to decide about their future educational and career choice (Jung, 2011).

It has been suggested that, in certain instances, a person's level of career indecision can be predicted based on background, gender, ability levels and personality (Chen et al., 2015; Jung, 2011; Martincin & Stead, 2015). Investigating university enrollment for chosen careers, some predictors of indecision include a student's abilities, expectations for success, social status, gender, satisfaction and enjoyment of field and educational area, and parental levels of involvement and engagement (Jung, 2011). In addition, it has also been shown that people who make these decisions belatedly are likely to be members of minority groups, male, of lower socioeconomic status, with low self-concept and efficacy, and having poor academic performance (Jung, 2011).

In conjunction with the above factors, personality has also been proven to predict career decision or indecision levels (Martincin & Stead, 2015). Someone who is considered to have neuroticism will be more likely to have difficulty making decisions, career decisions included (Martincin & Stead, 2015). Persons who are deemed agreeable, extraverted, or open are more likely to have an easier time making decisions whereas conscientious people are more prone to having difficulties with career decision making (Martincin & Stead, 2015).

Career uncertainty and indecisiveness have been proven to be harmful to one's career development, one's own personal growth and adjustment of one's psychological and physical levels (Chen et al., 2015). For this reason, it is crucial to begin to foster this decision-making process, increase supports and nurture these individuals to ensure a smoother decision-making process (Newmeyer et al., 2008; Oymak, 2018).

The social and family circle of these individuals are the first link and main influence for the decision-making process (Oymak, 2018). It has been reported that students rely first on their family, then school staff, and finally themselves, in order, for decisions regarding postsecondary education, whether to matriculate, and which career to choose (Oymak, 2018). Knowing this information, family, school staff, and peers can begin to engage in the necessary conversations to increase the chances of making an appropriate and smooth decision (Newmeyer et al., 2008). Some of these conversations and activities could include talking with the individual about their interests, perceived abilities, expectations, and efficacy (Newmeyer et al., 2008). In addition, family, peers, and school staff could provide experiential opportunities and stress the importance to the

individual of increasing and fostering their potential, interests, and expectations to match their careers (Newmeyer et al., 2008). In addition, the educational system could do their part to increase the connection between one's education, experiential opportunities, university information and the labor market (Menon, 2010).

While all these parties can do their part to facilitate the decision-making process, they may emphasize different goals and paths from one another depending on life circumstances and setting (Oymak, 2018). School staff could be guiding students toward university tracks while parental figures recommend unionized work (Oymak, 2018). For example, people from lower SES may be more inclined to follow the paths and voices of their family members or self, whereas higher SES individuals are more inclined to have the school staff be their main influence in the decision-making process (Oymak, 2018). Most of this is due to the perceived benefits of each option based on the family, school staff and individual's own perceptions, opportunities, and experiences (Oymak, 2018; Toppin, 2018). Someone from a lower SES may have a great deal of DCDM because their school staff is gearing them toward universities due to high academic performance, but their family influences are swaying their decision to union work based on supposed financial costs (Cote et al., 2008).

This decision-making process review brought an understanding into the predictive factors of career decision making difficulties (Bullock-Yowell, et al., 2012; Germeijs et al., 2006; Germeijs & Verschueren, 2007; Gnilka & Novakovic, 2017; Jung, 2011; Martincin & Stead, 2015) and the influences hindering or fostering the decision-making process (Cote et al., 2008; Newmeyer et al., 2008; Oymak, 2018). For the

purposes of this research study, the literature review, and the decision-making life tasks (Germeijs et al., 2006), the decision-making process is presumed to be completed once a career choice has been committed to.

Career Choice

The final step toward a career path, the career choice, is made once one finds oneself committed to a decision (Germeijs et al., 2006). Traditionally, a career choice is established once a career aspiration and expressed goal has become more realistic and operational (Buys et al., 2013). Once these career goals and aspiration have been determined, this will naturally begin to drive the motivation and behaviors toward this path (Buys et al., 2013). Components of prestige, authority, responsibility, training and traditionality are all considered to operationalize one's aspirational career choice (Buys et al., 2013). In addition, job-related career goals are also established to strive toward (ACT inc, 2009). People who, after choosing a career, demonstrate these strivings and components tend to have an increase in their choice certainty and persistence (ACT inc, 2009).

However, a career choice is not something that is immediate and obvious once the decision-making process is complete (Bright et al., 2005). Some influential factors on career choice include a person's interests, exposure to work-like activities, reinforcements of work, self-efficacy, leisure experiences and activities and outside factors such as friends, family members and teachers (Bright et al., 2005). Overall, the higher one's self esteem, the lower the career choice uncertainty (Chen et al., 2015).

Career choice also comes about through education and knowledge (Frenette, 2010; Germeijs & Verschueren, 2007). By the age of 15, almost 78% of students are aware of what degree requirements are necessary for their chosen career (Frenette, 2010). The remaining students are individuals who have a belief that no more than a high school diploma is required or, in some cases, are completely unaware of the educational degree requirements of their chosen career (Frenette, 2010). As students age to senior year, it is close to 84% who are now aware of degree requirements (Frenette, 2010). This is typically due to career choice change based on new and learned knowledge of careers and career options (Frenette, 2010). Occasionally, a student makes a career choice and is committed; however, they never end up pursuing this path (Germeijs & Verschueren, 2007). Students who had a choice, but still browsed other options were less likely to remain solid in their choices and often were easily swayed to their alternative choices (Germeijs & Verschueren, 2007).

Unfortunately, there have been circumstances where a career choice was made not out of preference but out of necessity (Lehmann et al., 2014). Students often pursue a chosen career because they do not feel like they have any other options and/or are unaware of alternative career choices (Lehmann et al., 2014). Some of these situations include a student with lower finances, poor academic performance, or the perception that their skill set can only be beneficial for a certain career based on their background, race, or upbringing (Lehmann et al., 2014). Sadly, choosing a career based on these circumstances often leads to changes or a career mismatch (Lehmann et al., 2014). A person who does well with their hands may pursue making tools or machines for a couple

of years only to discover that a more suitable career may be engineering, causing a realignment of career goals and change in paths (Lehmann et al., 2014). These career choice restrictions are due to a multitude of considerations including narrow visions, lack of resources, low academic performance and achievement or low engagement (Cote et al., 2008). At times, this mismatched career choice arises within families who may be first-generation students or have low parental influence, engagement, education, and encouragement (Cote et al., 2008).

Through the literature search on career choice, commitment factors, circumstantial mismatching, and choice influencers have all been discovered as vital elements of career choice (Christman, 2012; Frenette; 2010; Germeijs & Verschueren, 2007; Hunter 2018; Lehmann et al., 2014). It is not the task of the individual alone to educate themselves on their career choice options (Cote et al., 2008). People, through external influences, educational programs, school staff and peers, can find ways to commit to a career choice that is most fitting for their aspirations, personality and lifelong goals (Christman, 2012; Frenette; 2010; Germeijs & Verschueren, 2007; Hunter 2018; Lehmann et al., 2014).

Career Pathways

After exploration into the decision-making process and how one lands on a career choice, the two career pathways that were then investigated in the search were postsecondary education and unionized workers. Unionized workers and work were chosen to be examined as this category makes up the population of the present study. Postsecondary education was also parsed during the literature search as the unionized

workers' perceptions of this category and career pathway choice is the main focal point of the present study.

Postsecondary Education Pathway

There are many perceived statistical advantages to pursuing postsecondary education for one's health, finances, personal relationships, employment attainment, job growth, overall success, and feelings of satisfaction (Baum et al., 2013; Cote et al., 2008; Denhart et al., 2013; Sawhill, 2013). Looking toward overall lifetime earnings, those who successfully matriculated had a significant increase in earnings compared to those who did not attend higher education (Cote et al., 2008). In many instances, this increase was as high as over 600,000 dollars more for those who had a bachelor's degree in comparison to high school educated individuals (Sawhill, 2013).

There are still some additional financial advantages, beyond salary, such as with equities, investments, and insurance coverages (Baum et al., 2013; Cote et al., 2008). Investments or personal equities made by postsecondary graduates had a higher rate of return by 10-30% depending on their type of degree level (Cote et al., 2008). More affordable retirement planning and insurance coverages can be another compensational advantage (Baum et al., 2013). At the start of the decade, 65-73% of people with degrees were offered retirement plans, and roughly 70% are also offered fully funded health care coverage in comparison to the respective 52% and 27% for high school diploma holders (Baum et al., 2013). While this is not an exhaustive list of advantages, a most notable financial benefit of matriculation is the reality that there are a great deal of occupations

that will not offer a job or a salary without a bachelor's degree, if not higher (Baum et al., 2013).

Beyond financial gains, there are many skill-based and relational advances as well (Denhart, 2013). There are many skills that, though they cannot be taught in a textbook, are still developed through postsecondary education such as productivity, critical thinking skills, problem solving, decision-making and time management (Denhart, 2013). It has been discovered that all the aforementioned traits and skills will be developed stronger and faster through the experiences and teachings (Denhart, 2013). In addition, postsecondary education leads to more mature, disciplined, skilled and financially and relationally responsible individuals and employees (Denhart, 2013).

An individual's overall health and well-being is another component which is known to be improved due to the successful completion of a postsecondary educational program (Baum et al., 2013). Of those who have these degrees, there is a lower prevalence of smoking by almost 20%, an increase in physical activity of 30%, and a reduction in obesity within their households by over 10% (Baum et al., 2013).

Though matriculating has beneficial aspects, there are still postsecondary education disadvantages to ponder during the career decision-making process (Christman, 2012). One common misconception is that all postsecondary routes lead to a degree (Baum et al., 2013). In attending a four-year, two-year or community college institution, there are many programs that earn an individual a certificate in a field rather than a degree (Baum et al., 2013). This route leads many students to either continue to a degree-

based program after or be unable to obtain appropriate employment since many chosen fields require a degree (Baum et al., 2013).

The financial benefits of completing higher education have been established (Baum et al., 2013; Cote et al., 2008; Denhart et al., 2013; Sawhill, 2013). However, the financial advantages of attending a degree program do not always override the financial costs (Sawhill, 2013). More than half of college students, and a higher percentage of that among minority students, will drop out before completing a degree (Sawhill, 2013). One reason behind this is the rate of return on a certain degree (Sawhill, 2013). Depending on a person's degree level, their earnings and financial benefits will be increased; however, the higher the degree, or longer the time of matriculation, the higher the costs are for enrollment, tuition, and loan totals (Sawhill, 2013). Additionally, the type of institution and major chosen will also alter these earnings (Sawhill, 2013). Some lifetime earnings accumulate only a six percent return while others have an increase in over one million dollars compared to other fields, not accounting for debt and time accrued (Sawhill, 2013).

Thirdly, a college degree, despite the perceived benefits, is not deemed as lucrative as in previous times (Denhart, 2013). Due to the increase in the number of people who have obtained degrees, the rarity, and therefore appeal and value, of a degree has declined (Denhart, 2013). Moreover, though education and a degree are considered honorable, employers are beginning to view employee productivity and personality as metrics for promotion and salary increases as opposed to college diplomas (Denhart, 2013). Many college graduates have even had to take a lower-paying unskilled job due to

lack of demand or overcrowding in higher positions, so many graduates are failing to see corresponding financial gains (Denhart, 2013).

Despite the many strengths and weaknesses of matriculation, when exploring a student's decision to matriculate or drop out of their institution for alternative options it is necessary to explore the thoughts and actions during the career decision-making process and how it follows individuals throughout their matriculation journey (Aarkrog et al., 2018). Students' motivation to attend, and remain, at institutions can be swayed by the students' views on their performance levels, social status, self-efficacy, educational demands and necessary job qualifications and credentials for a desired career path (Aarkrog et al., 2018). Students are continuing to matriculate despite poor performances, lack of interest in material and low mental health and efficacy because they are fearful that they will not obtain their desired job, or any job, without completion (Aarkrog et al., 2018). In contrast, there are also students who receive a poor grade or have low self-efficacy who then opt to drop out as rigor increases to prevent potential future career or educational failure (Aarkrog et al., 2018). While some students can redirect and realign this career and educational ambivalence through the use of counseling support, not all students utilize this option and often make a decision to stay or leave without the guidance of others (Aarkrog et al., 2018). This research demonstrates the need for all students to examine all options and potential outcomes prior to commitment through the assessment of their own views and assumptions of postsecondary education, and their desired career outcomes (Aarkrog et al., 2018).

In examining the many rewards and disadvantages of matriculation, an overall benefit would be that higher education creates workers who are healthier, more informed, more satisfied, and wealthier (Sawhill, 2013). However, postsecondary education still breeds some drawbacks such as an increase in debt, loss of time, lack of return, lack of preparedness, lack of job demand and prestige depending on the type of degree, length of time required to complete the degree, and the educational setting it was earned in (Baum et al., 2013; Denhart, 2013; Sawhill, 2013; Soule & Warrick, 2015). Due to this, alternative options, such as pursuing unionized work, should be examined by individuals to ensure a decision that is most fitting can be made (Christman, 2012).

Unionized Workers' Career and Educational Pathway

Of the high school students who start college at a 4-year institution, 25-50% will not graduate until closer to six years' time, if they have not already dropped out or transferred first (Christman, 2012). People are going to college assuming they will build skills to obtain satisfying employment; however, spending multiple years in school misdirected or unguided leads to an increase in debt and stalls cognitive skills (Soule & Warrick, 2015). Some of this is due to students who may be attending college without having an interest in going, or in any of the career areas offered but, alternate options were never discussed with them, so matriculation occurred despite this (Christman, 2012).

Among graduating high schoolers, 25% perceived people who went to trade school as not as smart as college students, 55% felt office jobs over trade jobs led to more respect, 66% reported they did not know about trade schools enough, 62% revealed never

learning about trade schools and 68% reported that trade schools were never made an option by their school counselors (Schober, 2020). Students' expectations post high school were typically to matriculate, with only 19% assuming they would be working or thinking of working (Toppin, 2018). This assumption is brought on due to SES increases, a decrease in the value of blue-collar jobs, and the trained mental drive that a person's only path is to go to college and get a degree if they want to work or make money (Toppin, 2018). This mindset has led to over six years in a row of skilled trades having hard to fill job vacancies across the United States, with over four years in a row globally (Toppin, 2018). Due to these perceptions about skilled trades, assumptions about careers and lack of options, there has been an ongoing decline in technical education programs, especially at the high school level (Toppin, 2018).

Despite trade schools being overlooked and underemployed they remain a viable option for attaining a career (Toppin, 2018). In lieu of, or in combination with, matriculating would be completing an apprenticeship to then work in a labor trade position and join the union (Christman, 2012; Hunter, 2018). Apprenticeships are a form of vocational education, typically completed after high school (Christman, 2012). This form of education has current unionized workers instructing, supervising, and training a student to obtain the necessary skills for the job and eventual unionization (Christman, 2012). In addition to learning the trade, some common practices during apprenticeship are also teaching morals, integrity, and character in the workplace as these young adults' transition into full-time work and adulthood (Christman, 2012). Some of the many skilled trades that can be obtained and unionized through an apprenticeship program include

electricians, plumbers, heating and cooling, carpentry, welding, and construction (Toppin, 2018).

One appeal to these programs is getting paid training, hands-on experience, an increase in skills and a job lined up after completion of the program (Christman, 2012). Of apprenticeship graduates, over 90% have a job after completion with starting salaries averaging about 60,000 dollars a year (Toppin, 2018). In pursuing a skilled trade career, versus a traditional postsecondary education, workers are potentially beginning with somewhat lower, if not equal salaries (Toppin, 2018). However, due to taking only 2 years for completion, compared to an average 4-year college degree, the shorter time span places the union salary ahead by an accumulation of over approximately 70,000 dollars after those 2 years are averaged out (Toppin, 2018). For people who still would like to obtain degrees and certifications, many programs are done through dual enrollment at community or junior colleges (Toppin, 2018). In some instances, people opt to get a vocational technical degree instead of a specific degree or certificate due to a reduction in costs and time until completion (Hunter, 2018). This vocational degree still leads to an income that is on par with, if not much higher than, the average college graduate with up to 5 years of experience and, in some instances, student loan debt (Schober, 2020). Vocational degrees students are only required to take courses directly related to their skill trade rather than taking general courses or electives, thereby decreasing costs and time in the program as well (Hunter, 2018).

As of 2014, many adults have begun to seek out career opportunities that will lead to more job security, an increase in job competency, skill sets, income, and

competitiveness among peers (Stevens, 2014). Learners across all universities are desiring an integration between their learning and their work and life that, so far, has not been matched effectively within traditional postsecondary classrooms (Stevens, 2014). Having what is taught be directly utilized the next day at work has not yet been incorporated into postsecondary institutions' curriculums (Stevens, 2014). With 81% of all learners working at least 40 hours a week (Stevens, 2014) it is crucial for the learners to feel that their learning and time commitment is leading to their desired career and educational advancement goals (Stevens, 2014). Apprenticeship programs and unionized positions, in comparison to postsecondary institutions, offer the opportunity for these learners to directly apply their knowledge and learned skills each day due to the daily blend of their work and education (Christman, 2012).

The overview of literature highlighted unionized workers and careers as often being overlooked or opted out of for myriad reasons such as lack of awareness, lack of options, lack of integration within the education system, and misconceptions about salary and job projections over time (Christman, 2012; Freeman & Taylor, 2011; Hunter, 2018; Toppin, 2018).

Summary and Conclusions

This extensive literature review led to a deeper understanding of the social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994). Likewise, this overview of literature gives stronger insights into the predictive factors, life tasks and influences on the decision-making process (Bullock-Yowell, et a., 2012; Cote et al., 2008; Germeijs et al., 2006; Germeijs & Verschueren, 2007; Gnilka & Novakovic, 2017; Jung, 2011 Martincin &

Stead, 2015; Newmeyer et al., 2008; Oymak, 2018). In the exploration of career choice, the influences, and elements on career choice and the cruciality of matching career choice with one's self have been shown to be more important (Christman, 2012; Cote et al., 2008; Frenette; 2010; Germeijs & Verschueren, 2007; Hunter 2018; Lehmann et al., 2014). Finally, through surveying the advantages and disadvantages of both postsecondary education and unionized work, education on the misconceptions in career pathways, job requirements and projections over time has been increased (Baum et al., 2013; Christman, 2012; Denhart, 2013; Freeman & Taylor, 2011; Hunter, 2018; Sawhill, 2013; Soule & Warrick, 2015; Toppin, 2018).

Despite this increase in awareness and understanding of these categories, there are still gaps in the current literature. The literature was able to give insights for new and upcoming high school graduates regarding these categories (Baum et al., 2013; Christman, 2012; Denhart, 2013; Freeman & Taylor, 2011; Hunter, 2018; Sawhill, 2013; Soule & Warrick, 2015; Toppin, 2018). However, the literature failed to give a more descriptive understanding of the perceptions that the unionized workers have regarding postsecondary education or the personal experiences that this population has gone through during their career decision-making process and, more specifically, what led them to opt out of postsecondary education.

Based on the gaps in literature, the present study is deemed pertinent and beneficial to the field of educational psychology. In the subsequent chapter, Chapter 3, the research method for the present study will be described. Chapter 3 will articulate the

research design, the methodology of the chosen study, the approach of the study, data collection methods, descriptions of the samples and an explanation of the procedure.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this general qualitative study is to examine the experiences of unionized workers' decision-making process choosing their career path. This research also aims to gain an understanding of the perceptions unionized workers have regarding postsecondary education. Within Chapter One, the researcher produced a background on the present study including the main purpose for the study, the theoretical framework being used, the nature of the study, the scope of the study and all assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. In addition, Chapter Two presented a strategic literature review depicting the current gap in literature regarding the decision-making process of unionized workers and their perceptions on postsecondary education. Contained in this chapter will be an explanation of the research design and rationale, a description of the role of the researcher, a breakdown on the methodology and details on the issues of trustworthiness within the study.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Questions

The chosen research questions were applied to guide the study and maintain alignment.

RQ1- What are the career decision-making experiences of unionized workers?

RQ2- What are unionized workers' perceptions on postsecondary education?

Design and Rationale

The established research design for this study is a general qualitative design (Worthington, 2013). This methodology is most appropriate as it explores the experiences of the career decision making process of unionized men, and, if any, the meaning, and perceptions they ascribed to these experiences and, as a result, to their perceptions of postsecondary education (Worthington, 2013). This approach was best fitting as it allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of unionized men, and their path toward becoming unionized (Worthington, 2013).

Within a qualitative research design, the focus is on being able to interpret, to do in-depth analyses and to obtain comprehensive accounts of an event, unit, behavior, or person (Aspers & Corte, 2019). In narrowing down to a qualitative approach, it was important to first examine all designs for a potential fit (Aspers & Corte, 2019). While a case study could have been effective as it captures the complex details of a phenomenon (Ebneyamini et al., 2018), a case study could potentially show bias and fail to show a pattern, relationship, or generalizability within a phenomenon (Ebneyamini et al., 2018). Another alternative option could be using a grounded research design (Birks et al., 2019). This design would also give the in-depth examination that is being sought after however, grounded theory typically leads to hypotheses or theories (Birks et al., 2019). The goal of the research study at hand is not to generate a broad theory or hypothesis based on a phenomenon but instead to simply gain an understanding. Finally, ethnography would be a viable option for this study as it will allow the researcher to examine the participants during their natural daily lives for understanding (Aspers & Corte, 2019). However,

while the present research study will be noting the participants current life and career, the focal point is on the decision process that led them to this point, rather than the present (Aspers & Corte, 2019). From this process of elimination, based on the current studies intentions and purposes, this led the researcher to conclude that the general qualitative approach would be best as it allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of unionized men, and their path toward becoming unionized (Worthington, 2013).

To gather this data, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with each of the participants (Creswell, 2013). Employing semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to guide the interview in a way that enables the researcher to maintain structure yet still seek clarification and follow up where necessary to fully capture the details of these lived experiences (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

Role of the Researcher

Within a qualitative study, the researcher is the principal source throughout the entire study (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). When conducting a general qualitative study, a major role of the researcher is to appropriately portray the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of the participants (Austin & Sutton, 2015). Due to this, a crucial and primary role of the researcher is to maintain the participants' privacy, safeguard all data and participants, and avoid all biases and judgements (Austin & Sutton, 2015).

To accurately accomplish this role, the researcher will collect all data through conducting the interviews and accurately transcribing and recording them. The researcher will take the transcribed and recorded interviews and parse them, fully developing thematic analyses. Finally, the researcher will then have to be the one to report all

findings from the study without any occurring biases (Birt et al., 2016). All of this, done solely by the researcher, will be accomplished while still maintaining appropriate privacy, confidentiality, ethical boundaries, and full safeguard procedures through anonymity within reporting, member checking, and a single password protected file folder (Birt et al., 2016; Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Naidu & Prose, 2018). Throughout the entire process, beginning with an explanation of the study and ending with post study results and presentation, the researcher must also keep the participant informed and active in the research process to maintain trustworthiness, credibility, and active, willing participant engagement (Austin & Sutton, 2015).

Research Methodology

For this study, a qualitative method was deemed most appropriate for the data collection. Aside from the age requirements to meet the participant criteria of the study, there are no recorded numerical facts and figure within this study. Therefore, there is no use of quantitative or mixed methods procedures. In using qualitative methods, the research will be conducted in a safe, neutral, and natural environment to best aid in obtaining the appropriate data and interpreted meaning of the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). In addition, qualitative methods will assist the researcher in further understanding, representing, and accurately interpreting the meaning of these participant experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of this study is to examine unionized workers' decision-making process in choosing their career path and their perceptions on postsecondary education. Utilizing this research methodology, based on

the above information, seems most appropriate to accurately examine the participant experiences and meet the purposes of the study.

Participant Selection

This qualitative approach leads the researcher to make use of data collection through semi-structured interviews (Moustakas, 1994). These interviews will be conducted with men who are currently employed in a unionized trade position. There will be a total of 10 participants and corresponding semi-structured interviews. To qualify to be a participant in this study, there was a specific set of criteria participants must have met prior. The criteria for participation in this study is as follows:

- The target population will consist of males.
- Each participant must be between the ages of 18-25.
- Each participant must have completed high school and an apprenticeship
- Each participant may not have completed post-secondary education.
- Participants may have college credits; however, if a degree conferral occurred, or if there is current enrollment, participants will be ineligible.
- The participants will be residing and employed within the tri-state area of Delaware, Maryland, and Pennsylvania.
- Participants must be unionized in labor-based trades such as plumbing, masonry, electrical, mechanical, sheet metal, welding, or roofing.

Instrumentation

During the research process, and data collection efforts, the researcher will act as the instrument and main data collector. For the interviews, the qualitative method utilized called for semi-structured interviews with the unionized workers. These semi-structured interviews will be done to elicit a deeper understanding of the experiences, and associated feelings, of the unionized workers (Moustakas, 1994).

Each interview will be transcribed by the researcher and recorded for accuracy. The interview process will have only the researcher and participant present with the researcher conducting the interview and transcribing data while the participant answers the questions (Jamshed, 2014). Prior to the interview process, the participant will be made aware, via consent form, of the nature of the interview, duration of the interview, setting of the interview and the transcription and recording of the interview that will be conducted during the interview.

The interview process will be conducted with 10 unionized worker participants based on a series of questions previously developed by the researcher in collaboration with the research committee members. The previously determined questions will serve as the structure of the interview with the researcher and, where needed, follow-up questions will be asked for additional details or clarification (Creswell, 2013). Each interview will be conducted in a one-on-one face-to-face format, lasting no more than 45 minutes (Jamshed, 2014). All 10 participants will be asked the same questions, in the same order, apart from the follow up questions which may vary based on the level of clarification and follow-up that is needed.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation and Data Collection

To conduct research and have data collection commence, the researcher must first gain approval through the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). After approval is received, the researcher will be able to recruit participants, obtain the desired 10 participants and then, collect data from the participants via semi-structured interviews.

For recruitment, purposeful sampling will be applied to make certain that the participants selected fit the criteria, are most able to bring insight, knowledge, and reliability to the current phenomenon and best answer the research questions (Creswell, 2013). To begin this recruitment, the researcher will seek out local union halls within the tri-state region of Delaware, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. The researcher will reach out, via phone call, to gain permission to hang flyers within the union halls. In addition, the researcher will request the local union halls to reach out to members, via email, to reach a larger population of members. Members will be given the option to contact the researcher through phone or email to volunteer to become a participant in the study. To those who show interest, the researcher will inform them of the necessary criteria they must fit, as well as the nature and purpose of the study. The first 10 members to fit the criteria and successfully review the given information on the study will be chosen to be participants in the study. However, prior to active participation the participants must read, agree to, and sign the informed consent form and the permission form to record the interviews and allow their data to be used. In addition, the researcher will review verbally the confidentiality nature of the study, and that no identifying information may be said by the participants during the interview as well or the recording would need to be deleted and

the interview will have to start over. If all of this is done willingly and appropriately, the researcher and participant will agree on a mutually neutral location to conduct the interview. If one of the 10 participants fail to complete the forms, or they elect to no longer participate, a replacement participant will be chosen at random based off those who showed interest.

Once the researcher and the participant meet to begin the interview, the researcher will begin by reviewing the informed consent, voluntary participation, use of the recordings and transcriptions and also the participants option to freely, without repercussions, withdraw from the study. If the participant remains, the researcher and participant will sit across from one another, the recording will begin, and the interview, and associated transcriptions, will begin. After the completion of the interview, the participant may be excused.

After the interviews have been collected, the researcher will play the recording back, in a private space, and begin to add more details to the transcriptions to make it completely verbatim. Once verbatim transcription has been created, the recordings will be deleted. In addition, the transcriptions will be sent to the participants to review for accuracy through a method called member checking (Birt et al., 2016). If all gets returned in agreement and full accuracy, deemed by the participants, the data analysis phase of the research process will begin.

COVID-19 Precautions

Due to COVID-19, necessary precautions, such as maintaining safe social distancing, using clean, disinfected materials, and wearing masks will be in effect at all

phases of outreach, recruitment, and interviewing. If a participant feels more comfortable with interviews being done remotely, this can be arranged.

Data Analysis Plan

To properly analyze data from a qualitative approach, data analysis will be done based on a modified Van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994). Below is a description outlining each step of the Van Kaam method that will be enacted based on Moustakas's (1994) work, as explained in Bhattacharya's research (2017).

- 1. Horizontalization:** Researcher will parse each interview and highlight all the relevant information that pertains directly to the experiences of the unionized workers. These will be the established codes for the data.
- 2. Reduction and Elimination:** The previously made codes will now be narrowed down into categories based on if the details and expression in the code are necessary to understand the experience of the study and if the details of the code are able to be abstracted for interpretation purposes. If these are not met, the code is eliminated. If met, these codes will form to become categories.
- 3. Clustering and Thematizing:** These categories will be combined into clusters to be thematically labelled. These clusters are what will be used as the main themes of the workers experiences, and therefore study.
- 4. Identification of Invariant Constituents and Themes by Application:**
During this phase, the categories and themes will be traced back and

compared against the interviews to ensure that these themes and categories were explicitly expressed within the transcriptions. For validity, if they were not expressed and/or not compatible or comparable to all participants they get eliminated as a category or theme.

- 5. Individual Textural Description:** At this step, a description of the phenomenon will be expressed using the predetermined themes, categories, and direct data from the transcriptions.
- 6. Individual Structural Description:** Fabrication of a description occurs at this step as the textural description gets interpreted and altered to include how the participants felt during the experiences.
- 7. Textural Structural Description:** During step seven, the textural description and structural description become merged and interpreted to bring about the meaning of the experience for the unionized workers.
- 8. Composite Description:** Lastly, all descriptions get formed, realigned and expressed to demonstrate the meaning of the experience in a way that is representative of the entire group of participants, and unionized workers, as a whole.

Issues of Trustworthiness

To ensure the credibility, validity, and overall trustworthiness of the research, one step that will be taken is to continue the data collection process until data saturation occurs (Baker et al, 2018). With the 10 participants interviewed, each interview will be

conducted until this saturation is complete. This saturation of data will be evidenced when no additional data can be found, or if there become multiple similar instances within current data (Baker et al., 2018). This saturation is crucial as it will make certain that no further insights can be derived from the data regarding the phenomenon (Baker et al., 2018).

Once saturation occurs and data collection is complete, member checking is also something that can ensure the trustworthiness of the research (Birt et al, 2016). Member checking ensues when data and/or results get returned to the participants to explore the credibility and validation of what was collected and reported (Birt et al., 2016). This member checking can confirm that all data is accurate, no biases are present, and that all ethical methods were upheld throughout the process (Naidu & Prose, 2018).

Ethical Procedures

The Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) will review and assess the researcher's proposed study prior to selecting participants and collecting any data. In addition, this review board will also be approving all conditions, limitations, delimitations, risks, and ethical protocols of the study prior to participant selection and data collection (Grady, 2019). This board makes certain that all participants are protected from any harm, are not at risk, and will have all their rights upheld throughout the entire research process (Grady, 2019).

Once approvals have been granted from the IRB board, consent forms and confidentiality agreements will be given to each of the participants that will give a detailed explanation of the research process, the nature of the study, the conditions of the

study, the participants' role, the researcher's role, and ways in which their confidentiality will be ensured. After participants sign these forms, data collection will begin, and no personal identifying information will be disclosed by the participant or by the researcher. If any information is disclosed during the interview process, the interview will end, the recording will be deleted, transcriptions will be shredded, and the interview will begin again from the beginning. The interviews, the recordings and any data that will be collected are going to be shared only with the researcher, the participant and any of the researchers approved committee members. The information will remain secure within a secure password protected file on one computer and will be destroyed after 5 years passes. If at any time a participant opts to withdraw from the study, there are no repercussions, the participant is free to be released, and all information or data related to the participant will be destroyed.

Summary

This study used a qualitative research method. This method will be utilized to examine the experiences of unionized workers' decision-making process choosing their career path. This researcher will also aim to gain an understanding of the perceptions unionized workers have regarding postsecondary education. Within this chapter was an explanation of the research design and rationale, a description of the role of the researcher, a breakdown on the methodology and details on the issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures within the study. In the subsequent chapter, the researcher's conclusions and findings based on the unionized workers' perceptions and experiences will be explained.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore the experiences of unionized workers' career decision-making process and gain an understanding of the perceptions these unionized workers have regarding postsecondary education. Data collection was completed and analyzed based on two qualitative research questions:

RQ1- What are the career decision-making experiences of unionized workers?

RQ2- What are unionized workers' perceptions on postsecondary education?

Within Chapter 3 was a description of the research design, methodology and ethical procedures and considerations inside the study. In this chapter is a detailed description of the data collection procedures as well as the analysis. In addition, this chapter also illustrates the setting of the study, participants' demographics, the recruitment process, the interview process, the study results, and the associated evidence of trustworthiness.

Setting

For the purposes of this study and research design, participants were recruited through posted flyers (Appendix A) at local union halls within the states of Delaware and Pennsylvania after permission was given from the union hall directors. Permission was granted from 3 union halls in Pennsylvania and 3 union halls in Delaware. Maryland union halls were contacted as well but permission was not obtained by any halls within that state. All correspondence with participants was done via email and phone calls once outreach was completed to schedule the interviews. The first 10 participants to meet the desired criteria and contact me were chosen as participants.

During the time of data collection, COVID-19 precautions were necessary to ensure the health and safety of myself and the participants. Due to this, all data collection, via interviews, were done virtually. I conducted the interviews from my personal office with a closed door and no one else present to maintain confidentiality. Each of the participants opted to conduct their virtual interviews at their own homes as well at a time when no one else was present during non-working hours to also ensure confidentiality and not to interfere with work obligations.

Demographics

Table 1 is representative of the participant demographics for all 10 participants including their gender, age, state of residence and employment, and occupation.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Demographics

Participant (P)	Gender	Age	State of Residence/Employment	Occupation
One	Male	25	Delaware	Welder
Two	Male	25	Delaware	Electrician
Three	Male	25	Delaware	Sheet Metal
Four	Male	23	Delaware	Electrician
Five	Male	24	Pennsylvania	Sheet Metal
Six	Male	25	Delaware	Sheet Metal
Seven	Male	24	Pennsylvania	Elevator Machinery
Eight	Male	23	Pennsylvania	Welder
Nine	Male	25	Delaware	Electrician
Ten	Male	25	Delaware	Electrician

Data Collection

Prior to beginning recruitment or data collection, approval from Walden University's IRB was given on March 15, 2021 with an approval number of 03-15-21-0992031 for the research to be conducted. Once this was given, I reached out to local

union halls within the states of Delaware, Pennsylvania and Maryland seeking permission to hang a flyer within the union halls for participant recruitment. Permission was granted from 3 union halls in Pennsylvania and 3 union halls in Delaware. Permission was not given from any union halls in Maryland. All flyers were hung within 24 hours of permission being granted. Participants were collected on a first come, first serve basis. The first 10 participants who met all the necessary criteria to participate, and signed the consent forms, were selected. The needed criterion being male, between the ages of 18 and 25, completion of high school and an apprenticeship, no postsecondary degree conferral or current enrollment, residing in Delaware, Maryland, or Pennsylvania and in a unionized labor-based trade such as welding, plumbing, electrical and sheet metal.

Due to COVID-19 protocol, all communication and data collection with the participants was done virtually. Participants reached out either via telephone or email to offer their participation. They each received the consent forms (Appendix B) via email, including permission for the interview to be recorded, and had to respond back, via email, "I consent" for participation. The participants and I scheduled their interviews, via the virtual platform of the participant's choice (phone call or video call). Of the participants, 4 chose phone calls while 6 opted to utilize virtual video calling. Participants' chosen interview times were based out of their own convenience outside of their traditional work hours. Participants were all aware and understood that they could withdraw themselves from the study at any time, without repercussions, and that their participation was solely voluntary without any monetary gain or incentives as noted in the consent form.

Due to interviews being conducted virtually, I informed each participant to ensure they were in a comfortable, non-distracting and quiet space for the duration of the interview. I also ensured my environment was comfortable, quiet, and non-distracting through using my own office with the door closed and no other people present. Once both myself and the participant were present, I sought permission to begin recording, either via the screen recording on the computer or voice recording on the phone. All participants agreed.

When interviews began, each participant was asked the same 16 questions (Appendix C), along with any necessary follow up questions for clarification purposes. Each participant was asked to be as honest and descriptive as possible. During the interview, I remained an active listener and transcribed simultaneously in addition to the recordings. After all interview questions were complete, I asked each participant if they had any additional pertinent information that should be added to their interview, all participants felt like their interviews were sufficient and did not add any additional information. Each interview lasted around 35 to 50 minutes long. Post interview each participant was informed that they will be receiving their complete, transcribed interview within 48 hours for review as a form of member checking (Birt et al., 2016) to heighten trustworthiness of the data and associated study results. The interviews, participant information and all data was stored on one password-protected computer where it will remain for 5 years' time and then will be destroyed.

Data Analysis

For this general qualitative study, a modified Van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994) was utilized for data analysis. This method consisted of eight steps: Horizontalization, reduction and elimination, clustering and thematizing, identification of invariant constituents and themes by application, individual textural description, individual structural description, textural structural description, and composite description (Bhattacharya, 2017). For the purposes of this study, four of these steps were utilized, including horizontalization, reduction and elimination, clustering and thematizing and identification of invariant constituents and themes by application.

Once each interview was completed, recorded, and fully transcribed, each participant was given their interview for review and corrections. No participants made corrections or had any objections to the finished transcription. After member checking, I started my full data analysis with the modified Van Kaam method (Bhattacharya, 2017; Moustakas, 1994):

Horizontalization: For this step, I highlighted all statements or phrases that I deemed necessary and relevant for the study within each of the interviews.

Reduction and Elimination: In a separate color, all statements or phrases deemed unnecessary or irrelevant to the study were highlighted. These highlighted phrases were eliminated from the data.

Clustering and Thematizing: In a third color, I wrote in and highlighted common statements, phrases and patterns across interviews that are relevant. These statements became my themes.

Identification of Invariant Constituents and Themes by Application: For this final step, each theme was traced back within each of the interviews to ensure it was relevant to the interviews, that the pattern was present among interviews and that the theme is relevant and pertinent to the study. Within all the steps, anything that I found to be non-pertinent or irrelevant to the study was eliminated.

During the data analysis process, there were six total themes that were common among participants that will be addressed in greater detail within the results section of this chapter:

Research Question One Themes: family footsteps, choice satisfaction and feelings of safety.

Research Question Two Themes: finance options, lack of interest in school, choice career requirements.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Within Chapter Three potential issues of trustworthiness were addressed as well as the methods that could ensure this trustworthiness. Two methods addressed included data saturation and member checking (Baker et al., 2018; Birt et al., 2016; Naidu & Prose, 2018).

To make certain of trustworthiness within the research, the first step was to have data saturation. Data saturation occurs when no additional data can be found about the phenomenon, or if multiple similar instances begin occurring within the data (Baker et al., 2018). For my data collection, I utilized semi-structured interviews, due to this, each

of the 10 participant interviews were conducted until I no longer received new information regarding the phenomenon and research questions.

An additional step taken to ensure trustworthiness is member checking (Birt et al., 2016). Member checking is when all data gets returned to participants for them to explore and confirm the credibility and validation of what was collected and reported (Birt et al., 2016). For my data collection I gave each of the participants the transcriptions from their interviews for them to review for accuracy, validity, credibility, and overall trustworthiness.

Thematic Results

The conducted data analysis led to six major themes based on two research questions:

RQ1- What are the career decision-making experiences of unionized workers?

RQ2- What are unionized workers' perceptions on postsecondary education?

Including all 10 participants' interviews, six total themes were discovered, three for each research question.

RQ1-Theme One: Family Footsteps

Half of the participants interviews disclosed that a large reason they began exploring, and picked, their chosen career path was due to having someone in their family already in the union or doing a labor-based position. For example, Participant Two shared "every male figure in my family is a union tradesman, I am a third generation...It felt like an advantage due to my fundamental for it growing up". Of these participants, not all opted to go into the exact trade of their family members however, the choice of an

apprenticeship program and then acquiring a union trade position was instilled in them from a young age through modeling, exploration, and admiration. This was evidenced with Participant One stating “My dad showed me what welding was, and I knew from him and my uncle I did not want mechanical but still something with my hands”.

RQ1-Theme Two: Choice Satisfaction

Each participant questioned noted that they are satisfied with their current career trade choice as well as all the decision-making experiences and trainings that it entailed. Four participants revealed areas in which they would like to see advancements and changes within their current roles such as Participant Three sharing his reflections of his apprenticeship “I think an apprenticeship should have been an apprentice placed with a different union person each year to explore and learn all skills as opposed to the same person each year”. Nevertheless, these four participants shared that they had no regrets in their decisions and that these areas of improvement are not cause for them to lose satisfaction or change position with most having high levels of satisfaction such as with Participant One proclaiming “I would not change anything, I actually really enjoy what I do”.

RQ1- Theme Three: Feelings of Safety

All but two participants voiced their feelings of comfort and safety within their positions. Of these participants, three noted the inclusivity package of a union-based position offering benefits, vacation, PTO, and job security that they believe they would not be able to find elsewhere without seniority, if ever. Participant Two gave insights into the inclusivity of the union and safety versus other careers through stating “everything

you offered is not something you are going to get somewhere else. Benefits, pension, annuity, retirement, vacation fund, health, and welfare. It is an advantage”. In addition, a consensus among four participants was that in having the apprenticeship program and union be so diverse when training the members, it allowed the participants to feel safe in their mechanical knowledge, ability to take on projects, both at home and at work, and also competency to go into a different labor-based position, if ever needed, such as with Participant Five “that first-hand experience is so crucial and applicable to my daily life and routine and home such as fixing things in my home and helping others also”.

RQ2-Theme One: Finance Options

In every interview, participants acknowledged the financial obligation that occurs when one elects to matriculate in comparison to apprenticeship programs and union dues that are, in most instances, a few hundred dollars a year, compared the tens of thousands for postsecondary education, Participant Two shared “I would have like to even try out college due to how well I did in college, but it was hard to afford it and I still wanted this field anyway”. However, in noting this, none of the participants, including Participant Two, used finances as a deterrence for not matriculating. Nevertheless, in comparing between the two options during career decision-making, the financial costs and benefits of matriculation versus union positions were unmatched for these participants, Participant Two echoed the finance differences in acknowledging “working for a trade in the union, the package, training and everything you get, it is really hard to walk away from and not try versus college”.

RQ2-Theme Two: Lack of Interest in School

Six participants proclaimed their perceptions of matriculation as being for people who have an interest in school and enjoy school. Three of these participants stated that one of the reasons in choosing a union position was that they would not have to go to traditional school anymore to acquire the training and a position despite having to attend night classes once or twice a week after they are done their on-the-job trainings for the day, such as Participant Six stating “I saw what I could accomplish without having to commit to school and college and I decided to do it”. While three participants reported that matriculating is not something they are opposed to for their futures, if mandated by the union, it would have to be in connection to, and in addition to, their chosen career path to increase their current positions and knowledge as opposed to studying an alternate field for instance, Participant Two explained “the union does have programs that will help me get into the college, if needed...I can get more certifications” .

RQ2- Theme Three: Choice Career Requirements

As noted in the above theme, six different participants report not being interested in school, or enjoying it such as Participant Three “I didn’t love school so it [union work] piqued my interest”. These same individuals proclaimed their satisfaction in knowing their chosen careers did not require a college education. Three participants shared that they had an interest in their chosen fields regardless of the necessary training and educational requirements reporting that them not having to matriculate was a large bonus.

Overall Study Results

While the purposes of this study were not to make conclusions and merely to understand the experiences of these unionized workers and their perceptions, a consensus

has been established based on the thematic results. Regarding unionized workers' decision-making process, the process was not a challenging one for these workers due to their understanding and acceptance of all the career choice requirements, the perceived benefits in choosing their trade and the support received from their families. Concerning these unionized workers' perceptions on postsecondary education, postsecondary education is not viewed a poor choice, however due to the financial obligations, schooling requirements and low interest in schooling, matriculation did not seem as fitting as they would like it to be for themselves.

These study results, including the decision-making process experiences and perceptions on matriculation are not representative of all unionized workers. Yet, these results were still able to provide insights into these experiences and perceptions.

Summary

This chapter supplied a culmination and summary of the results from the research study. Each participant chronicled their support systems, thoughts on their current career path and postsecondary education, and satisfaction levels regarding their chosen field. In addition, reflective insights, and advice for those in the decision-making process and those supporting the decision-making process for others whether it be to matriculate or to unionize were given by participants. The themes that emerged contributed to the research questions and overall research study through the summarization of these unionized men's career decision-making experiences as well as their perceptions of postsecondary education.

In the final chapter is a more descriptive discussion as to how the themes and results of this research study are compatible with, and contribute more information to, current literature. The last chapter will consist of an interpretation of the findings of the study, how the theoretical framework of the study can be applied, limitations of the research study, recommendations for future research, and implications for social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This general qualitative study was conducted with the purpose of exploring the career decision-making experiences of unionized workers as well as their perceptions on postsecondary education. For this study, 10 unionized men between the ages of 18 and 25, within the areas of Delaware and Pennsylvania, who completed high school and an apprenticeship program, are employed in a labor-based trade position, did not successfully matriculate and are not currently matriculating each completed a semi-structured interview. These interviews, and the study, were constructed around two qualitative research questions:

RQ1- What are the career decision-making experiences of unionized workers?

RQ2- What are unionized workers' perceptions on postsecondary education?

Within the introductory chapter of this study was a background on the study, the problem statement, a description of the purpose of the study and the research questions that were examined. In addition, a report of the theoretical framework, Social cognitive career theory, was given, a description of the nature of the study was done, and an explanation of the operational definitions used in the study were noted. Finally, the study assumptions, scope, limitations, delimitations, and significance were mentioned. Chapter two of this study was a concise, but descriptive, literature review of all the present literature regarding the theoretical foundation of the study, as well as career decision-making processes, career choice, postsecondary education and unionized work and workers. The purpose of this second chapter was to note the evident gaps in literature

surrounding the decision-making experiences of the unionized workers and their perceptions of matriculation. Contained within chapter three was an explanation of the research design and rationale of this study, a description of my role as the researcher, a breakdown on the methodology of the study as well as details on the issues of trustworthiness within the study. Chapter four consisted of a description of the data collection procedures of the study, the data analysis that occurred using the modified Van Kaam method, the setting of the study, participant demographics, the recruitment and interview processes, study results and the evidence of trustworthiness in the study.

This concluding chapter is an interpretation of the findings of the study, how the theoretical framework of the study can be applied, the limitations of the research study, recommendations for future research and the implications for social change based off this research study and corresponding results.

Interpretation of Findings

This study, using a general qualitative design, was conducted to examine unionized workers' perceptions on postsecondary education and their career decision-making experiences. Using semi-structured interviews, it allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of unionized men, and their path toward becoming unionized as well as their perceptions regarding postsecondary education including why they opted not to matriculate.

The data collected for this study was analyzed using a modified Van Kaam method. All discovered themes were based on commonalities and patterns within the semi-structured interviews conducted with the 10 unionized workers. There were six total

themes between the two research questions that emerged: family footsteps, choice satisfaction and feelings of safety from the first research question then finance options, lack of interest in school and choice career requirements from the second research question.

Research Question One Thematic Results

Theme one, family footsteps, was able to bring insights into the relationships that unionized workers have had with their family and the impact the families support and modeling had in the career decision-making process for these unionized workers. This theme can be highlighted through literature findings that credit family as being the first, and largest, influence for career choice (Oymak, 2018). This was evident within the thematic results as half of the participants attributed their interest, knowledge and exploration of their career being due to their family and their family's participation in the union.

Theme two, choice satisfaction, was a description of the satisfaction level, evaluation of, and potential remorse in, choosing their careers. Choice satisfaction can arise through family support, self-esteem, and commitment to a choice (Germeijs et al., 2006). As mentioned in the above theme, all participants felt supported by their families with their decision. In addition, multiple participants, in sharing their decision-making experiences, stated their interests began in late middle school and early high school years and stayed, with only 3 participants sharing potential alternate career paths. Due to this, it can be shown that these participants committed to their choices early and therefore were

able to increase in esteem and satisfaction as they dove deeper into their career each year and their career and trainings enforced what they were seeking.

Theme three, feelings of safety, detailed ways in which the union positions provided trainings, education, opportunities, benefits, and finances that instilled comfort and safety within the unionized workers. Eight participants explicitly mentioned the financial and benefits package as being a large contributor to keeping them happy and comfortable with their position, noting they felt covered in the event of any needs or emergencies arising. In addition, the training and education provided by the union, as four participants shared, gave them the freedom to use their skills and knowledge not only at work but in multiple facets of their life thereby increasing their comfort and safety to take care of themselves, their homes, and others, if the need arises. This matches with current literatures results on apprenticeship program and unionized trades providing this level of security through training and education. It has been reported that in addition to learning the trade, some common practices during apprenticeship programs and unionized trades are also teaching morals, integrity, and character in the workplace (Christman, 2012).

Research Question Two Thematic Results

Theme one, finance options, was a large theme with every single participant acknowledging the financial obligations with matriculating in comparison to unionizing. Literature also provides a financial comparison between matriculation versus unionization. More than 90% of apprenticeship graduates come out with a job post-graduation with salaries typically around 60,000 dollars a year, in comparison to college

graduates who do not have as large of a percentage, or guarantee, of acquiring a job post-graduation (Toppin, 2018). In addition, unionized positions, and apprenticeship programs typically cost only a few hundred dollars a year in comparison to the tens of thousands of dollars to attend colleges (Toppin, 2018). While none of the participants noted finances as a deterrent for their decision not to matriculate, they did report wanting a career they feel passionately about in order to spend those large sums of money, and potentially have debt, none of the participants reporting a college major/career providing that passion for them to pursue college.

Theme two, lack of interest in school, was another large factor with participants attending colleges and also their perceptions of college, as seen in the previous theme. Six participants shared that they did not and still do not enjoy school so traditional schooling and getting a college education in order to work in a chosen field was not as ideal for them in comparison to working during the day in their chosen field and attending night classes one or two days a week for an apprenticeship program. As noted in the above theme, participants did not want to matriculate and spend large sums of money on schools if they were not fully committed and getting their most out of it. With apprenticeship programs and unionized positions, in comparison to postsecondary institutions, there is the opportunity for the workers to directly apply their knowledge and learned skills each day with the daily blend of their work and education as opposed to learning then obtaining a job post-graduation (Christman, 2012).

Theme three, choice career requirements, explored how aware unionized workers were of all the requirements of their career and how to go about obtaining them,

including how and if postsecondary education would be necessary. Six participants reported not having to attend college is something they knew in advance about their career and that was a large reason for choosing their field. By 15 years old, 78% of students are aware of all career choice educational requirements (Frenette, 2010). These participants, most of whom began their career exploration around late middle school and early high school, were aware prior to commitment about their career educational requirements.

From the thematic results of this study, and the current literature on this population, a direct connection between the two can be found. In addition, participants' findings, in being related back to the literature, demonstrates a deeper confirmability and generalizability.

Theoretical Framework Application

Robert Lent, Steven Brown, and Gail Hackett describe Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) as how cognitive processes occur within a person and how the cognitions, and contextual factors, influence one's career choice (Lent et al., 1994; Oymak, 2018). During the interview process, participant's detailed ways in which their families, their life experiences, their academic achievements and their career expectations and goals led to their choice in unionization. All participants noted the amount of support they felt by their families with their choice, with half mentioning their family as a major influence. In addition, every participant acknowledged the financial and academic obligations with matriculating versus unionizing and how this also led to solidifying their career choice. Within SCCT, self-efficacy is a large mediating and contextual factor in decision-making

due to how self-efficacy affects one's intentions, explorations, and abilities with efficacy having a correlation on career interest and choice (Angell et al., 2002; Bullock-Yowell et al., 2012). All participants recognized their current careers as an intention at a young age and therefore their career exploration was used to further solidify their choice as their education on the field increased. Due to their intentions, explorations and abilities being discovered and nurtured at a younger age, one could argue that these participants had strong self-efficacy. In addition, the decision-making process, and their abilities to make this decision was not a challenge evidenced by all participants reporting their decision-making process as easy. These participants' influences, such as their family support and career expectations and goals, along with their decision-making abilities and self-efficacy are the contextual factors that were their influences on their career choice (Oymak, 2018). SCCT as the theoretical framework for this study was able to assist the study through giving insights into possible ways interest and motivation arose in these unionized workers for their chosen career paths. In addition, SCCT makes evident the crucial role that self-efficacy can play in career choice and the decision-making process. Through the exploration of these participants self-efficacy, an understanding was gained as to how the participants' support led to their own feelings of competency, ability, and commitment to their careers.

Limitations of the Study

There were 10 participants, within Delaware and Pennsylvania, that I conducted interviews with to complete this qualitative study. Each interview was conducted until there was total saturation of data. The participant criteria can be deemed limiting due to it

not being inclusive of non-males, people over the desired age range, those who matriculated in addition to being a labor-based union worker and those who are outside of the chosen geographical location. However, this was a conscious choice made due to ease of access and availability of participants and to be more comparable to the traditional aged college student/graduate. Opting to use only males was also a conscious decision as the union is a male dominated field, at this time, so it would allow closer generalizability from the data results. While this data was not intentionally representative of all unionized workers, these participants' data provided insights into the experiences of unionized workers' decision-making processes as well as unionized workers' perceptions on postsecondary education.

Recommendations for Future Research

In the examination of all this study offers current literature, this research also elicited three potential recommendations for future research. While these three recommendations, detailed below, have been noted as potential options, this is not an exhaustive list of recommendations as there are a myriad of ways in which this research can open the door for future research developments within this topic area.

Due to the research gap regarding unionized workers' career decision-making experiences and their perceptions on postsecondary education, this study can be viewed as a starting point for future research regarding this population to further fill this gap. A second potential recommendation for this research is to expand on this topic and explore it with a different population to increase generalizability and increase insights such as with the use of minority populations among unionized workers. Potential populations

could be female union workers or using geographical locations least/most likely to attend college versus union. A third potential recommendation for future research could be to do a comparative study among high school graduates from the same high school comparing those who matriculated and those who opted for a unionized position exploring satisfaction levels, commitment levels, and societal/family supports during the decision-making process.

Implications for Social Change

This research study was conducted to not only fill a literature gap but also to aid in bringing about social change. While it is hopeful that this research will educate all regarding unionized workers perceptions on matriculation and their career decision-making experiences, some particular populations can benefit from these results the most. This study has the potential to create social change in counselors and educators by providing them with information on some of the perceived advantages and perceptions of this process and career paths to better enable them to assist students to explore all avenues, as opposed to the more commonly discussed path of matriculation. In addition, counselors, teachers, and administrators could use this information to begin to implement more career path driven exploratory programs within their schools whether it be guest speakers, exploratory classes, or planned field trip tours of union halls, in addition to colleges. This studies intent was not only to fill a literature gap but also to begin to open a new realm of research, understanding and acceptance regarding this topic, career choice and population.

Conclusion

In this chapter, information provided included how the findings of the study can be interpreted, how the Social cognitive career theory can be applied, limitations of the research and recommendations for future research as well as implications for social change. This general qualitative study was chosen to provide insights into, and fill a research gap, regarding the experiences of unionized workers' career decision-making experiences and their perceptions on postsecondary education based on the results of interviews with 10 unionized workers. The themes found during data analysis detailed the satisfaction unionized workers have for their career path, their decision-making experiences, and their supports. In addition, the themes detailed the positive feelings unionized workers have regarding postsecondary education despite the perceived financial burdens they feel matriculation brings and the workers lack of interest in schooling. There is hope that this research was only the beginning on the subject of unionized workers experiences and perceptions.

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SEEKING UNIONIZED MEN

FOR
Study Participation

TOPIC
Career decision-
making process and
thoughts on college

WHEN

VIRTUAL/PHONE INTERVIEWS
DURING AN AGREED UP NON-
WORKDAY HOUR

18-25-YEAR-
OLD MEN

INTERVIEW

15-20 questions
Voluntary
Confidential

AFFILIATION

Walden University

BENEFITTING

Educators
Students
Parents
Families

FOR INFO OR
TO
VOLUNTER:

Angela Pesce
Doctoral Student

Appendix B

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study about the decision-making experiences of unionized men and their perceptions on post-secondary education. The researcher is inviting males, between the ages of 18 and 25, within the tri-state area of Delaware, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, who work in a labor-based trade position, completed an apprenticeship and did not successfully complete post-secondary education. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Angela Pesce, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of the decision-making process for unionized workers as they chose their career path. In addition, this research will strive to understand unionized workers perceptions of post-secondary education.

Procedures:

This study involves the following steps:

- take part in a virtual, confidential, audio recorded and transcribed interview utilizing the virtual communication platform of participants choice i.e., zoom, phone call, or etc. (1 hour)
- review a typed, and emailed transcript of your interview to make corrections if needed (10 minutes)
- speak with the researcher one more time after the interview to hear the researcher’s interpretations and share your feedback (this is called member-checking and it takes 20-30 minutes via phone)

Sample questions:

- What is your job title, roles, and responsibilities?
- What were your education and training requirements for this job?
- Can you describe how you came across this career decision?
- What were your experiences like during this decision-making process?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Research should only be done with those who freely volunteer. Everyone involved will respect your decision to join or not. You will be treated the same at your union hall whether you join the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. The researcher seeks 10 volunteers for this study.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this study could involve some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as revealing personal disclosures or discussing stressful topics, with the protections in place, this study would pose minimal risk to your wellbeing.

This study offers no direct benefits to individual volunteers. The aim of this study is to benefit society by allowing future unionized workers to be aware of all their options prior to choosing a career, educate families and school staff on how to foster the interests of individuals during the career decision-making process, and allow all persons to understand that matriculation is one option of many and that not all options may be fitting for all students.

Payment:

There will be no compensation, payment, or rewards for participating in this study.

Privacy:

The researcher is required to protect your privacy. Your identity will be kept confidential, within the limits of the law. The researcher is only allowed to share your identity or contact info as needed with Walden University supervisors (who are also required to protect your privacy) or with authorities if court-ordered (very rare). The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. If the researcher were to share this dataset with another researcher in the future, the researcher is required to remove all names and identifying details before sharing; this would not involve another round of obtaining informed consent. Data will be kept secure by placing it within a secure password protected file on one single computer and will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Counseling:

If at any time, the interview questions lead to a level of distress that the participants find to be harmful, stressful, or risky, they can end the interview. If the participants and researcher deem it necessary, or if the participant requests it, counseling services can be arranged and scheduled for participant at their earliest convenience.

Contacts and Questions:

You can ask questions of the researcher by email. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant or any negative parts of the study, you can call Walden University's Research Participant Advocate at 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 03-15-21-0992031 and it expires on March 14, 2022.

You might wish to retain this consent form for your records. You may ask the researcher or Walden University for a copy at any time using the contact info above.

In addition, researcher will be emailing you a detailed summary of the research results once the study is completed.

Obtaining Your Consent

If you feel you understand the study and wish to volunteer, please indicate your consent by responding back to researcher, via email with the statement "I consent."

Appendix C
Interview Questions

1. What is your job title, roles, and responsibilities?
2. What were your education and training requirements for this job?
3. Can you describe how you came across this career decision?
4. What were your experiences like during this decision-making process?
5. Who, if any, were the people, or person, supporting you during this decision-making process?
6. If possible, can you explain any negative or unsupportive people or statements that were made about this career and your choice?
7. What would you change about your career if anything?
8. What do you enjoy most about your career if anything?
9. What are some of the other opportunities and/or careers that you would have liked to further explore or do, if any?
10. How do you feel like your life would be different if you chose an alternate career path?
11. Post-secondary education is necessary for many jobs today, how would post-secondary education have changed your current career, if at all?
12. What are your perceptions and attitudes on post-secondary education?
13. What do you feel is the significance of post-secondary education for a person's career?
14. What do you feel is the significance of an apprenticeship, like the one you completed, for a person's career?
15. For people in the career decision-making process and choosing whether to attend a post-secondary institution, what would be your best piece of advice?
16. For people wanting to pursue your field, what would be your best piece of advice?