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# How commitment and detachment influence members' discourse about the National Education Association

Amy Aldridge Sanford  
*University of Iowa*

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HOW COMMITMENT AND DETACHMENT INFLUENCE MEMBERS'  
DISCOURSE ABOUT THE NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

by

Amy Aldridge Sanford

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree  
in Communication Studies in  
the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2006

Thesis Supervisors: Professor Randy Y. Hirokawa  
Associate Professor David B. Hingstman

## ABSTRACT

The National Education Association (NEA) has experienced negative publicity and discontent amongst its membership in recent years, thus causing some members to completely withdraw from the organization and still others to become detached. Yet some members remain completely committed. It is through examining the members' talk about identification, involvement, and loyalty that his/her level of commitment or detachment is explored. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 NEA members at two different local affiliates in the southern region of the United States. The conversations were transcribed and served as the text for content analysis. The major identification barrier for the informants was the NEA's political stances, specifically when it came to the issue of homosexuality. One local was more organized and committed to the national association, thus allowing their members to be more involved at the local, state, and national levels. The major barriers to involvement were overwork and life cycle issues (i.e., spouses, children, church, social obligations). There were four major themes surrounding loyalty to the NEA: recruitment, incentives for staying, future plans, and reasons for quitting. Most of the members were recruited as student teachers because they felt they needed the liability insurance. Most of them stay for the insurance. Committed members discuss their futures in the organization; detached members do not. The predominant reason members withdraw is because they disapprove of how the NEA handled a local grievance. NEA members are most likely to converse about the organization with their family members and this is usually in defense of the organization. The committed members reported avoiding conservatives when discussing the union. Topics of conversation include goals of the NEA, complaints about the organization, and

the nonunion alternative. Prior to this research, identification was often the only variable considered when studying commitment of organizational research. Involvement and loyalty were virtually ignored. This research highlights that identification and loyalty are best understood by listening to the members' talk. Involvement can be easily measured with a survey. Additionally, both the local affiliate and the members' commitment need to be considered when pondering commitment or detachment of a member.

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph. D. thesis of

Amy Aldridge Sanford

has been approved by the Examining Committee  
for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of  
Philosophy degree in Communication Studies at  
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Douglas M. Trank

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Carolyn L. Wanat

For my teachers



To fulfill the promise of a democratic society, the National Education Association shall promote the cause of quality public education and advance the profession of education; expand the rights and further the interest of educational employees; and advocate human, civil, and economic rights for all.

NEA Mission Statement

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## ABSTRACT

The National Education Association (NEA) has experienced negative publicity and discontent amongst its membership in recent years, thus causing some members to completely withdraw from the organization and still others to become detached. Yet some members remain completely committed. It is through examining the members' talk about identification, involvement, and loyalty that his/her level of commitment or detachment is explored. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 NEA members at two different local affiliates in the southern region of the United States. The conversations were transcribed and served as the text for content analysis. The major identification barrier for the informants was the NEA's political stances, specifically when it came to the issue of homosexuality. One local was more organized and committed to the national association, thus allowing their members to be more involved at the local, state, and national levels. The major barriers to involvement were overwork and life cycle issues (i.e., spouses, children, church, social obligations). There were four major themes surrounding loyalty to the NEA: recruitment, incentives for staying, future plans, and reasons for quitting. Most of the members were recruited as student teachers because they felt they needed the liability insurance. Most of them stay for the insurance. Committed members discuss their futures in the organization; detached members do not. The predominant reason members withdraw is because they disapprove of how the NEA handled a local grievance. NEA members are most likely to converse about the organization with their family members and this is usually in defense of the organization. The committed members reported avoiding conservatives when discussing the union. Topics of conversation include goals of the NEA, complaints about the organization, and

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	xi
CHAPTER	
I. LITERATURE REVIEW	1
Guide to the Dissertation	8
Review of the Literature	10
History of the NEA	10
Membership	12
Criticisms of the NEA	14
NEA and the Issues	20
Vouchers	20
Homeschooling	21
No Child Left Behind	22
Professional Pay	22
Non-Educational Issues	23
National Decline of Unions and the Nonunion Alternative	24
The National Decline of Unions	25
The Nonunion Alternative to the NEA	28
Organizational Detachment and Commitment	31
Detachment	31
Commitment	32
Identification	32
Involvement	34
Loyalty	35
Non-communicative Factors	36
Research Questions: The Talk of Attached and Detached Members	39
II. RESEARCH METHODS	43
Research Design	44
Multiple Site Case Studies	44
Research Strategies	45
Research Methods	47
Affiliate Selection	47
Participant Selection	51
Data Collection	55
Observations	55
Documents	56
Interviews	56
Member Checking	57
Data Analysis	58
Researcher's Positionality	59

III. RESEARCH RESULTS	61
Informants	63
Local Q	63
Ana	63
Bridget	63
Clay	64
Dorothy	64
Eve	64
Fran	65
Gina	65
Helen	65
Irene	66
Norene	66
Local G	66
Julia	66
Keith	67
Lois	67
Melissa	68
Oliver	68
Commitment and Detachment in the Talk	68
Identification: <i>“Probably wouldn’t associate with them if I didn’t have to”</i>	69
Involvement: <i>“Teachers determine the direction”</i>	73
Loyalty: <i>“It’s tax deductible”</i>	82
Communication about the NEA	93
<i>“A satanic organization”</i> :	
Conversational partners	94
<i>“They’re kind of scary when you talk to them”</i> :	
Whom members avoid	96
<i>“They’re more of a fence”</i> :	
Communicating the goals of the NEA	97
<i>“National Everything Association”</i> :	
Complaints about the NEA	98
<i>“They are the annoyance”</i> :	
Discourse about the nonunion alternative	102
Ambivalence in the Talk	105
Internal and External Anchors	106
Costs and Benefits	107
Unions and Collective Voice	108
Local and National	109
IV. DISCUSSION	111
Summary of Findings	112

Identification	112
Involvement	113
Loyalty	115
Applying the Research	116
Improving Identification of Members	117
Improving Involvement of Members	118
Improving Loyalty of Members	119
Replicate the Research	120
Limitations of this Study	121
Conclusion	123
APPENDIX A. INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT	125
APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE	128
REFERENCES	130



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Local NEA members	53
Table 2. Involvement of Local NEA Members	54
Table 3. Levels of Identification, Involvement, and Loyalty	112

## CHAPTER I

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Union membership in the United States of America is on the decline. Just 50 years ago, about 33% of American workers belonged to a union (Reitz, 2005). Today, only 12.5% of the American workforce is unionized (*Union members in 2004*, 2005). The exception is public school employees. In 2003, nearly 70% of them belonged to a union (Brimelow, 2003). The largest of these education unions is the National Education Association (NEA) with 2.7 million members. In fact, the NEA has been touted as the largest labor union of any kind in the nation. The next largest teachers' union is the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) with a little less than one million members. Carini (2003) found that unionized teachers feel more empowered and have higher job satisfaction than nonunionized teachers. "Unions provide a collective 'voice' for workers which would often not be heard if workers voiced concerns individually" (p. 32).

The leadership of the NEA considers itself a protector of its members. In a statement to members in November 2003, current NEA president Reg Weaver wrote, "While your work is both noble and necessary, that's not enough to protect good education professionals from bad people or bad policy. Sometimes, even the rescuers need rescuing. And that's why you have the NEA" (p. 5). The NEA prides itself as an education watchdog, often issuing funding reports and state rankings (e.g., "NEA study finds stagnant resources jeopardize public schools," 2004). On its website [www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org), the nonprofit takes stances on no less than 20 issues, on everything from charter schools to international issues to legislation like No Child Left Behind.

The NEA takes stances on issues based upon resolutions and new business items (NBI) passed by delegates at the national representative assembly (RA) held each summer over the Independence Day holiday. The organization's annual meeting is also held during this time. The year 2005 marked the 143<sup>rd</sup> annual meeting for the organization and its 84<sup>th</sup> RA. The NEA refers to the RA as the "world's largest democratic deliberative body" (*Annual meeting and representative assembly*, 2005). Local affiliates of the NEA are entitled to send one delegate to the RA for every 150 members or a major faction thereof. There are special provisions made for small states, support personnel, retired, and minority members. For example, locals with fewer than 76 members may join together to form membership units known as clusters with other locals. This allows them to participate in RA. In the end, an average of about 8,000 to 9,000 delegates attend the national RA each year.

Any delegate can submit an amendment to an existing resolution or suggest a new business item to be considered by the RA. In the 2005 RA handbook, it was estimated that the RA votes on 300 motions in a cumulative time of 31 hours over the course of four days of business meetings ("Team NEA: Fighting for you, your schools, your students!," 2005). Adopted resolutions represent the official position of the NEA and are the basis for its legislative agenda. Resolutions are the organization's basic philosophical beliefs. According to RA Standing Rule 10, a resolution must be submitted to the resolution committee chair or the NEA executive director by February 15 in order to be considered at that summer's RA. "All new resolutions to be submitted from the floor for consideration must have a majority of the vote to be placed on the agenda (heard) and a two-thirds (2/3) vote to pass" ("Team NEA: Fighting for you, your schools, your

students!," 2005, p. 55). There are currently more than 320 official resolutions of the NEA in 10 different categories, ranging from public perceptions of education to the welfare of students to human and civil rights.

New business items call for action. During the summer of 2005, the NEA RA considered 92 new business items. NBI-2 called for the NEA to join the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union in educating the public about the unfair business practices of Wal-Mart. The "Wake-up Wal-Mart" campaign was passed by the NEA RA. In press releases since then, the NEA claims Wal-Mart will not let their employees unionize and that the retail giant's employees are a drain on tax dollars in the form of public-subsidized health care benefits that should be paid by their employer (Reitz, 2005). It was reported in *Newsweek* that 46% of the children of Wal-Mart employees are uninsured or on Medicaid (McGinn, 2005). The NEA encouraged its members and the public to buy school supplies somewhere besides Wal-Mart (*Wal-Mart: Always High Costs. Always.*, 2005). NBI-78 was introduced at the 2005 RA and called for a complete boycott of Wal-Mart and Sam's Club but was referred to the executive committee by the RA.

Along with the Wal-Mart initiative, the RA has recently lobbied for more racial and cultural diversity amongst teachers (Feller, 2004), free speech for educators ("Free speech on campus!," 2004), the significance of girls' education ("Get those girls in school," 2004), literacy through its "Read Across America" program ("NEA's Read Across America is where it's 'hat!'" 2004), and stronger Kindergarten and preschool programs ("Lobbying for the littlest ones," 2003). The NEA has encouraged their own members to get physically fit ("Beat the plateau blues," 2004) and have offered them

financial advice ("Heads up from NEA member benefits," 2004). With the exception of Wal-Mart, none of these others issues have been controversial and have gotten most of their press in the organization's magazine *NEA Today*. There has been limited coverage in the popular media on the aforementioned issues (with the exception of Wal-Mart).

Controversial issues do get the national media's attention, and most of those controversies began at the RA each summer. In fact, there is a large presence of the press at the RA every year, where the media are relegated to their own room at the large convention centers and are not allowed on the floor of the RA to speak with members ("Team NEA: Fighting for you, your schools, your students!," 2005). The issue that has garnered the most attention lately is the NEA's stance on homosexuality. In 1995, an RA delegate proposed multiple resolutions encouraging the celebration of Lesbian and Gay History Month and other gay-friendly resolutions (Haar, 1996). Resolution B-8, which included the celebration of Lesbian and Gay History Month, passed. Much debate pursued over the next few years and at least one NEA state affiliation (Oklahoma) publicly opposed it.

In 2001 at the NEA RA, the "New B" resolution was presented in hopes of calming the controversy that had begun six years earlier. New B would have consolidated and amended several existing resolutions and used the language of "acceptance" and "appreciation" of "diversity." The goal was to take the focus off of the controversial issue of homosexuality. Focus on the Family President James Dobson spoke against the resolution on his radio program just five days before the RA was to convene in Los Angeles. As a result, hundreds of citizens rallied outside the convention center during the 2001 NEA representative assembly. The protestors held signs with

messages such as “Educate, Don’t Indoctrinate” and “Teach History, Not Homosexuality” (Winn, 2001). The “New B” resolution was withdrawn by the NEA leadership before it went to a vote, and Bob Chase, NEA president at the time, assigned a task force to look into the issue (*When values collide: Teachers, unions, and the charity option*, 2003). In 2002, the NEA Board of Directors approved the *Report of the NEA Task Force on Sexual Orientation*. The report looks at the needs and problems confronting, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans-gendered students and school employees (see *Report of the NEA Task Force on Sexual Orientation*, 2002).

In 2003, a delegate from Pennsylvania introduced NBI-15 on the NEA representation assembly floor, in which she asked for “ex-gay” to be added to the NEA list of sexual expression. She explained that this would allow school counselors to help those students wanting to leave the gay lifestyle. The item was dismissed with little debate (Maxwell, 2003). Furthermore, it has been reported that the Pennsylvania delegate was actually loudly booed, while another speaker was cheered when he proclaimed there is no such person as an ex-gay (Schlafly, 2005). Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays and Gays (PFOX) claims the NEA is not friendly to ex-gays and filed a sexual discrimination complaint against the NEA for prohibiting ex-gays from exhibiting at NEA conventions. PFOX claims they were prohibited exhibit space at the national meeting in both 2002 and 2003 (Throckmorton, 2004). It is stated in Standing Rule 13 of the RA handbook that the NEA does have the right to deny exhibitors who provide material that is contrary to NEA policy (“Team NEA: Fighting for you, your schools, your students!,” 2005).

A *Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup* poll shows that 63% of the public is against “teaching about the gay and lesbian lifestyle as part of the curriculum in public schools” (qtd. in *When values collide: Teachers, unions, and the charity option*, 2003). This controversial issue has gotten the attention of conservative church leaders, including the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The SBC has 16 million members and is the second largest denomination in the United States (*About Us-Meet Southern Baptists*, 2005). State leaders in that convention have encouraged their parishioners to leave the NEA for other education associations (Yeats, 2001). Another conservative person who has taken on the NEA is Phyllis Schlafly. She often writes about the NEA in her monthly newsletter *The Phyllis Schlafly Report* and for at least the last 10 years has dedicated her August issue to reporting her disapproval of the happenings at the NEA RA. In each August issue, Schlafly prints the resolutions passed by the RA. Schlafly’s newsletter is in its 38<sup>th</sup> year and has a large audience of conservatives. Many churches make it available to their members.

The SBC and Schlafly complain that the NEA is not friendly to its conservative members and their concerns. In fact, the Pennsylvania delegate who was booed for introducing the NBI on ex-gays told the *AgapePress* that she has often considered leaving the NEA but fears no one will speak up for conservatives if she and others like her drop out (Brown & Parker, 2003). In *Education Reporter* (a publication by Eagle Forum, an organization formed by Schlafly in 1972) there are pictures of buttons worn by RA delegates in 2001. They read “JESUS LOVES YA DUBYA. Every one [sic] else thinks you’re an ASSHOLE!” and “BUSH WINS 5-4. Supreme Court Decides” (*New gay resolution tabled at NEA convention*, 2001). Schlafly (1997) claims that the most influential single group within the NEA is gay and lesbian activists. Maxwell (2003)

reports that conservative union members feel disenfranchised and have heard themselves referred to as “right-wing radicals” and “religious fanatics.” He goes on to say that they have been laughed at, mocked and shouted down by other delegates at the RA.

In Washington (where the state affiliation of the NEA has been in some legal trouble for misuse of finances), there is a website dedicated to persuading teachers to declare themselves religious objectors to the NEA and to donate their dues dollars to charity and not the union (*When values collide: Teachers, unions, and the charity option*, 2005). Maxwell (2003) cautions that doing so will cause education professionals to virtually forfeit any say in local, state, or national education policy. The Christian Reformed Church of America, Roman Catholics, and Seventh-day Adventists have all made public statements about unions, albeit not specifically about the NEA. Seventh-day Adventist writes that their members “cannot either join or support a labor union because his allegiance to God forbids it” (*When values collide: Teachers, unions, and the charity option*, 2003, p. 16). The church goes on to state six other reasons their members should not support labor unions.

The NEA’s membership declined in 22 states in 2002 (*NEA membership declines*, 2002). In 2003-04, they had a slight recovery with a .1% increase in membership, but they actually budgeted for zero growth. Critics claim that *teacher* members are still on the decline. The minimal growth the NEA is experiencing is with their support personnel and retired members; both of these groups pay lower dues than teachers (*NEA convention inhospitable to diverse viewpoints*, 2005). While teacher members may be leaving the NEA, alternative education associations are increasing in membership. In Texas, Georgia and Missouri the non-union education association is now larger than the state NEA



affiliates (Haar, 1996). It may be no coincidence that all three of these states are located in the conservative Bible Belt. In an internal survey that was leaked to a watchdog group, 50% of NEA members called themselves conservatives and only 40% identified as liberal ("The NEA ponders the NEA," 2005).

In 2001, a Tennessee delegate at the NEA RA introduced NBI-59 that read: "The NEA shall hold its affiliates harmless, for a period of five years, for any loss of dues revenue related to loss of membership beginning with the 2001-2002 membership year if Resolution New B is passed" (Schlafly, 2001, para. 5). During this membership slump, the NEA has offered assistance to state affiliates "experiencing challenges related to membership recruitment and retention" (*NEA membership declines*, 2002). According to the aforementioned leaked internal survey, the No. 1 reason new members give for joining the NEA is that they "have no choice." Furthermore, one-third of the repeating members and one-half of the new members say they are not involved with the organization at all. They just pay their dues and are detached from the union. As further evidence of this detachment, during the last local affiliate election cycle, 89% of local presidents ran unopposed ("The NEA ponders the NEA," 2005). The organization's political stances on issues such as homosexuality are causing dissonance for conservative members of the organization. Knoke (1981) writes that during times of dissonance members are likely to detach from the organization and are at risk to completely withdraw.

#### Guide to the Dissertation

This dissertation explores the talk of NEA members in a conservative Bible Belt state. The purpose of the study is to establish the connection between commitment to the

national association and its affiliates and detachment from the national association and its affiliates and how that commitment or detachment resonates within the NEA members' communication about the organization. Two local NEA affiliates were chosen, one for its predictive commitment to the national association and one for its predictive detachment from the organization.

The first chapter of this dissertation outlines the history of the NEA and some criticisms of the organization found in popular media. These criticisms include the NEA's misrepresentation of the majority of their membership with the union's stances on education issues as well as non-education issues. It is impossible to understand why some members are detaching from the organization without reviewing the many criticisms directed toward the NEA. Additionally the first chapter addresses the national decline in trade unions and the largest nonunion alternative to the NEA will be addressed a little more thoroughly. We will look at the 100-year history of labor unions and what factors have led to their recent decline in blue-collar industries. Additionally, the growth in white-collar unions and the major nonunion option in education will be explored. The nonunion option differs from the NEA in its collective bargaining practices, membership, and conservatism. Current organizational commitment research is reviewed and conceptions and definitions of both commitment and detachment are examined. The *characteristics and factors* of committed and detached members are readily available in the research; how those members communicate that commitment and detachment is not. The research questions hope to examine that gap by exploring how commitment and detachment are communicated in NEA members' talk about the organization.

Additionally, the dissonance many of them experience as a result of their commitment or detachment will also be highlighted.

The second chapter presents the qualitative research methods used in conducting this research and explains why particular methods are best suited to address the problem. Chapter Three describes the analysis process and research results. Chapter Four discusses the findings of the study and the implications and directions for future research.

## Review of Literature

### *History of the NEA*

Founded in 1850, the NEA was formed when 10 state teachers' associations joined to establish what was originally labeled the National Teachers' Association. The group was founded by 60 superintendents, principals, college presidents, and professors (Hronicek, 1979). Only two of those in attendance at the first meeting were women, and women were not officially allowed to join the organization (other than in an honorary capacity) until 1866 (Fenner, 1942). It was also during 1866 that the NTA helped encourage the establishment of the Department of Education. The NTA became the National Educational Association in 1870, and finally the National Education Association of the United States in 1907. Its membership was made up of about 1% of the teaching population in 1910. During its early years, the NEA was primarily a social club dominated by male employers. This group opposed labor union activity.

It was circa 1917 when teachers' consciousness about the benefit of group action was raised as a result of inflation from World War I (Ade, 1980). The AFT was founded in 1919 and was perceived as a union alternative to the nonunion NEA. The AFT supported union activities, such as collective bargaining and striking. Only 17 school

systems had collective bargaining agreements during the 1964-65 school year (Saltzman, 1982). Teachers had resisted collective bargaining because they thought it was too blue collar and not professional. They feared it would lessen their social status. The NEA remained opposed to collective bargaining and striking until the early 1970's (Chisholm, 2005; Cilek, 1971; Ota, 1985). As the teaching population grew younger and more males entered the profession during the 1970's, union activities (including collective bargaining) became more acceptable. Many of these teachers had lower-middle class and working class backgrounds (Cilek, 1971).

The Civil Rights movement also inspired teachers to become more militant. "The rising militancy and civil disobedience by the civil rights demonstrators made militance and civil disobedience (such as illegal strikes) more respectable among segments of the middle class" (Saltzman, 1982, p. 83). By 1978, only five states (all in the South) prohibited collective bargaining. NEA, an organization founded by administrators who had once encouraged their teachers to join, had now been taken over by the subordinates. It was also during this time in the 1970's that the NEA also started to become more politically active and formed their political action committee (Ota, 1985; Shotts, 1976). The NEA registered as a labor organization with the Department of Labor in 1980 (Richards, 2004).

Before the 1970's the NEA was considered a conservative professional *association*. (In fact, Cilek referred to the NEA as the nonunion throughout his doctoral dissertation published in 1971). Since the 1970's, the NEA has functioned like a union, although their name has not changed. The use of the word "association" has been a point of confusion for some and a point of contention for others. "Calling itself [the NEA] an

education association is like calling the United Auto Workers a driving association” (Chisholm, 2005, p. 25).

### *Membership*

Today the NEA is made up primarily of classroom teachers but also includes administrators, support professionals, college students, higher education faculty and staff, and retired members. The organization has experienced a steady increase in membership over the years. During the 1930s and 1940s, the membership numbered at about 200,000 people, largely as a result of the Depression (Ade, 1980). “The depression [sic] demonstrated the need for labor to act as a group banded together to improve its economic conditions and to function as a positive force in American society” (Hronicek, 1979, p. 174). Fenner wrote in her 1942 dissertation on the history of the NEA: “It would be difficult to find one significant trend in education, one important area or educational though or endeavor, in which the NEA has not made its influence felt either directly or indirectly” (p. 6).

New York City’s teachers held many strikes during the 1960s. In fact, during a three month period in the fall of 1968, New York City schools were only open for a cumulative two week period (Hronicek, 1979). Amongst other things, the teachers demanded collective bargaining agreements, which called for higher salaries and better working conditions (Cilek, 1971; Saltzman, 1982). They were successful with their strike and many believe this to be the true beginning of teacher militancy (Ade, 1980). “Teachers changed from quiet docile people into militant professionals who are demanding to be recognized by and dealt with by boards of education as equals” (Hronicek, 1979, p. 95).

The New York City teachers' strike was led by the AFT. The NEA felt the heat to become more militant as a result of the strikes. "The NEA, despite the reluctance of many of its leaders, was forced to start bargaining in order to survive" (Saltzman, 1982, p. 96). The NEA reported 766,000 members in 1961 (Lieberman, 1997) and took a comfortable lead over its rival the AFT. This lead may also be attributed to the fact that the AFT expelled all segregated schools during the 1950's (Saltzman, 1982). The NEA may have picked up some of those expelled members.

By 1984, there were 1.7 million members in the NEA (Blumenfeld, 1984). Ota (1985) attributes this growth in the mid 1980's to four reasons: (a) a history of economic injustice to teachers, (b) changes of personal characteristics of teachers, (c) growth of schools and the teaching force and an increasing bureaucratic structure within school districts, and (d) social and political influences (i.e., high-profile strikes and collective bargaining by industrial workers). Since 1985, the NEA has grown by another 1 million members and currently has 2.7 million members with affiliates in every state and in more than 14,000 local communities (*About NEA*, 2005). The NEA employs 550 people at its headquarters in Washington, D.C. and is just a few blocks from the White House (Archer, 2002).

As mentioned previously, the organization has experienced a bit of a decline in membership since 2000, with many members leaving for alternative nonunion "professional" associations, such as the American Association of Educators (AAE). To increase membership numbers and to decrease the competition between NEA and AFT, a merger between the two former enemies has been rumored since at least 1968 (Cilek, 1971). In 1998, the NEA leadership formally proposed a merger at its RA. This

marriage would have increased the NEA's shrinking membership by nearly a million, but 58% of the NEA delegates rejected the proposal (*NEA convention delegates reject merger with AFT*, 1998). The two organizations still have not merged but are now cooperating through the "NEAFT Partnership."

### *Criticisms of the NEA*

Besides the Wal-Mart campaign and the NEA's stance on homosexuality, one of the biggest news stories concerning the NEA as of late involves former Education Secretary Rod Paige. In February 2004, Paige made national headlines when he referred to the NEA as a "terrorist organization" (King, 2004). Paige was upset with the NEA for how they were handling the No Child Left Behind legislation. Paige went on to say that the NEA is often at odds with rank-and-file teachers. The NEA responded quickly, sending out press releases and kits to its state affiliates within a matter of hours. They also sent emails to their members encouraging them to email President Bush immediately.

Click Back America and the Campaign for America's Future joined with the NEA to circulate an online petition asking for Paige's resignation and received over 260,000 signatures within two months of Paige's comments (*Tell Bush to fire Rod Paige: Sign the petition*, 2004). Paige did resign in November 2004 but did not cite the pressures of the NEA and its affiliates as a factor. President Bush appointed Margaret Spellings, a domestic policy adviser, as Paige's replacement that same month. Reg Weaver, president of the NEA, said he looked forward to working with Spellings (Kjos, 2004).

Many NEA members are unhappy with their union. Tracey Bailey, the 1993 national teacher of the year and a member of the NEA for one year, said that he had never

seen so many people who felt so bad about an organization yet continue to join until he began talking to NEA members (Jones, 2001). This causes outsiders to ask, why do these teachers stay in the organization? Critics of the NEA say that the teachers are confused about educational reform and are seeking guidance from a large organization like the NEA, even if they disagree with the politics of the union (Gormley, 2004).

One of the most often cited criticisms of the NEA is that they are not representing their membership and are unresponsive to their true needs. In 1985, Ota surveyed 193 teacher union members in Illinois (114 were affiliated with the NEA; 79 were with the AFT local). He found that most members belonged to their associations for the liability insurance and that most of them did not agree with the politics of their national association. “Teachers may tend to see their union as an organization established mainly for the limited purposes of economic unionism... Teachers may view the union’s political and educational activity as beyond the legitimate scope of the union’s functions” (Ota, 1985, p. 103).

In 1996, the NEA hired a Washington consulting firm to assess their public image. The internal document described the organization as being too partisan and too much of a naysayer (Archer, 2002). In a survey of 1,345 public school teachers in 2003, *Public Agenda* found that only 5% of those surveyed ranked “political clout in the state and national arena” as the union service most valuable to them (Farkas, Johnson, & Duffett, 2004). Golden (2004) writes that teachers are being drawn to nonunions as a result of their disapproval with the NEA’s politics.

The NEA does place emphasis on politics. The first political action committee (NEA-PAC) was officially recognized in 1972. The NEA-PAC allowed the NEA to



collect money and endorse a candidate or an issue. This was something they could not do before. At that time, 83% of teachers thought that it was unprofessional to be involved with politics (Shotts, 1976). Those teachers in the southern and southwest regions of the United States were especially hesitant to get involved. Editorials were written that claimed that the formation of the NEA-PAC would fragment the membership of the organization. The leadership of the NEA convinced their members to come on board by telling them that everything in education is politically motivated. During 1972, more than \$30,000 was raised during that election cycle. By 1974, that figure grew to \$224,000. During that political season, the NEA endorsed 283 Democrats, 39 Republicans, and 1 Independent (Shotts, 1976). The NEA endorsed its first presidential candidate in 1976.

Today, the NEA refers to their PAC as “The NEA Fund for Children and Public Education.” With a minimum donation of \$50, delegates at the RA are given ribbons to wear on their name badges so that others can see how much money that member is donating to the NEA-PAC (“Team NEA: Fighting for you, your schools, your students!,” 2005). Most of that NEA-PAC money goes to Democrats. During the 2000 presidential election cycle, the organization donated \$3.1 million to federal candidates. Ninety percent of those donations went to Democrats (King, 2004), even though only 59% of the membership voted for the union-backed Al Gore (“What teachers really think,” 2001).

Only 19% of the teachers say that the NEA’s policies “almost always” reflect their values and preferences at the national level (Farkas et al., 2004). An example of this can be found with the NEA’s stance on “reproductive freedom.” Resolution I-13, also referred to as the Family Planning Resolution, shows support for “reproductive freedom.”

NEA members and others have shown concern that “reproductive freedom” is just code for “abortion” (*NEA confirms pro-abortion position*, 1998). In April 2004, pro-life teachers across the nation were angered by the NEA’s choice to co-sponsor a pro-choice rally in Washington, D.C. (Archibald, 2004b).

Nearly a quarter of the NEA’s membership is Republican (“What teachers really think,” 2001) and the NEA’s chief lobbyist considers himself a Goldwater Republican (Bluey, 2004). Many of the NEA’s members in the West and South are admittedly “conservative” (Cooper, 1998). Even so, Salvato (2004) writes, “Conservatism is looked down upon within the NEA, almost as though it were a cancer” (para. 4). The resolutions and new business items coming out of the annual RA do not reflect conservative values for the most part. There have even been some problems within the NEA’s Republican Caucus. Recently some members of that caucus left for the Conservative Educators Caucus, citing that the Republican Caucus has been taken over by liberals who are against the education policies of the Bush administration (Archibald, 2005).

The NEA has never supported a Republican candidate for president (Lieberman, 1997). When President Bill Clinton was running for reelection in 1996, he made a stop at the NEA RA, where 91% of the delegates voted to endorse him for president. Schlafly (1996) claims that was a higher approval rating than Clinton received from the Democratic Party. During the 2004 political season, the NEA supported Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry. In fact, Reg Weaver, the president of the NEA opened the organization’s annual convention in the summer of 2004 by specifically urging NEA members to defeat President Bush (Schlafly, 2004). Additionally, Michael Moore’s anti-

Bush film *Fahrenheit 9/11* was shown after a speech by Hillary Clinton at the same convention (Archibald, 2004a). Blumenfeld (1984), a public opponent to the NEA, writes, “The NEA is little more than the socialist Trojan horse within our political walls...They are being used by clever political activists to bring the radical left to power” (p. xii). Almost 20 years ago Berube (1988) predicted, “The NEA may suffer some divisiveness among its members by endorsing specific candidates of a political party” (p. 17).

It may have been the NEA’s political activism that caused a high-profile audit of the nonprofit in 2003. Weaver claims that complaints from a conservative foundation lead to the audit (Margasak, 2003). In a newspaper article dated April 2004, the Landmark Legal Foundation was identified as that complaining conservative foundation (“The probers and the NEA,” 2004). The NEA definitely has its right-wing enemies. The Heritage Foundation, Schlafly’s Eagle Forum, Foundation for Education Reform and Accountability, TheRant.us, Evergreen Freedom Foundation, James Dobson’s Focus on the Family, and the Education Intelligence Agency all dedicate web space to their fight against the NEA and its “liberal” politics. Krista Kafer, senior policy analyst with the Heritage Foundation, told *The Washington Post*, “I don’t get the impression their [NEA’s] motives are entirely pure in seeking changes. I think they are not really that supportive of accountability and standards” (qtd. in Gormley, 2004).

Brimelow (2003) claims there is a tremendous amount of apathy amongst NEA members and writes that most of them do not even know which of the two major unions (NEA or the AFT) is their national affiliate. Public Agenda (see Farkas et al., 2004) found that teachers’ sentiments about their union “appear less than passionate.”

According to their survey, 66% of union members say they are *not* involved with their union (other than receiving mailings and notices). One teacher said: “I’m in the NEA and basically just paying to it for the insurance thing” (qtd. in Farkas et al., 2004, p. 18). Other teachers said they belong because it is a stipulation in their collective bargaining agreements (Archibald, 2004b).

According to the Education Intelligence Agency, the NEA is aware of this member apathy. In the EIA’s weekly newsletter (dedicated to the NEA), the EIA had this to say about the NEA’s response to a national news event: “NEA is constantly looking for an issue to energize its activists and radicalize the *apathetic* majority” (*NEA Rips Paige*, 2004, para. 3). This apathy may come as a surprise to outsiders, considering the financial burden teachers encounter when joining the NEA. Brimelow (2003) estimates that it cost each person \$500 annually in dues (\$130 national, \$300 state, and \$70 local). Over half of the teachers (56%) surveyed by Public Agenda believe that union charges are higher than warranted (Farkas et al., 2004).

Many cash-strapped educators do find union membership necessary. There are after all nearly 3.7 million members of teachers’ unions in the United States. In Bascia’s (1994) ethnographic study, the researcher discovered three main reasons teachers join unions: (a) job protection, (b) economic issues, and (c) representative participation in decision making. Subcategories under *job protection* included workload, health and safety, and legal representation (i.e., the “insurance thing” mentioned previously). “It is perhaps only natural that they [teachers] will seek out a protector—even if not all of its [union’s] policies enthrall them” (Farkas et al., 2004, p. 19). Instructional resources and personal benefits were listed under *economic issues*. The list for *decision making*

included teacher leadership. Teachers in the NEA are giving opportunities to hold offices in the local affiliation and to serve on collective bargaining units. Urban (1982) claims that the most important category is that of job protection. However, Public Agenda found that “negotiates pay and benefits” (i.e., collective bargaining) was the most valuable service to teachers’ union members at 47% (Farkas et al., 2004).

Salvato (2004) argues that many newly hired teachers have no choice but to join the NEA. These teachers are automatically slated to contribute to the NEA and find it difficult to stop these contributions—bureaucratically, socially, and professionally. “There is no recourse for teachers who disagree with the NEA’s incredibly liberal policies other than to become unrepresented, disenfranchised” (Salvato, 2004, para. 4).

#### NEA and the Issues

During the early days of the NEA the issues that got the organization’s attention included salaries, teacher preparation, tenure, retirement and academic freedom (Fenner, 1942). Today, the NEA takes stances on no less than 20 “issues in education” on its website (*Education issues in the spotlight*, 2005). “Wake-up Wal-Mart” is on that list. Other issues that have gotten a lot of media attention are vouchers, homeschooling, No Child Left Behind, and professional pay.

#### *Vouchers*

The NEA opposes voucher plans in Resolution A-24 and comments that vouchers “undermine public education.” The NEA, in conjunction with other like-minded organizations, have staged public protests to school voucher programs (Drebes, 2004). The organizations claim that vouchers take away money from failing schools. Weinberger (2000) compares the education lobby (i.e., the NEA) to two other powerful

lobbies: the tobacco and gun lobbies. He claims that out of the three lobbies, the education lobby has done the most damage by opposing reform movements—particularly school vouchers. Lieberman (1997) argues that the NEA is opposed to reform because they are adamantly against “competition in their labor markets, and to any policy that would shrink the market for teacher services” (p. 5).

### *Homeschooling*

According to the U.S. Department of Education, more than one million children were homeschooled in 2003 (Princiotta, Bielick, & Chapman, 2003). NEA addresses homeschooling in Resolution B-73: “Home schooling programs based on parental choice cannot provide the student with a comprehensive education experience.” An NEA spokesperson later explained, “It’s our feeling that public schools are the best choice for parents” (qtd. in *When values collide: Teachers, unions, and the charity option*, 2003). Resolution B-73 also states, “Home-schooled students should not participate in any extracurricular activities in the public schools.”

The NEA’s public stance on homeschooling has left many on the defensive. Susannah, a homeschooling parent, posted this on The New Homemaker bulletin board: “I have little respect for the NEA when I consider how hostile they are to homeschooling or any other form of educational freedom, and how they spend their members' dues on left-wing causes having little to do with the education of our children” (*Rod Paige and the NEA*, 2004). Tsubata (2005) writes, “If the NEA is so overwhelmed with its task of educating 48 million children, you would think it would be grateful to the parents who are willing to educate their own 2 million, and who are getting better results” (p. B-4).

Tsubata thinks that the union focuses too much on money and funding and should be grateful to these parents for lightening the load of public schools.

### *No Child Left Behind*

The NEA has been a vocal opponent to the Bush administration's "No Child Left Behind" act, and at the 2003 NEA RA, computers and telephones were made available to delegates to contact the White House. The members sent more than 13,000 emails and made more than 1,000 phone calls (Maxwell, 2003). In 2004, it was promised on the NEA website that they would deliver "an unprecedented public awareness" pertaining to NCLB (*'No Child Left Behind' Act/ESEA*, 2004). In April 2005, they delivered on that promise when the NEA and several local affiliates in multiple states sued the Education Department, calling NCLB an "unfunded mandate."

The goal of the suit is to free schools from complying with any part of the legislation not paid for by the federal government ("Education department seeks dismissal of No Child Left Behind lawsuit," 2005). In May 2005, two states announced that they would *not* join the NEA's lawsuit. One of those states was Wyoming, where the state superintendent of public instruction said his state was benefiting from NCLB ("Wyoming, New Mexico opt out of NEA lawsuit against NCLB," 2005). In November 2005, a judge dismissed the case and the NEA promised to appeal (*Plaintiffs in 'No Child Left Behind' act lawsuit will appeal decision*, 2005).

### *Professional Pay*

As mentioned previously, administrators and college presidents founded the NEA in the mid-19th Century. Very few classroom teachers were involved during the organization's conception and teachers' salaries was not an issue that was often discussed

by the members. “Rules for teachers were similar to the rules of life and conduct under which nuns and monks lived. Teachers believed that they would be financially compensated by the public out of a sense of gratitude for the public service rendered by the teachers” (Hronicek, 1979, p. 176). Finances were not a major concern of the organization until nearly 100 years later when the New York City teachers’ strikes of the 1960s brought the issue of teachers’ pay into the public sphere.

At the 2005 annual NEA representative assembly, NEA President Reg Weaver announced his vow to fight for higher pay for teachers. Currently, the average starting pay for a beginning teacher in the United States is a little below \$30,000 (Feller, 2005). Weaver would like to see that reach \$40,000 (Quindlen, 2005). “Some 20 percent of new public school teachers leave the profession by the end of the first year, and almost half leave within five years....And the economic reality of teaching means that many who do stay are working second jobs to meet their families' basic needs” (*Professional pay*, 2005, para. 4). The NEA’s new resolve to take on teachers’ pay has taken the spotlight off the dated, more controversial issues of homosexuality and abortion.

#### *Non-Educational Issues*

In addition, the NEA has made statements (via press releases from the national office and resolutions passed by delegates at the annual representative assembly) about other issues, including the death penalty, gay marriage and other political issues that appear to have nothing to do with education (Salvato, 2004). During the summer of 2005, delegates to the NEA representative assembly passed resolutions supporting affirmative action (I-41) and opposing capital punishment (I-10). They also passed new business items endorsing organ and tissue donation (NBI-18), a boycott of Gallo wine



(NBI-32), an exit strategy in Iraq (NBI-61), and proposed debt cancellation for underdeveloped countries (NBI-70).

It was also during 2005 that the NEA members began the Wake-up Wal-Mart campaign, which has also been criticized for being a non-educational issue. Some in the media have defended Wal-Mart, citing their community donations to education and their annual “Teacher of the Year” award (Lambert, 2005). Ironically, NBI-1 did not pass in the summer of 2005. According to Schlafly (2005), it called for a “survey of the membership and potential members to determine the extent which NEA resolutions affect membership” (para. 11).

Lieberman (1997) argues that the NEA is a powerful union that assists other unions and lobbyist groups in return for favors and endorsements of education issues. Others agree: “The NEA wants failing schools, left-wing propaganda passed off as fact, and dupes teachers into paying dues that will eventually go on to Planned Parenthood” (Lore, 2005, para. 5). Lieberman goes on to say that the NEA’s influence on noneducational issues is more important than their influence on educational issues. Blumenfeld (1984) writes, “The NEA is probably the most intellectually dishonest organization in America...Its interest in academics is subordinate to its radical political and social ends” (p. 139).

#### National Decline of Unions and the Nonunion Alternative

One hundred years ago, unions were formed to give blue-collar workers a voice. Industrial workers were overworked and underpaid and had no means of fighting the boss until they unionized. Unionization was a grassroots efforts and necessary. One of the earliest victories for the union movement was the 8-hour workday at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup>

Century (Barry, 2005). Over the years, union efforts have created minimum-wage standards, developed overtime pay regulations, child labor laws, and worker safety and health codes. Today, 100 years later, union members often have better health insurance and pension plans than nonunion workers (Kinsman, 2005) and earn about 28% more than nonunion workers (Barry, 2005). This is nearly a \$9,000 difference in annual pay (Dobbs, 2005). Union members will attribute their higher pay to their ability to collectively bargain their work contracts. Researchers agree. According to Blackburn and Prandy (1965) the larger a work group becomes the more effective collective bargaining is for raising earnings. It is tough for management to treat everyone in a large group as individuals and thus individual action is less effective.

#### *The National Decline of Unions*

On the other side of the coin, collective bargaining has been criticized by nonunion supporters who say that it drives up the cost of products and protects lazy employees (Kinsman, 2005). Labor unions are having problems with declining membership in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century—down 20% in the last 20 years. Union leaders blame this loss of membership on layoffs and anti-union presidential administrations (*Job losses erode union membership*, 2003). There also appears to be additional reasons: (a) the public image of unions is terrible amongst nonunion members and nonunion workers have no desire to unionize, (b) the few strong unions that are left are splitting from federations of unions, and (c) many people see unions as extinct and unnecessary in today's global, federally sanctioned workplaces.

In a poll conducted by Zogby International and the Public Service Research Foundation, 56% of nonunion workers said they would vote against unionizing their

workplace (Reitz, 2005). In the 1950's unions won between 65% and 75% of representation elections (Richards, 2004). Dobbs (2005) writes that unions are "virtually impotent" in corporate America. Peter Morici, a business professor at the University of Maryland, says that most people see unions as obstacles: "We see unions as special-interest groups that victimize society at large. We see them as obstacles to progress" (qtd. in Kinsman, 2005, para. 15).

The AFL-CIO has been synonymous with unions for the last 50 years. It is a federation made up of multiple unions and prides itself on being "America's Union Movement." The American Federation of Teachers, the second largest teacher's union with 1 million members, is a member of the AFL-CIO. In February 2006, NEA President Reg Weaver announced that local affiliates of the NEA were now allowed to join the AFL-CIO but went on to say that this was not a prelude to the NEA merging with the AFL-CIO. The agreement is set to expire in 2009 ("NEA, AFL-CIO hope affiliation spells success," 2006).

This partnership with the NEA comes after the AFL-CIO suffered a huge blow in the summer of 2005 when several of its unions quit the federation, taking 36% of its members and much of its political clout (Baird, 2005). Ironically, the leaders of the departing unions cited the AFL-CIO's president's inability to stop membership decline as their reason for leaving (Lewis, 2005) and have started an organization of their own. The new federation will focus on raising union membership nationwide.

Among age groups, union membership rates were lowest among those ages 16 to 24 (4.7%) in 2004 (*Union members in 2004*, 2005). Workers today want to be autonomous and make their own choices when it comes to their workplaces (Ramsey,

2005). This generation of workers does not feel they need a union to assimilate information to them like the generations of workers before them did. They get their information from the internet or other forms of mass media. Their grandparents, many of whom were union members, did not have this advantage. The biggest concerns of their grandparents' generation was sweatshops and child labor problems. Today's workers worry about competing in a global market. Since 1978, manufacturing jobs have decreased by 4.5 million in the United States (Kinsman, 2005). Many of these jobs are being sent overseas. Globalization is contributing to the extinction of unions. Domestically, companies that have to follow union rules are losing to union-free companies that can adapt more rapidly to ever-changing market conditions (Baird, 2005).

There is a small bright spot for those concerned about the future of unions. According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, union membership is high amongst government workers. About 34% of government workers were members of unions in 2004. This was about a 1% decline from the year before but is still well over the private sector average of 8% unionization (*Union members in 2004*, 2005). This group includes several heavily unionized occupations, such as teachers, police officers, and fire fighters.

New groups being drawn to union membership are women and white-collar professionals ("Unions ready for new challenges," 2001). In 2004, the union membership rate was higher for men (13.8%) than for women (11.1%). The gap between their rates has narrowed considerably since 1983, when the rate for men was 10 percentage points higher than the rate for women (*Union members in 2004*, 2005).

A unique problem to white-collar unions is finding the balance between militancy and moderation (Blackburn & Prandy, 1965). When these unions collectively bargain, they must not come across too militant because they will lose members. They are concerned about public image and do not want to make the same mistakes as the blue-collar unions before them. Many of these white-collar unions avoid the negative connotation of the word “union” by using “guilds” or “associations” (Blackburn & Prandy, 1965). The National Education *Association* is one such organization that does not employ the word “union” in its title. Many people in the American public may not even realize it is a union.

*The Nonunion Alternative to the NEA*

There are currently 22 right-to-work states in the United States. Within those states, teachers do *not* have to belong to the union in order benefit from the collective bargaining contract. People who choose not to join the union are often referred to as freeloaders because they do not compensate the union (Carini, 2003). In forced-fee states, teachers *must pay* mandatory agency fees (a percentage of union dues) to the teachers’ union. Teachers in forced-fee states, such as Washington, have been declaring themselves religious objectors to the NEA and have been redirecting their fees to charity (*When values collide: Teachers, unions, and the charity option*, 2005). Many unhappy NEA members in right-to-work states have been redirecting their dues to a nonunion option. Forty years ago, the NEA’s biggest competitor was the AFT, a union alternative to the nonunion NEA. Today, the NEA embraces their union label, but members are leaving for nonunions. There are nonunion teacher organizations in all 50 states, but the most successful of these is the Association of American Educators (AAE). In three

states the AAE's state affiliate is larger than the NEA's (Haar, 1996). In 2001, they had 300,000 teachers who were members of their association (*AAE is alternative to NEA*, 2001).

On the AAE's website, it is written: "We don't want to become anything like the NEA, or as ponderous and resistant to change as the NEA or AFT. That is why we call ourselves a professional alternative to unions rather than an alternative union" (*What the NEA says about the AAE*, 2005, para. 35). The AAE is against collective bargaining, allows citizen members, has less expensive dues but double the liability insurance of the NEA, and embraces conservatism. In addition, the AAE does not require their members to join the national association like the NEA does. The NEA requires all local members to join both their state and national affiliates and have since 1972. This is referred to as "unified membership."

The same complaint about collective bargaining that has been made about factory workers is now being made about teachers. Collective bargaining has been criticized for making it difficult to fire bad teachers and for keeping good teachers from making more money. Additionally, parents are shut out of the collective bargaining process (Chisholm, 2005). The AAE argues for the Collaborative Communication Model, in which teachers, administrators, and parents are all on the same "team." In the old collective bargaining model, only those on the negotiations team vote for the contract. In the AAE model, all teachers vote on the contract, not just those on the committee. Every year the AAE surveys its members, in one state survey the following question was asked: "Do you agree that ALL teachers should vote on negotiated agreements?" Granted, the question was leading, but 90.42% of that state's affiliate members answered yes. In that

same survey, only 33.23% work at a school where everybody currently does vote on the negotiated agreement ("APOE 2004-2005 member survey results," 2004).

The AAE criticizes the NEA for being taking political stances and contributing to political campaigns and paying lobbyists. The NEA takes positions on whatever resolutions the delegates pass at the annual representative assembly. These include those aforementioned resolutions on homosexuality, Wal-Mart, the Iraq War, vouchers, No Child Left Behind, homeschooling, etc. The AAE will only take positions on issues when their annual surveys show that at least 75% of their members are for or against something (*What the NEA says about the AAE*, 2005). The AAE wants to be more inclusive, involving parents, administrators, and the community in their decision making (*AAE is alternative to NEA*, 2001). Unlike the NEA, the AAE does allow (and encourages) private citizens to join their association.

The single biggest reason teachers join unions is for the liability insurance (*AAE is alternative to NEA*, 2001). AAE dues are about half the cost of the NEA in most states and offers their members double the liability coverage (2 million dollars to the NEA's 1 million). This is an issue that is mentioned prominently in the literature. Finally, the AAE is much more conservative than the NEA and is endorsed by the right-wing Focus on the Family and the Christian Coalition (*What the NEA says about the AAE*, 2005). In a state newsletter, AAE members are encouraged by legal counsel to celebrate Christmas with their students by reading the Bible and displaying religious symbols in the classroom (Burchett, 2003). The AAE's lawyer goes on to cite court cases to support teachers who want to use the Bible and display religious symbols and finally ends the article with a "God bless."

Former union members who switch to the nonunion may be questioned by members of their former union. Members of the AAE are encouraged not to argue with members of the NEA about their choice of professional association. The following advice is offered in an AAE state affiliate newsletter: “If someone questions your choice of professional organization, politely but firmly say, ‘This is the choice I’ve made, and it is no longer a topic for discussion’” (Burchett, 2004). The AAE has also begun to form student chapters to attract college education majors in many states. The NEA has a similar program.

### Organizational Detachment and Commitment

Most of the research done on commitment and detachment has been in the fields of sociology and political science. Every member of an organization has a level of commitment to that organization. For some, the commitment may be so low that the member is actually detached and at risk for leaving the organization. In the next few pages, detachment and commitment will be defined. Both communicative and non-communicative concepts surrounding commitment will be explored and the notion of exploring commitment through members’ talk will be advanced.

#### *Detachment*

Knoke (1981) defines detachment as a sense of personal remoteness from the larger organization. Those who are detached feel they have no influence on organizational activities and policies. Ade (1980) explains that when teachers feel that their opinion on a policy is similar to that of their organization then they feel more strongly attracted to the organization. This meets the member’s expectation and s/he feels a sense of cohesiveness and commitment to the organization. On the other hand, if



the member's opinion on a policy and the group's opinion on a policy are different, the member experiences cognitive dissonance. This causes a temporary lack of commitment to the organization. Ade warns that consistent failure by the organization will cause withdrawal by the member.

### *Commitment*

Characteristics of commitment includes a person's: (a) belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values [i.e., identification]; (b) willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization [i.e., involvement]; and (c) desire to maintain membership [i.e., loyalty] (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). The word "identification" often gets used synonymously with the word "commitment," but commitment and identification are not one in the same. Identifying with an organization is just a part of commitment; it also takes involvement and loyalty. How and if identification, commitment, and loyalty manifest themselves in talk will be the main objective of this qualitative dissertation project.

*Identification.* Meyer and Allen (1997) found three types of commitment in their research: (a) continuance, and (b) normative, and (c) affective. These scales have been measured by other researchers and have been found to be stable (e.g., Hackett, Bycio, & Hausdorf, 1994). Both continuance and normative are reluctant (possibly detached) members. Becker and his colleagues defined continuance commitment as "a tendency to engage in consistent lines of activity because of the perceived cost of doing otherwise" (Becker, Billings, Eveleth, & Gilbert, 1996, p. 465). Continuance members feel like they *need* to stay, and normative stay because "it's the right thing to do" and they feel obligated. Knoke (1981) refers to these reluctant types as passive members. He defines

them as those who are content to pay dues, yet are infrequently in contact with leaders and leaving day-to-day decisions to others, usually paid staff. The author claims that these organizations can function with passive members, but are very at risk of losing members if an internal crisis erupts.

Affective is the strongest form of commitment, as stakeholders truly *identify* with the organization. As a person identifies more strongly with the organization and its values, the organization becomes as much a part of the member as the member is a part of the organization (Bullis & Tompkins, 1989). The more a person identifies with the organization, their beliefs about the organization become more positive and they will begin to downplay inconsistencies by offering excuses for the organization (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994).

A person is considered to be strongly identified with an organization when his/her identity as a member of the organization is more salient than alternative identities and his/her self-concept correlates with the perceived characteristics of the organization (Dutton et al., 1994). Identification allows the organizational member an opportunity for self-expression. For example, teachers get an opportunity for social reform through the NEA, whether that reform centers around No Child Left Behind, salaries, Iraq, Wal-Mart, etc.

Cheney (1983) explains that identification is especially important to communication scholars because “identifying allows people to persuade and be persuaded” (p. 342). He goes on to say that organizations put out persuasive materials which then forces the member to “complete” the process by either accepting the persuasion or resisting it. This completion has been modeled within the NEA

membership, with some members accepting the persuasion from national and state offices while others have resisted. This resistance has taken many forms, from verbal confrontations on editorial pages and the NEA RA, to detachment from the organization, to quitting the organization altogether.

Since commitment is an outcome of identification (see Sass & Canary, 1991), this *identification* will result in more *commitment* to the organization. Committed members are viewed as more stable, productive, and more likely to accomplish organizational goals than less committed members (Larkey & Morrill, 1995). Organizations like the NEA need committed members. Knoke (1981) writes that commitment in its most extreme form takes place when a person identifies his/her personal fate with the success or failure of the larger organization.

*Involvement.* Along with identifying with the organization, those members who are more *involved* in the organization tend to have more organizational commitment (Sabatier & McLaughlin, 1990). Knoke (1981) found that being an organizational officer has one of the strongest relationships with commitment, but the researcher also warns leaders to be wary of centralized policy making. It tends to decrease member commitment and increases the likelihood of detachment. “Membership apathy is both a cause and a consequence of the leaders’ theft of policy making” (p. 143). Phillips (2003) also suggest that organizational leaders have better communication with their stakeholders and to not just simply guess at what the stakeholders want. “Stakeholder communication is not only good for the organization, but also a matter of moral obligation. Those who contribute to the organization should be permitted some say in

how the organization is managed” (p. 160). Phillips (2003) goes on to say that a person’s influence within the organization directly correlates with his/her commitment.

Korsgaard and her colleagues found that when leaders acknowledge a member’s input, the member is more likely to be involved and thus committed. However, when input is not used, perceptions of unfairness are more severe than if the member had not contributed at all (Korsgaard, Schweiger, & Sapienza, 1995). Efficacy (i.e., the extent to which a person believes s/he has an impact) has been shown to predict commitment in teachers (Mottet, Beebe, Raffeld, & Medlock, 2004).

Larger organizations tend to reduce members’ power and influence, thus resulting in less involvement and detachment. “Almost all of the studies on the relationship between organizational size and member participation have shown a negative relationship” (Wilken, 1971). Size affects voluntary involvement, attendance, active involvement in meetings, and taking part in project activities (Warner & Hilander, 1964). Talacchi (1960) found that size also affects satisfaction of members. Strong interpersonal ties amongst members tend to increase commitment to the organization (Allen, 1992; Dutton et al., 1994; Eisenberg, Monge, & Miller, 1983; Guzley, 1992).

*Loyalty.* The NEA’s most attached members exhibit identification, involvement, and loyalty. The highly detached members typically exhibit just the third characteristic: paying their dues. If a person is just paying his or her dues to the NEA though, s/he is *loyal* but not committed. Walker and Marr (2001) explain the difference between loyalty and commitment by using the example of a convenience store customer who shops at the same store everyday but will bad-mouth the high prices to anyone who will listen. This hypothetical person is a *loyal* customer but not a *committed* one. A loyal NEA member

will write the organization an annual dues check (or have it automatically deducted from his/her paycheck), but that does not mean s/he is committed to the organization.

### *Non-Communicative Factors*

Up to this point, researchers have largely studied non-communicative factors that lead to commitment and detachment and have paid little attention to identification, involvement, and loyalty (and even less attention to how those three concepts appear in the talk of members). Knoke argues that there are three big factors leading to organizations with more committed members and less detachment: (a) decentralized policy making, (b) extensive communication patterns, and (c) high total influence among participants. Knoke (1981) found other minor factors influencing commitment and detachment include size of the organization, financial resources, the age of the organization, paid executive staff, local chapter autonomy, interpersonal ties within the organization, and demographics of the membership.

Organizations with more financial resources tend to have more committed members. Stability (i.e., age of the organization) also tends to directly correlate with membership commitment. Paid directors and staff tend to remove control from members and can result in detachment. In Allen's (1992) research on organizational support, she found that an employee's relationship with top management had the strongest relationship to commitment than any other variables she studied. The more influence the supralocal (i.e., national and regional) bodies have on local chapters, the less committed local members will be to the national organization. Public image of an organization can also influence commitment. If the member interprets the public image of the organization to be unfavorable they may terminate their membership (Dutton et al.,

1994). These authors go on to admit that most people have a distorted image of their organization, either perceiving more positive or more negative than others see it.

Finally, a person's position in the larger social system influences his/her commitment and detachment. These factors include income, education, occupational prestige, race, marital status, number of children, length of residence in the community, age, and gender (Knoke, 1981). For instance, number of children can limit a person's ability to be committed because of time constraints. In fact, Knoke (1981) found that the more hours a person has available for community activities, the greater the commitment. He also found that lower-income members are more supportive than higher-income members. "Possibly, wealthier members of these social influence associations contribute financial assistance but not the psychological involvement provided by less affluent members" (Knoke, 1981, p. 150).

Rotolo (2000) in a study on voluntary association membership, discovered that married people are more likely to say affiliated with organizations, that women are more likely to drop out because of elementary age children, that men's memberships are not affected by children, and that as individuals age, they join less organizations but are also less likely to leave current organizations. Additionally, he found that the longer a person stays in an organization, the less likely s/he will quit.

Caldwell and his colleagues suggest that commitment may also be influenced by how a person joins an organization (i.e., recruitment). They found a significant positive relationship between strong recruitment (including socialization practices) and individual commitment (Caldwell, Chatman, & O'Reilly, 1990). Hildreth (1994) argues that incentives also promote levels of commitment. Clark and Wilson (1961) originally

introduced Incentive Theory over 40 years ago and discussed three types: (a) solidary, (b) material, and (c) purposive. Solidary are those incentives based on associating and include friendship and other personal relationships. Material incentives are those that specify tangible benefits or consequences. Purposive are the nontangible benefits or consequences. In her research, Hildreth found purposive to be the most important consideration for members, followed by material and then solidary.

In sum, researchers have advanced identifying levels of commitment by operationalizing the following concepts: (a) decentralized policy making (Knoke, 1981); (b) extensive communication patterns (Knoke, 1981; Phillips, 2003); (c) high total influence among participants (Knoke, 1981; Korsgaard et al., 1995; Mottet et al., 2004); (d) size of the organization (Knoke, 1981; Talacchi, 1960; Warner & Hilander, 1964; Wilken, 1971); (e) financial resources (Knoke, 1981); (f) the age of the organization (Knoke, 1981); (g) paid executive staff (Allen, 1992; Knoke, 1981); (h) local chapter autonomy (Knoke, 1981); (i) interpersonal ties within the organization (Allen, 1992; Eisenberg et al., 1983; Guzley, 1992; Knoke, 1981; Sabatier & McLaughlin, 1990); (j) demographics of the membership (Knoke, 1981); (k) recruitment (Caldwell et al., 1990); and (l) incentives (Clark & Wilson, 1961; Hildreth, 1994).

While these concepts are important, the role of communication has virtually been ignored. This thesis advances the notion of listening to an NEA member's discourse about the organization in order to gauge his/her commitment or detachment to the organization. Mowday et al. (1979) writes that the three most important factors leading to commitment in organizations are identity, involvement, and loyalty. How and when

the members of the NEA evoke these concepts must be explored to fully understand commitment and detachment to the organization.

#### Research Questions: The Talk of Attached and Detached Members

A major gap in the current commitment literature is of the relationship between communication and commitment and/or detachment. As noted earlier, researchers to date have largely limited their attention to the non-communication influences on commitment and detachment. While these characteristics allow us to identify committed and detached members, their communication about the organization has been ignored. This is unfortunate because communication is central to organizational commitment (Allen, 1992) and has been found to have a strong influence on organizational commitment (Welsch & LaVan, 1981). Theoretical works by Bales (1970), Fisher (1984), and Polkinghorne (1988) support studying concepts like commitment and detachment by listening to people's talk.

Bales (1970) argues that an individual's personality consists of his/her relatively enduring behavioral characteristics as reflected in his/her interpersonal behaviors in groups. In other words, our feelings about commitment and detachment are almost always reflected in how we talk and act with our peers. Fisher (1984) believes that human beings understand and make the world meaningful through stories. In this case, we understand our views about unobservable feelings like commitment and detachment through the way we talk about those views with others. Polkinghorne (1988) argues that we understand and explain causation in terms of stories we hear or tell. In other words, we explain why we feel committed or detached from an organization through the stories we tell about our experiences with the organization.



In 1985, education scholar Haruo Ota ended his dissertation with the question: “What is teacher unionism after all, when there is not strong support from the rank and file members?” (p. 106). The handful of dissertations about teacher unionism have been written mostly by education scholars and focus on the history of teachers’ unions (Fenner, 1942; Hronicek, 1979; Saltzman, 1982; Shotts, 1976), attitudes about the organizations by members and nonmembers (Ade, 1980; Carini, 2003; Cilek, 1971; Richards, 2004), and the causes of unionism (Ota, 1985). In addition, most of the researchers employed quantitative methods, wrote their dissertations at least 20 to 30 years ago, and very few focus solely on the NEA. A communication scholar can add to this body of research on teacher unionism by discovering how committed and detached members communicate their commitment and/or detachment to the NEA (the nation’s largest and most politically influential union) and its affiliates.

When examining the current literature on commitment and detachment, it becomes clear that, to some extent, the current conceptions are problematic or limiting when studying a voluntary organization like the NEA. Specifically, commitment studies rarely address dissonance or detachment. Furthermore, previous research on commitment and detachment has focused on factors that create committed and detached individuals. Those factors include, but are not limited to, how the person was recruited, incentives for belonging, amount of influence that person has, local chapter autonomy, interpersonal ties within the organization, and demographics of the individual. The role of communication in identifying committed and detached members and how they talk about the organization has been underdeveloped.

This dissertation hopes to remedy that by focusing on how commitment and detachment are communicated by NEA members. We know from the previously cited research that the central characteristics of commitment are identification, involvement, and loyalty. How these characteristics are reflected in NEA members' talk about the organization needs to be examined. This leads to the following research questions:

RQ1a: How do NEA members talk about identification with the organization?

RQ1b: How do NEA members talk about involvement within the organization?

RQ1c: How do NEA members talk about loyalty to the organization?

RQ2a: To whom do committed members talk about the NEA?

RQ2b: To whom do detached members talk about the NEA?

RQ2c: What do members say about the NEA in these conversations?

How members of the NEA talk about the AAE (the nonunion alternative) also needs to be explored. In particular, is there a difference in how committed members of the NEA and detached members of the NEA talk about the AAE?

RQ3a: How do committed members of the NEA talk about the AAE?

RQ3b: How do detached members of the NEA talk about the AAE?

The previously mentioned research claims that dissonance leads to detachment and detached members are more at risk for leaving the organization in a time of crisis. The NEA has definitely faced crises as of late, with the negative publicity surrounding their stance on homosexuality and consequent loss of membership. In particular, they have lost membership in the Bible Belt states, where this research takes place.

RQ4: How do members of the NEA talk about dissonance caused by their commitment or detachment to the organization?

In summary, the research on commitment and detachment to this point has focused mostly on characteristics (i.e., identity, involvement, and loyalty) or factors (i.e., recruitment, local chapter autonomy, interpersonal ties, demographics) of the concepts and not how those concepts get communicated by members in their everyday talk about the organization. Additionally, commitment and detachment have rarely been taken into consideration together when looking at members of a volunteer, nonprofit organization like the NEA. Current conceptions of commitment and detachment are somewhat narrow and cannot automatically apply to the members of the NEA. While researchers have made considerable progress in understanding commitment, particularly identification as it applies to paid employees in organizations, very little is known about commitment and detachment in labor unions and how that commitment and detachment is communicated by the membership. Accordingly, I argue that we need to discover how members of the NEA evoke the concepts of commitment and detachment when talking about the association. Only in gaining NEA members' perspectives of the organization can we seek to understand what commitment and detachment mean in this particular context.

## CHAPTER II

### RESEARCH METHODS

The purpose of this research is to seek to understand how committed and detached members of the National Education Association (NEA) talk about the organization. In particular, whom the members talk to about the NEA and what they talk about will be explored. Ultimately, I want to discover if and how identification, involvement, and loyalty are evoked in the members' talk and if commitment or detachment influences members' communication about the union to members and/or nonmembers.

As discussed in Chapter 1, commitment requires three factors: identification with the organization, involvement in the organization, and loyalty to the organization (Mowday et al., 1979). Scholars of organizations have mostly focused on identity (e.g., Bhattacharya, Rao, & Glynn, 1995; Brown & Williams, 1984; Cheney, 1983; Dutton et al., 1994; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; Mael & Ashforth, 1992) while the concepts of involvement and loyalty have been given only a slight nod from time to time. Ade (1980) examined teachers' congruency (i.e., identification) with the NEA and AFT on issues and found that teachers who have high participation in at least one of the organizations had more congruent responses with the organization. Ade hypothesized that those members had greater opportunities to contribute to the organization's policies. Ade's research was a written survey for elementary teachers (union members *and* nonmembers) administered during a time when neither the NEA nor AFT was taking stances on such controversial issues as homosexuality or abortion.

Three of the previously mentioned identity studies (Ade, 1980; Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Mael & Ashforth, 1992) were done solely with paper-and-pencil measures.

“[Surveys] are of little value for examining complex social relationships or intrinsic patterns of interaction” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 131). Quantitative research casts a wide net and allows for great numbers of people to be studied but it does not allow for the depth this study requires. Observations, interviews, document reviews, and member checking will allow the researcher to better explore the depth of the research questions set out in Chapter 1.

Throughout the next few pages, the following areas will be explored: (a) research design; (b) methods, including affiliate and participant selection, data collection, member checking, and data analysis; and (c) the researcher’s positionality.

### Research Design

Leading organizational scholar George Cheney (1983) and qualitative scholar John Van Maanen (1979) encourage the use of qualitative research as a way of really understanding the dynamics of the individual-organization relationship, such as the relationship between NEA members and their local, state, and national organizations. Qualitative research is also useful when delving into complexities, looking at processes in organizations, or for research on real, as opposed to stated, organizational goals (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Ultimately, the purpose of qualitative research is to obtain rich data to build theory step-by-step from the examples and experiences collected by the researcher (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

#### *Multiple Site Case Studies*

The overall design for this project was multiple site case studies. Yin (2003) writes that when research questions deal with operational links needing to be traced over time, the qualitative strategy of case studies should be employed by the researcher. Yin

goes on to say that case studies are the preferred strategy when (a) the research questions begin with “how” or “why,” (b) the investigator has little control over the behavioral events, and (c) the focus is on contemporary phenomenon with some real-life context. This research project meets all three of these criteria.

Two local affiliates of the NEA and its members were studied in depth during the course of an academic year. One local affiliate was chosen because of its predictable commitment to the NEA. There was a large membership, involved members, organized leadership, scheduled monthly meetings, and many financial resources. The other affiliate was chosen because it had the characteristics of a detached chapter: decreasing membership, no members involved beyond the local level, disorganized leadership, no scheduled meetings, and limited finances. Additionally, the detached site had a local chapter of the Association of American Educators (AAE) that actively competed with the NEA for membership.

Even though committed members do exist in detached locals and vice versa, it was important to take an institutional approach and identify both committed and detached locals to better ensure the likelihood of finding both committed and detached members.

### *Research Strategies*

Although Yin (2003) does not limit case study research solely to qualitative methods, he does acknowledge that interviews are one of the most important sources for case study information. Marshall and Rossman (1999) write that in-depth interviews allow the researcher to focus on the individual member while the case study focuses on the collective (i.e., the local affiliate of the NEA). In-depth interviews help explain the creation, evolution, and maintenance of a culture (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Lindlof and

Taylor (2002) discussing organizational communication write that organizations can be likened to cultures.

The interviews in this study were guided conversations (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Yin, 2003) or collaborative interaction (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) between the researcher and the informants and gave the informants the opportunity to convey their perspectives about the NEA and their state and local affiliates in their own words and in the depth qualitative research encourages. “We exist in a conversational circle, where our understanding of the human world depends on conversation and our understanding of conversation is based on our understanding of the human world” (Kvale, 1996, p. 296). Pen-and-paper methods would have limited the NEA members responses based upon available answers, white space, hand cramps, or even general disinterest in the survey. In an interview, the informant has a captive audience with the researcher. The ultimate goals were depth, detail, and richness within the conversations or what Geertz (1973) referred to as “thick description.”

The most employed strategy during this multiple site case study was the in-depth interview, but three other strategies were also used: observations at local affiliate meetings, reviewing NEA documents, and member checking. By attending local meetings the researcher watched the members interact with each other and discuss affiliate business outside the context of an interview. Documents that were reviewed included state and local newsletters, local minutes, and local budgets. Again, this gave the researcher the opportunity to learn about the organization without the formality of an interview. Member checking involved making the transcripts and chapters available to the informants for their review and feedback. By combining the strategies of

interviewing, observing, reading, and member checking, the researcher was better able to understand the culture of the local affiliate and its members.

## Research Methods

### *Affiliate Selection*

This research was conducted in a state within the southern region of the United States during the 2005-06 school year. There are 40,000 NEA members within the state. Recently, people in this conservative region have expressed some discontent with the “liberal” teachers’ union and NEA membership has begun to lag in this region when compared to others (Carini, 2003). A poll conducted by Public Agenda found that only 44% of those in the South agreed that without their union “teachers would be vulnerable to school politics or administrators who abuse their power.” Compare that with 66% in the Northeast, 58% in the Midwest, and 46% in the West (Farkas et al., 2004). Southerners do not believe the NEA is vital to their existence or success, as members in the other regions do.

In the state where this research was conducted, the state’s NEA affiliate has traditionally been very active and well respected at the national level of the NEA, but even this state’s membership has shown its disapproval with the “liberal” NEA in the past. The leadership of the state organization publicly disagreed with the national level on a resolution dealing with homosexuality. The state affiliate made headlines in January 2006 when they aligned with the NEA and filed suit (along with three school districts in the state) against the state senate’s president and the speaker of the house for underfunding that state’s school districts by 1 billion dollars. The fingers immediately pointed to the influence of the NEA on the state affiliate, and politicians were not happy.



The senate president responded in one of the state's most read newspapers that he was disappointed that the state's affiliate "has decided to follow the advice of a national teachers union ..." (qtd. in Hoberock, 2006).

The state affiliate of the AAE saw this as an opportunity to attack the state NEA affiliate and they did in editorial pages across the state. The executive director of the state's AAE affiliate wrote that the NEA is closely aligned with the Democratic party, donates disproportional amounts to left-leaning groups, spends too much on their payroll, and is ultra-liberal. ("Democrat," "left," and "liberal" are all dirty words in this state). The AAE's state executive director encouraged NEA members to drop their membership and to join the AAE, a less expensive alternative (Tinney, 2006).

For this research, one local affiliate of the NEA was chosen because of its predictably high commitment to the NEA, the other for its predictable detachment from the national organization. The committed local needed to have a high percentage of membership in its district, members who were involved at all levels of the organization, organized leadership, a good communication network, scheduled monthly meetings, and many financial resources. The detached local needed to have the exact opposite characteristics.

Finding the committed affiliate was a relatively simple task. There are 400 local affiliates in the state. Only 5% of them have at least as many members as the "committed" local chosen for this project. There are only two state officers in this state; one of them is from this local. Every year this affiliate sends members to the zone meeting, state delegate assembly, regional leadership conference, and national representative assembly. The committed organizations had members who appeared to

identify with the NEA, were involved in the organization, and were loyal. The local organization has plenty of financial resources and is well established in the community, having been there for more than 30 years. Additionally, there are extensive communication patterns amongst members. Their local president often sends out emails to the members and the executive committee meets in person at least once a month.

Clay, the local president of the identified committed affiliate (from now on referred to as Local Q), was contacted in early August to obtain permission to conduct the study. Permission was granted and the researcher attended Local Q's first executive meeting just a few days later. Clay's superintendent was also agreeable, granting permission via email within a matter of a week or two. When the researcher attended the first meeting of Local Q, Clay asked her to introduce herself and then asked, "Are you saying good or bad things about the NEA?" He went on to say, "As I like to say, 'We are the NEA.'" The committed site is in a school district made up of 3,500 students and 260 faculty members of whom 224 (86%) are members of the local NEA affiliate.

The second site (the "detached" site) was a little more difficult to secure. Initially Clay was consulted on a potential site and suggested a school district very close to his own. He explained that they have one extremely active member (who is a member of the state NEA affiliate's board) but the rest of the local is not. Bob, the very active member, was contacted and asked if he would be interested in participating in the study. He agreed, but permission could never be secured from Bob's superintendent. The superintendent said he would have to speak to his board president and then was "in a meeting" every time the researcher called after that. This went on for nearly a month.

In mid-September, the researcher asked a person who consults with detached chapters of the NEA about potential sites for this research. She suggested Local G, saying that they have not been very involved, do not have a negotiated contract, and have not sent anyone to the national representative assembly in a while. (It turns out they do have a negotiated contract). When Gabe, Local G's president, was contacted he said his executive committee had not yet met that school year. (In contrast, Local Q had already two meetings). It took him a month, but Gabe finally agreed to be a part of the study. His superintendent was very agreeable, granting permission to the interviewer within a day's time. The detached site is in a school district made up of 1,874 students and 145 faculty members of whom 54 (37%) are members of the local affiliation.

Local Q and Local G are only separated by about 20 miles, but are vastly different as far as their local NEA affiliate is concerned. A person need only look at their membership, involvement, and meeting schedules to begin to understand the differences. Less than half of the teachers at Local G are members of their local, whereas 86% of the teachers are members of the NEA at Local Q. Nobody at Local G has been to a state or national assembly in years; Local Q sends multiple people to each assembly every year. Local Q has scheduled monthly meetings for its large executive committee; Local G only meets when they feel it is necessary, which was only once during the course of this study.

Additionally, Local Q had two meetings for its entire local membership during the academic year. The first meeting was held in August and the other was held in May. During the August meeting Local Q's president explained the negotiated agreement and the teachers were given the opportunity to vote whether or not to approve it. The meeting in May was also a reception in which the Teacher of the Year was recognized and the

district's retirees were presented with a gift from Local Q. The membership also voted on the members of the executive board at this time, with the exception of the building representatives, which are elected at each building site.

### *Participant Selection*

The participants for this study were members of two different local NEA affiliates. One affiliate was chosen for its commitment to the NEA, the other for its detachment. Attempts to recruit participants occurred through several means. First, the researcher attended local executive meetings and presented consent letters to all of those present to contact her if interested in being interviewed. No one responded to the letters. Second, emails were sent to specific members whom the interviewer had met at executive committee meetings and to other members who were on executive committee email lists made available by the local presidents. Many responded to the emails and volunteered to be interviewed. Third, the snowball sampling technique was employed to locate other participants by asking those who were interviewed to recommend others that might like to talk about the NEA. The snowball sampling technique offered the researcher convenience but does create a risk of sample bias and homogeneity. The sample only represented a particular sector of the population and generalizations should not be drawn from these cases.

Through these means a total of 15 participants were recruited for this study. Prior to this research the researcher knew none of the interviewees. Since nobody contacted the researcher to be interviewed after receiving the consent letters, all of the participants had to be recruited through emails and the snowball technique. Eleven of the informants were found on email lists of local officers, and the four others were referred by the study

participants. Informants at Local Q included a state officer of the state's NEA affiliate. The number of informants interviewed at each affiliate followed the notion of "theoretical saturation" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and no more informants were sought after the same themes reemerged again and again. It soon became clear to the researcher that the themes of identity, involvement, and loyalty were evident in the members' talk.

Of the 15 NEA members interviewed for this study, 10 people were interviewed from Local Q and five were members of Local G. See Table 1. Finding informants at the detached site was admittedly much more of a challenge than with the committed local. Potential informants at Local G had to be contacted time and again, most of them not returning the researcher's messages. (This included Local G's president Gabe, who never agreed to be interviewed for this study). It would have been ideal to have the same number of informants at both sites, but nearly impossible in this case. Nonetheless, theoretical saturation was reached at both sites.

According to the research cited in Chapter 1, the most committed members of voluntary organizations are older, married, male and have lower incomes. Males are sparse in the teaching profession and were difficult to secure for this research. The majority (12, or 80%) of the local informants were women; three (20%) were men. The sample was pretty homogeneous as far as income, race, marital status, and number of children. Combined family income was mostly in the mid-range. Two of those interviewed had a combined family income of \$30,000 to \$49,999, five earned between \$50,000 and \$69,999, five earned between \$70,000 and \$89,999, one earned between \$90,000 and \$109,999, and two earned more than \$110,000. The majority of the interviewees were white (73%), married (80%), and everybody had a least one child. Ten

**Table 1**  
**Demographic Characteristics of Local NEA members**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Local Q (n =10)</b>	<b>Local G (n =5)</b>	<b>Combined (n=15)</b>
<b>Sex f (%)</b>			
Men	1 (10%)	2 (40%)	3 (20%)
Women	9 (90%)	3 (60%)	12 (80%)
<b>Age Mean (SD)</b>			
	45.7 (2.9)	52.4 (3.6)	47.9 (2.3)
<b>Combined Family Income f (%)</b>			
Less than \$30,000	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
\$30,000-49,999	1 (10%)	1 (20%)	2 (13%)
\$50,000-69,999	2 (20%)	3 (60%)	5 (33%)
\$70,000-89,999	4 (40%)	1 (20%)	5 (33%)
\$90,000-109,999	1 (10%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)
\$110,000 or more	2 (20%)	0 (0%)	2 (13%)
<b>Race f (%)</b>			
Caucasian	7 (70%)	4 (80%)	11 (73%)
African American	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Native American	3 (30%)	0 (0%)	3 (20%)
Italian	0 (0%)	1 (20%)	1 (7%)
<b>Marital Status f (%)</b>			
Married	8 (80%)	4 (80%)	12 (80%)
Divorced	2 (20%)	1 (20%)	3 (20%)
Separated	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Never Married	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>Number of Children f (%)</b>			
0	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
1-2	6 (60%)	4 (80%)	10 (67%)
3-4	4 (40%)	1 (20%)	5 (33%)
5 or more	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

of those interviewed had one or two children; the other five participants had three or four children.

The local members had diverse experiences with the NEA and its state and local affiliates. See Table 2. None of the participants were especially new in their teaching career. The mean for membership in the NEA amongst this group was 13.2 years. Both Clay and Keith had been members the shortest amount of time with 6 years. Oddly

**Table 2**  
**Involvement of Local NEA Members**

<b>Interview</b>	<b>Alias</b>	<b>Local Affiliate</b>	<b>Years of Membership</b>	<b>Leadership Positions</b>
1	Ana	Q	8	state committee; local officer; state delegate assembly; national representative assembly; local grievance chair
2	Bridget	Q	8	building representative; national representative assembly; zone secretary
3	Clay	Q	6	local officer; building representative; state delegate assembly
4	Dorothy	Q	10	building representative; zone officer; regional leadership conference attendee; national representative assembly; state delegate assembly; negotiation team
5	Eve	Q	19	building representative
6	Fran	Q	20	state committee; negotiation team; local officer; building representative; state delegate assembly; regional leadership conference attendee
7	Gina	Q	19	local officer; negotiation team; building representative
8	Helen	Q	27	Building representative; local officer; state board of directors; national board of directors; state delegate assembly; national representative assembly; state officer; state committees; national committees
9	Irene	Q	27	Building representative; state PAC committee, state board of directors, chair of an NEA caucus, national representative assembly; Zone delegate; local negotiation team
10	Julia	G	19	Negotiation team; local officer; presenter at regional NEA meeting; summer leadership attendee
11	Keith	G	6	Building representative
12	Lois	G	10	Building representative; local officer; summer leadership attendee
13	Melissa	G	12 <i>Quit and rejoined</i>	Building representative; local officer
14	Norene	Q	15 <i>Quit and rejoined</i>	none
15	Oliver	G	11 <i>Quit and rejoined</i>	none

enough, Clay was the committed local's president, while Keith has just recently become a building representative at the detached site. Three of those who were interviewed have quit the NEA at one time or another during their teaching career; only one of them joined the AAE during his hiatus from the NEA. All but two of those interviewed have been officers at the local level.

If involvement and commitment were synonymous, it would be a simple task to go through and label each member committed or detached from the NEA based upon the information in Table 2, but the two terms are not synonymous. It is important to listen to the talk of the members to decipher if one is committed or detached. Involvement is only a small part of commitment. The member's identity and loyalty have to be heard in the talk. The purpose of this research is to discover each member's level of commitment or detachment to the NEA and how that commitment or detachment sounds in the talk.

### *Data Collection*

The case descriptions of the two local affiliates are based primarily on direct observations of local affiliate meetings, documents (i.e., newsletters, minutes, budgets) from the state and local affiliates, and responses to semi-structured interviews with individual members.

*Observations.* Participant observation took place primarily at executive committee meetings of both affiliates, although the researcher did attend one district faculty meeting in which the Local Q was given time on the agenda to explain the negotiated contract. Additionally, the researcher attended a training session for delegates to the state delegate assembly. Local Q had an executive committee meeting once a month for its 22 officers and building representatives. An average of 13 people attended



each meeting in the fall semester. Local G had one executive meeting in the fall semester. There were three people in attendance. They have a total of 10 executive members.

*Documents.* Documents included state and local newsletters, local agendas, local minutes, and local budgets. The state NEA newsletter is available online and is published 10 times per year. Local Q had two local newsletters during the course of this study; Local G had none. Local Q had typed copies of minutes, agendas, and budgets at every meeting. At the one meeting of Local G, they had no agenda or minutes. There was a financial report, in which the treasurer read from the local affiliate's bank statement.

*Interviews.* The informant was emailed the informed consent document at least 24 hours prior to his/her interview. See Appendix A. The document was explained in detail at the time of the interview and was signed by the interviewee before the first question was asked. The interviews were semi-structured and questions were used to guide the interviewer throughout the conversation. See Appendix B. Probes frequently followed primary questions. Since this research was inductive, the researcher and informants often deviated from the prepared questions, following the lead of the informant. "The interview, like an ordinary conversation, is invented anew each time it occurs" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 7).

With the exception of the first interview, all of the interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed by the researcher. Tape recording interviews allows the research to more fully participate in the conversation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The length of the interviews/conversations varied from 24 to 103 minutes. A typical interview (i.e., the mean) was about 49 minutes. All interviews took place in one session. Most interviews

took place in the informant's classroom. One elementary teacher was interviewed in a high school math classroom after her local executive meeting. Three informants opted to be interviewed in the researcher's office at the university.

*Member Checking.* Stake (1995) suggests using member checking (or member validation) as a means of triangulation. Triangulation involves using multiple methodologies in hopes of overcoming the problems that come from single method, single-observer studies. Triangulation adds credibility to the research. This project involves observation, interviewing, document review, and member checking as means of triangulation. Member checking gave the researcher a chance to check his/her facts and fairness with the informants. Granted, the informants are not free from bias, but it is not uncommon for the researcher to learn new information from a member check which can be used to revise findings (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Truth is not a goal in case study research, but by allowing informants to read their transcripts it was an opportunity for the researcher to gain insight into interpretations of truth.

Each informant was given a copy of his or her interview transcript for fact checking. All member checking was done toward the end of the project, so that there would be no danger of losing access to either local affiliate or its members. Dorothy was the only informant who responded to her transcript. She requested no changes and apologized for not being more comprehensive during the interview. The researcher is not sure what to make of the other informants' silence. They could be disinterested, content with the transcript and what they said, embarrassed, or angry and silent.

Helen, a member of Local Q, was asked to examine Chapter 1 of this dissertation for accuracy. She is incredibly knowledgeable of the national organization and was

capable of recognizing factual errors about the NEA. She was told she could make critical observations and suggestions but that the final editorial control belonged to the researcher. Helen sent her response to the chapter by email:

I've scanned your work and was impressed.---Interesting to see the perceptions from outside my own vantage point. Your references were well documented and we could discuss interpretations of facts for hours. Reading your presentation of NEA facts stretches me beyond my own point of view. Your dissertation is going to be an opportunity for me to grow and learn.

No corrections or edits! Keep me posted on how the work progresses and send me more to read! If I get really wired about anything, you can count on hearing from me immediately!

### *Data Analysis*

“Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and other materials that you accumulate to increase your own understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). As suggested by Rubin and Rubin (1995), data analysis began while the interviews were still being conducted. Once a few interviews were finished and transcribed, the data was examined for preliminary themes and concepts. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) write that this early coding “keeps the growth of the data under control and keeps the analyst alert to the conceptual trajectory of the study” (p. 214).

In the end, there were 41 pages of documents acquired at local meetings. These documents included newsletters, meeting agendas, budgets, memos, minutes, a satisfaction survey, a list of officers, and a copy of a presentation used during Delegate Assembly training. Other documents included Local Q’s negotiated agreement and brochure of products and services for members distributed by the NEA. A total of 11

single-spaced pages of observation notes and 224 single-spaced pages of interview transcripts were generated. No discourse analytic notations were used in transcribing the interviews. As interviews were transcribed, identifying information such as school district or names of coworkers and locations such as cities or state were removed or changed. Each of the interviews was assigned a code. The transcripts of the interviews became the research text for analysis.

Transcripts, documents, and notes were analyzed qualitatively using the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This is considered one of the most influential models for coding qualitative data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Initially, nearly 90 open codes were used to develop a coding scheme that encompassed the full range of participant responses. This was unrestricted coding and allowed the researcher to code minutely (Strauss, 1987). Open codes were used to create new coding categories by adding, collapsing, and revising throughout the interpretive process until the researcher was satisfied that the codes adequately captured variation in the data. These became the three core categories: commitment (including identification, involvement, and loyalty), detachment, and ambivalence.

#### Researcher's Positionality

Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2002) write, "Positioning includes all the subjective responses that affect how the researcher sees data" (p. 119). The authors go on to say that it is *deceptive* for qualitative researchers not to share relevant personal background information in their work. Researchers are "positioned" within their research in three interrelated ways: fixed, subjective, and textual (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2002). *Fixed* includes personal facts like age, gender, class, nationality, and race. Life history

and personal experiences are categorized under *subjective*. Both fixed and subjective positions can be explored prior to the fieldwork; whereas textual occurs in the field and includes language choices and focusing a research lens close up or far away.

The majority of NEA members are white (90%) and female (79%) as is the researcher. The author taught public school for a brief period of time as an undergraduate and was a member of the student section of the NEA during that time. She joined for the million dollars worth of liability insurance and legal representation. During the researcher's three years of Ph.D. coursework, she was a member of a graduate student union and has also been a member of the American Association of University Professors since 1999, which is also a union.

Readers of this work could conceive the researcher's personal involvement in unions and commonality with the informants as a weakness that could affect data collection and/or analysis. A common complaint about case study research is that the investigator has too many preconceptions before conducting the study. Eisenhardt (1989) does not deny this is true and goes on to argue that these preconceptions are actually a benefit and that the constant juxtaposition of the conflicting realities "unfreezes" paradigms of the researcher. Although Truth is never discovered, the researcher and others develop realities of teachers' unions through literature, observations and interviews. These realities are constantly shifting as paradigms are "unfrozen."

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH RESULTS

The results described in this chapter will primarily be organized around the central observations of Mowday et al. (1979) in regard to commitment and its three characteristics of identification, involvement, and loyalty. It is noteworthy that the findings in this study also parallel the early quantitative research in persuasion. Hovland and his colleagues (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; Sherif & Hovland, 1961) discovered that the positionality of audience members reflected latitudes of acceptance or rejection in relation to a given proposition. Sherif and Hovland (1961) argue that people have “internal anchors” (p. 157), or stances, when it comes to any proposition or issue. The researchers observed that when there is a large discrepancy between a person’s internal anchor and external communication (or “external anchor”), opinion changes are unlikely. Thus, internal anchors are a strong predictor of acceptance or rejection of external communication.

The implications of the Sherif and Hovland (1961) study are useful when applied to members’ levels of commitment and detachment to the National Education Association (NEA). After all, every member of the NEA has an internal anchor. When the NEA offers communication close to a member’s internal anchor, it strengthens the member’s acceptance or commitment to the organization. The opposite is also true. If a member’s internal anchor differs from the external anchor, it will probably result in detachment or withdrawal. As a result, there are people who are very pro-NEA (because the anchors are consistently the same) and those who are very anti-NEA (because the anchors are consistently different).

Between these two extremes is the ambivalent audience. Miller (2002) writes that ambivalence “occurs when two mutually exclusive alternatives are valued in similar ways or when the same alternative evokes contradictory responses” (p. 128). An ambivalent audience is the most fluid or persuadable audience. In many ways this audience is the most relevant due to the fact that these members are “reachable” and subject to change. Whereas the other remaining NEA members are attitudinally stable and are not liable to change. Thus the findings in this chapter will incorporate the identification and reporting of an "ambivalent" category, which was the most prevalent in the areas of identification and loyalty. This will contribute to a utility-based approach to the reporting of research findings in Chapter 4. The identification of the characteristics and manifestations of ambivalence of NEA members can provide the basis for a series of pro-active recommendations. Ultimately, a utility-based approach argues the need to isolate the data in such way to offer insights that can be used by scholars and non-scholars alike.

The results described in this chapter are divided into four sections. The first section provides brief introductions of the 15 informants/conversational partners. The biographical sketches were compiled from observations, documents, and interviews. The findings described in “Commitment and Detachment in the Talk” relate specifically to commitment and detachment displayed by members of the NEA and how the concepts of identity, involvement, and loyalty were evoked in conversations with the researcher. The third section will describe the communication of both committed and detached NEA members, highlighting what they say about the organization and to whom. Additionally, discourse about the American Association of Educators (AAE), the nonunion alternative to the NEA, will also be documented in this section. The final section deals with

ambivalence in the talk of the NEA members. “Ambivalence” was not anticipated in the initial planning of this study but emerged as a main category during the coding of this data.

### Informants

Fifteen NEA members took part in this study during the 2005-06 academic year. All of the informants were from two locals. Local Q is noted for its commitment to the national organization, while Local G is known more for its detachment from the national organization. Throughout this chapter the local affiliates are identified in the participant’s code. For instance, G2 was the second person interviewed from Local G.

#### *Local Q*

*Ana.* Ana (Q1) joined the student affiliation of the NEA almost a decade ago and has been a loyal member ever since. Ana was the youngest informant at 29 years old and is the local grievance chair for Q. Early on in her career she taught at a school with an inactive local but kept paying her dues to the NEA. She was the local president at Q few years ago, is on a state committee, and used to attend the RA annually but has become less involved lately. This may be a result of her two small children at home. The only local meeting she has attended this year was in August. Ana adamantly defends the choices of the NEA to her mother, who is also a teacher. Ana also donates regularly to the NEA’s PAC fund. She appears very committed to the NEA, although she is less involved than she used to be.

*Bridget.* Bridget (Q2) has been a member of the NEA for the last 8 years. She attended her first RA in the summer of 2005 and is relatively new to being a building representative at Local Q. Her husband is Oliver, an informant from Local G. When he



quit the NEA a few years ago for the nonunion alternative of the AAE, it was Bridget who convinced him to come back. Although she does not identify with all of the NEA's choices, she feels like she gets a chance to voice her concerns at the RA.

*Clay.* Clay (Q3) is in his second year serving as Local Q's president. He has agreed to serve another term next year and shared during his interviewing that he plans to get involved in state and maybe national levels of the organization in the years to come. He is in his sixth year of teaching and his sixth year of membership in the NEA. Clay attended his first state delegate assembly in the spring of 2005. He was quick to defend the national organization's decisions during local meetings and often referenced the negotiated agreement when discussing potential grievances of local members. He is a 30-something father of two young children and in a high-income bracket.

*Dorothy.* Dorothy (Q4) announced her candidacy for the state NEA affiliate's board of directors at the February meeting of the local. She has been a member for 10 years and has been active at the local, zone, state, regional and national levels of the organization. Her husband is also a member of the local. Her father was a member of a union and Dorothy is an advocate for workers' rights. She will be vice president of the local next year.

*Eve.* Eve (Q5) was a member of the local for 19 years before she became a building representative in 2005-06. During the interview she admitted she knew very little about the state or national levels of the organization and that she was unhappy with her local for how they handled a grievance in her building last year. She is married with no children at home. During this research she was called in as a building representative to her principal's office to mediate a potential grievance. She said she did not like it and

will probably not run for office again. She has been loyal to the organization and has paid her dues for nearly 20 years. However, her main incentive for joining the NEA was the liability insurance, which the AAE offers double now. If the AAE had a stronger local presence, Eve may be at risk for leaving the NEA. The only thing that may keep her around is her loyalty and 20-year history with the NEA.

*Fran.* Fran (Q6) is a 20-year member of the NEA and is nearing retirement and plans on joining the NEA as a retired member. She has been active at both the local and state level of the organization and is currently the recording secretary for her local. She began her membership in the organization at the same time Helen, the state officer, moved to the same local and the two women remain close to this day. She has had to defend the organization's choices to her daughter and son-in-law and gets teary when she discusses the friends she has made in the NEA.

*Gina.* Gina (Q7) is very active at the local level but appears to know very little about the organization beyond her town. She has been a member for the last 19 years. Although she knows very little about the national level, Gina is not a risk for leaving the NEA because she very much identifies with her local and stays very involved. During her interview she said that she had two younger children and they have kept her too busy to get involved beyond the local level. In fact, she wanted to resign her local position this year and her husband encouraged her not to quit.

*Helen.* Helen (Q8) is the ideal committed member. She was a member of her local for 25 years and served in many leadership capacities, including local president and the negotiations team. She was a delegate to both state and national assemblies and served on the board of directors for both the state and national levels. During the course

of this research she was elected to her second three-year term as a state officer. She was unopposed. She said she could never quit the NEA because if she did not like something she would just work to change it.

*Irene.* Irene (Q9) has been a member of the NEA her entire professional career—27 years. She is on the committee that decides to whom the state PAC money is given. She has also been a national caucus chair. She was at the national RA when they took votes on reproductive rights and homosexuality issues and defends those decisions made by the NEA.

*Norene.* Norene (Q10) joined the NEA 15 years ago but quit for a few years because she could not identify with the organization's perceived liberal politics. Her husband is a minister in a Southern Baptist Church. She has come back to the NEA, citing guilt as the main incentive. She wants to support her local and state affiliates. She is a good friend of Clay, her local president. She is married with no children at home, but is still a risk for leaving because she does not identify with the organization and is not involved at any level.

#### *Local G*

*Julia.* Julia (G1) is the most committed member encountered at Local G. This may be a result of her being a second-generation NEA member. Both of her parents were active members in a neighboring district. In fact, her mom is currently a retired member. Julia did express discontent with the NEA's decision to support non-education issues, but does not appear to be at risk for leaving the association. She has been a past local president and seems to want to keep the local together. She has not been involved beyond the local level, but unlike Gina at Q, does seem to understand what is going on

beyond her local. In comparison to members at Q, Julia is not very involved. However, when compared to other members at G, she is probably the most involved member they have.

*Keith.* Keith (G2) entered the teaching profession in the middle of his life after having retired from two other careers. He has been a member of Local G for the last six years and agreed to be a building representative this last year. He grew up in a large city in the northern part of the United States and has a history with unions but does not appear to identify with them very well, calling himself a “union cheater” at one point in the interview. He does have a lot of respect for the teaching profession though and tends to link the profession to the NEA and its affiliates. He is married with no children at home but is very busy with church and the student organization he sponsors. He said he might be able to make time to be on the negotiation team in the future. Keith’s wife has been president of her local. Keith is possibly a risk, but his northern upbringing and interpersonal connections in the local affiliate lean more toward committed.

*Lois.* Lois (G3) is much like Eve from Local Q. They are both the same age and are soft-spoken elementary teachers who are very likeable. They also both know very little about the NEA beyond the local level. Lois has been an NEA member half the time of Eve—just 10 years, but Lois has been very active locally during that time. She has been a building representative, local vice president, and will soon serve as president. Her main incentive for joining the NEA and remaining loyal was the liability insurance. She was not aware the AAE offered insurance until the interviewer told her during their conversation. She is at risk for leaving the NEA, but probably will not because of her involvement in the organization.

*Melissa.* Melissa (G4) joined the NEA in 1972 when she began teaching but left the organization for a brief time because she did not like the choices the NEA was making about homosexuality and abortion. Melissa's husband is a Church of Christ minister. She came back so that she would have a voice in decisions made by the organization but has never been a delegate for a state or national assembly. She has been active at the local level, serving as a building representative and local officer. She used to be friends with the active members of the local AAE but that friendship was strained after a principal was let go and Melissa did not side with the principal. They are working on rebuilding those friendships, and this may put Melissa at greater risk for leaving the NEA again.

*Oliver.* Oliver (G5) joined the NEA 13 years ago but quit for a few years to charter the local AAE in his district. Bridget from Local Q is his wife and convinced him to rejoin the NEA by asking him what the AAE had done for him or the profession. Oliver believes that the NEA is a lot more proactive than the AAE. Even though his values are more in line with the AAE, he appears to have more respect for the NEA. He is not involved at all in his local, but did travel to a lobbying conference with his wife this last year. He may also accompany her to the RA in the summer of 2006. He is a risk for flight, but Bridget's influence may prevent Oliver from leaving the NEA again.

#### Commitment and Detachment in the Talk

The findings in this section center on commitment and detachment of NEA members and how they communicate those concepts to people inside and outside of the organization. As mentioned in the previous chapters, commitment requires three factors: identification, involvement, and loyalty (Mowday et al., 1979). If members are lacking in

any of these three or a combination thereof, they may be detached. The findings described in this section pertain to research questions 1a: How do NEA members talk about identification with the organization?; 1b: How do NEA members talk about involvement within the organization?; and 1c: How do NEA members talk about loyalty to the organization?

*Identification: “Probably wouldn’t associate with them if I didn’t have to”*

During the interviews, the informants were asked to give the NEA human characteristics. The committed members had no problem doing this and identified the NEA as dynamic and full of energy (Q2); strong, passionate, and committed (Q8); and compassionate, understanding, tolerant, empathetic (Q1). They also describe it as a parent, saying that the NEA is motherly in a sense of watching out for kids and fatherly in that they are willing to go to battle (Q3). It was also described as a nurturing mother (Q6), a protector (Q5), and a hopeful grandmother who can demonstrate anger to those who hurt her family (Q4). These members saw the NEA as someone like themselves.

Julia explains:

I think the NEA is someone like me. Who cares about kids. Who cares about uh our future and educating our future. Someone who’s involved not only in the school but they’re also involved in their community through teaching Sunday School or volunteering on the fire department. (G1, 441-444)

Not all of the informants so easily identified with the organization. Some even hesitated to be interviewed for this study because they did not feel like they identified enough with the national organization. Instead of identifying the organization as a close relative, Lois said “he” was more of a distant relative:

I think of him [the NEA] maybe as a great uncle or aunt. He's taking care of me but not maybe directly, like [state affiliation] is. Um, because I'm more close to that and it's not taking care of me like the local is taking care of me. It's still out there, but it's three times removed. (G3, 578-581)

Helen, a former president of Local Q and current state officer for the NEA state affiliate, admits that the national level may be too distant for local members to form an identification with the association: "The NEA level is far enough away that it's difficult to make that connection unless you have people in your local association who are involved in those issues" (Q8, 317-318). It may be the separation that has caused Norene to view the national organization as arrogant and as someone with whom she would rather not associate:

I think they [the NEA] might be a little arrogant. Um, [pause] maybe even a little bullyish. Um, I don't see them as kind and considerate... They set they mind their minds to a purpose and then they're not easily dissuaded from that purpose. Whether they're right or wrong, they think they're right... I'm not real fond of them. Probably wouldn't associate with them if I didn't have to. (Q10, 245-246, 252-253, 257)

There were three barriers to identification found during this qualitative study: the NEA's political stances on non-education issues, the union label, and the fact that some members do not feel like they need protection from administration at the local level. The major complaint of those who could not identify with the NEA is that it is too liberal. Many of the informants did not identify with the political left and/or knew other teachers who did not lean to the left. Dorothy and Ana both know people who have not joined the NEA because of the political stances of the organization. The internal anchors of these people are different from the external communication of the NEA. Dorothy and Ana explain:

Because of the conservative um religious fundamentalist religious upbringing of many people in this area, um, there's several people in this district who are not members because they feel that um belonging to the NEA is not a representative of a Christian mindset. (Q4, 159-162)

My mother is not a member. She is a teacher. She's not a member of NEA. She belongs to, um, [AAE state affiliate]. And that has caused a lot of friction between she and I. She belongs to a Southern Baptist church and received a Southern Baptist Missions, and they've put things in their handbooks that were untrue about the NEA. (Q1, 327-331)

Besides political stances, some members have a tough time simply identifying themselves as union members. When the state association filed a lawsuit against members of the state legislature for underfunding the state's schools, a communication specialist for the state NEA affiliate encouraged members of Local Q at their January meeting to speak to the media as teachers and not as "union" members. He encouraged members to respond to the media but "not be combative." Helen does not use the u-word when speaking on behalf of the organization: "I call us a professional organization or I say collectively we're working on things together. I don't use the word union much because people don't like to hear it and it kind of throws red flags" (Q8, 525-527).

Dorothy said that she thinks many people see it as a professional organization and not a labor union. Keith agreed, "I think they [NEA members] might realize it's a union because their husband takes it off the union dues on taxes. [inaudible] knowing what a real union is, no" (G2, 431-432). Eve provided an example of that sentiment during her interview:

The NEA is the National Education ASSOCIATION... I just don't think of it as a union. Unions—when I think of unions, like steel workers and things, I think of um like striking and you know, people that can do that. And I don't see that teachers can really do



that and so it's more like an association working together kind of that kind of thing. (Q5, 577-581)

Oliver does not like to use the language of unions because of the negative connotation of the word. He is also concerned about the public image of teachers as union members:

You're going to be like the teachers in Philadelphia and Detroit and Chicago who are thought of as a bunch of union bloodsuckers that aren't doing a good job anyway....In the true sense of the word, I guess it is a union but not really. I don't like using that word because it has a negative connotation in this part of the country still. (G5, 616-618, 630-631)

A few of the informants had histories with unions. Both Dorothy and Norene's fathers were members of blue-collar unions. Dorothy has talked to her dad about the NEA, but he has a difficult time seeing the NEA as a union because teachers rarely strike. After he saw Dorothy's first paycheck, he wanted to know what her union was doing for teacher pay:

He does not understand why the NEA and the [state affiliate] are not greater advocates of the strike. He thinks that we've lost power...His words are, there comes a time when you quit talking and you start walking. And he thinks it's time for us to walk. (Q4, 188-119, 124-125)

Two reasons that NEA members do not identify with the association is because they do not have the same political stances as the NEA and/or do not see themselves as members of a union. Another major reason for detachment is that people like where they work and feel no need to be protected from the administration, which is a major function of the NEA in many locals. These members like their salaries and their administration. This is especially true for Local G. There is much more of a struggle with administration at Local Q. Keith identified Local G as a "FANTASTIC place to work... The kids are

fun. The school is great. The program's good. I look forward to coming to school every day" (G2, 27, 41-42). Oliver and Melissa, also teachers at Local G, agree:

They've [administration] always been on our side. For that reason, we've never had the need to be aggressive and militant. They've always shared with us budgets and negotiations have been very agreeable and honest and forthright with here's what we can do and here's what we can't and here's why. And uh so I think it's been a good working relationship at my school. (G5, 46-52)

Coming from a model school all I see are good things. Now we do have our problems, but we're doing some good things here at this school. We've got some great teachers here. I mean some good teachers. Where some places don't. And maybe the inner cities somewhere that I don't know about. Maybe NEA does more for them then they do for us. I don't know. (G3, 295-299)

The struggle members of Local Q have with their administration was particular noticeable at their April meeting when the executive committee discussed whether or not to recognize a retiring administrator when they recognized the teacher and staff retirees. Fran suggested that the local should recognize the administrator and remarked, "They'll [the administration] will be nicer in the negotiations because they'll think we like them." Dorothy made a suggestion for the use of the retiree's \$70,000 salary, commenting they should hire two more English teachers. "Where we really need people and not administration."

*Involvement: "Teachers determine the direction"*

Committed members are involved at all levels of the organization (i.e., local, zone, state, regional, and national) but are at risk for getting distracted from the organization by other obligations. When Helen, the state officer and member of Local Q, was interviewed she gave the names of people she wanted the researcher to interview for this study at her local. All of the recommended interviewees had been to state and

national meetings. Helen said they would give a better perspective than someone who had never been to those meetings.

Local Q had a very structured local organization. At the first meeting of the academic year there were multiple handouts for every member, which included an agenda, minutes from the last meeting, a proposed budget, an executive committee list, and negotiated agreement changes. Eighteen of the group's 22 members were in attendance for that first meeting. They met for more than two hours, and only three of the members left before the end of the meeting.

At every monthly meeting of Local Q after that, there was an agenda, minutes from the last meeting, a very detailed budget for every member, and snacks for those in attendance. The local's budget included four areas for expenses: operating, member services, contributions, and conferences. There were 21 subcategories under these headings, including the line for snacks. Local Q operated on a budget of about \$8,000 for most of the year. Income came from dues, rebates from the state association and dividends. There were columns for both projected and actual amounts. One of the high school math teachers served as treasurer and was responsible for the local's financial records.

There were also many leadership opportunities for local members at Q. Clay, the local president, prided himself on involving all members and not just executive members on committees. For example, he encouraged the executive members to recruit other members to be on the negotiating team or the calendar committee. At Local Q's February executive committee meeting the members were already talking about officers for the next year. Fran commented on how important it was to incorporate new people

for “New ideas and new strengths.” During Local Q’s April meeting when they were slating the officers for the next year, Clay said, “This is a good place for [name]...kind of a new person with a head on her shoulders.” He added, “When they’re not looking, we’ll reel them in. People are happy on the sidelines.”

Local Q also provided “Know Your Contract” newsletters to all certified staff in their district. Clay explained the contract in detail (with a Power Point presentation) at the faculty meeting at the beginning of the year. Local Q’s executive committee met monthly in Clay’s room at the high school. Dorothy had this to say about her local:

Local is more nitty gritty. I think that we have to deal—the NEA pursues idealistic and granted, somewhat unattainable standards, given the political climate of this country. Um, locally we deal with more nitty gritty day-to-day frustrations, contractual problems of this district. So, I think that a lot of the hard work comes at the site level and the local and then your more idealistic big picture is provided by the NEA. (Q4, 255-260)

Local G met only when meetings were announced by email by Gabe, the local president. Gabe only called one meeting during the fall semester. Gabe, Julia, and Lois were the three of the 10 executive members who were in attendance. They met in Lois’s elementary classroom. There was no printed agenda or minutes or treasurer’s report. In fact, the treasurer read directly from the bank statement and admitted she could not find the checkbook. National Education Week was the main topic of conversation during that meeting. Julia asked if there was a quorum and Gabe said they made the decision last year with just a majority of the executive body. The three of them decided to buy lanyards for all of the certified staff as gifts from the local. (During an interview with Julia a couple of months later, she admitted they did not end up getting the lanyards). Local G’s meeting ended after 35 minutes. Lois explained that they used to meet more

often: “We used to meet in the morning before classes at the school like 8. We used to meet before in his classroom, but nobody would ever show up” (G3, 343-345).

In Local G, the members appeared hesitant step up for leadership roles and the officers served in multiple capacities. For instance, Melissa was the secretary and a building representative. Keith was a building representative and was also on the calendar committee. Lois was the vice president and a building representative. Both Lois and Melissa said they do not want to negotiate their local’s contract though:

I’ve been to one pre meeting and they were telling me all this and all that. And I was thinking, you know, I’m just sure I’m a negotiator because you don’t want to say this... There’s things you say. There’s thing you don’t say. There’s things he offers and you counter offer. And I’m thinking, this is too much. (G3, 351-353, 355-356)

This year, I was supposed to be secretary but I’ve been gone so much I’m not real sure where we are or what we’re doing but um um I have been supportive of those people who have been on the negotiating committee and that sort of thing. That’s just not my cup of tea. I said, you guys don’t want me doing that because I would not be beneficial. You know, that’s just not what I do well. And I think the people who understand that and do that better, need to do that. (G4, 197-203)

Members of Local G did not want to be local officers because of the responsibility. Lois said, “Nobody else would do it. So I just did it. I’m not the best. And I really don’t keep up the best, but nobody else would do it. So I just did it. And I’ve been doing it ever since” (G3, 140-142). Lois went on to say that she will be president of her local next year and may have a problem making it to board meetings because they conflict with her water aerobics class.

Eve got involved as a building representative at Local Q after spending 25 years just being a loyal, dues paying member. There had been a grievance in her building with

a principal the year before and the building's teachers were pretty divided when it came to their local affiliate. "We uh just felt like we needed someone on there that could kind of relate to the other side" (Q5, 77-78).

The main responsibilities at G included signing up members, passing on information to other members, and finding people to serve on the calendar committee. Members of Q's executive committee recruited members very aggressively, appointed people to sit on committees, and also handled grievances frequently. Oliver, a member of G, said he had not heard of a grievance at his district in the last 10 years.

Local Q has had at least two zone officers (Bridget and Dorothy) and has hosted the zone meeting in the recent past. Dorothy ran unopposed for the state NEA's board of directors in March to serve the following year. Local Q sent four delegates last year to the state delegate assembly (DA). The number of delegates a local is allowed to send is based upon membership. Local affiliates are allowed to send one delegate for every 60 members or a major fraction thereof. Only 5% of the state's locals are allowed to send four or more delegates to the DA.

Local G could send one delegate to the DA, but has not sent anyone in the last four or five years. Lois said it is inconvenient to prepare for a substitute teacher. The DA takes place over the course of a Friday and Saturday in April and includes four business sessions. Training is held for delegates zone wide a couple of weeks before the DA. The training for Local Q's zone was held at a local Chinese buffet and was led by the state affiliate's president. There were 10 delegates in attendance; three of them were from Local Q. During the two-hour training the state president went through the 6 million dollar budget page by page. He explained that membership in the state has

increased but gave no specifics. When the researcher asked him for a copy of the DA handbook (which contained the budget), he said that was only available to delegates. The state president also made mention during the training that the state affiliate switched banks a few years ago because their former bank supported school vouchers.

Helen, the state officer from Local Q, said she caught on fire after her first DA. Fran believes attending the state DA is a great way for members to get involved. “I have encouraged our younger members or anybody who says they’re interested in getting involved that that’s a really GOOD way because you vote on everything, everything is discussed” (Q6, 184-186). Clay said attending the DA was a positive experience for him as well:

It [the state DA] opened my eyes to what the [state affiliate] and NEA is really all about and how it’s a democratic process and how it governs itself. And I really saw that teachers determine the direction. And I took a more active role then. (Q3, 41-43)

There are 19 state committees, ranging from affiliate relations to elections to human and civil rights. Members are appointed for three-year terms by the state president. Each group meets at least twice a year, once in the fall and once in February. Local Q currently has two members (Ana and Fran) on state committees.

Other events sponsored by the state affiliate include an advocacy conference every spring, a state convention in the fall, a leadership training in the summer, and days at the state capital. Bridget from Local Q attended the advocacy conference and took her husband Oliver from Local G with her. Clay and Dorothy from Local Q presented workshops at the state convention. Both Julia and Lois from Local G attended state leadership training until it was moved a greater distance from the G district. It was after attending one of the days at the state capital that Norene decided to rejoin the NEA after

she had quit based on moral reasons: “I thought, well, you know, these people really are trying to do good for education so I’ve been a member ever since” (Q10, 66-67).

Dorothy and Fran from Local Q have attended regional leadership training. Dorothy went to Denver, and Fran went to Dallas. Fran said the training helped her how to stand up for herself.

The national representative assembly (RA) is held annually every summer. Last year, Local Q sent both Bridget and Dorothy. Dorothy wrote about her experience at RA in her local’s fall newsletter:

The delegate assembly this past July in Los Angeles was an education in itself! Non-members often cite concerns about NEA policies as a primary reason they do not join [state NEA affiliate]; as first-time delegates, we can truly say that the NEA is a democratic body in which 8,000 plus delegates vote on NEA policy, and that the primary concern in every vote is the effect issues are having on the children and communities our members serve. Several debates lasted three or more hours, and others were settled quickly and unanimously, but the voices of children and the ideals of teachers across this nation were heard.

The state newsletter had a full-page article in its August issue entitled “Delegates honored to carry the message: Sense of unity found at NEA Representative Assembly.” A first-time delegate said, “They’re [teachers] the ones who make up NEA and make all these things we do at the national level happen. They shape the guidelines such as which items go and which don’t. It’s amazing.”

Helen and Irene from Local Q also attended the RA, but not as official delegates for Local Q. Helen is a state officer and Irene is sponsored by the state affiliate because of her minority status. Irene said the RA has become an exercise in futility to her. Bridget volunteered to serve on the state caucus while at the meeting, and Irene has served as a chair of a caucus in the past. Local G did not send anyone to last summer’s



RA. After Ana from Local Q attended her first RA, she began to donate an extra \$200 a year to the NEA. (It should be noted that Ana had the lowest combined household income of anyone interviewed for this study). “I have actually become more respectful of the NEA. Because before I went to NEA RA, I didn’t really know what the NEA did, what, what nationally my money went to” (Q1, 420-421).

There are barriers to involvement for NEA members. Reasons cited include that the teaching profession is getting too difficult and demanding and family commitments created by the life cycle. Gina explained, “It’s [teaching] changed a lot in the 20 years that I’ve been teaching. The last four or five years has been more stressful. I have more paperwork expected of us. More testing expected of us” (Q7, 10-12). Fran mirrors the same concern: “I mean, and they just keep giving you more stuff to do, more stuff to do, more stuff to do. We haven’t lengthened the school year. We haven’t lengthened the day” (Q6, 286-288). Dorothy agrees:

It’s just getting impossible—a lot of teachers now are so worn out and they’re so disgusted. And it’s like, well I don’t have anything to give you. [laughs] I can’t help you. This JOB takes enough out of me and you don’t get what’s left. (Q4, 564-567)

Gina said that she has not attended a state or national meeting because of her children. “I have two older siblings [her children] and then I have the two younger siblings [her children]. And it takes a lot of my time. Right now I am so spread thin” (Q7, 174-176). Ana talked about a woman who had been president of Local Q. She said she had done a great job but made the local organization her life because she did not have any children. Ana represented Local Q for a long time at the RA but felt like she could not anymore because she wanted to be with her small children over the Independence Day holiday. (The RA is always held over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July holiday).

It was not until Helen's kids were grown and she was divorced that she felt like she could run for state office. Eve, who had been a member of the Local Q for 20 years, did not accept a building representative position until her child was grown: "I don't have any little kids at home. I don't have anything really keeping me from serving. So I thought yeah, I'll do it" (Q5, 504-506). At the April meeting of Local Q, Eve commented, "Her boys are graduating and she won't have nothing to do" when the name of a potential local officer came up.

Irene reported that she knows a man who quit as a building representative because "his kids were getting to the age where he was spending more time with them" (Q9, 201-202). Dorothy is an extremely involved member of Local Q but admitted during her interview that "There may come a time in the next few years where time wise I can't dedicate the amount of time I do to the local and [state affiliate] and NEA" (Q4, 556-557). During the April meeting Dorothy said that retired members were an excellent resource because "they have more time than us."

Julia is the treasurer for Local G but had lost the checkbook in the fall semester. She also used to be a much more involved member but expressed a sense of panic during her interview. Her life is distracting her from the NEA:

This year I tell you I'm losing it. Going from being a head coach to booster club to trying to keep this stuff. I mean, this is the worst year cause I'm in charge of the membership cause I volunteer. Nobody else wants to do it. I usually have my membership charts filled out; I have all the money collected. I've lost the checkbook! And I still can't find it. I mean, I'm just I'm telling you I'm having a I guess because my daughter's a senior and I'm trying to help her with scholarships and stuff. It's not my big priority right now [laughs]. Where is in the past, I had time. I would sit down and make time. (G1, 492-499)

*Loyalty: "It's tax deductible"*

In order to discuss loyalty, the members' past (or recruitment to the NEA), present and future in the NEA have to be considered. Additionally, reasons why members sever ties with the organization will be explored. More than half of the NEA members who were interviewed for this study initially joined the student organization as college undergraduates and most of them were motivated by the liability insurance and legal coverage. Ana explained that she did not know a lot about the organization when she was an undergraduate but that it was "cheap to join as a student" (Q1, 51). Helen, who is probably one of the most committed NEA members in this study, explains that she also initially joined for the insurance and legal coverage:

My thinking at that time, which has changed considerably, was when I'm in a classroom working with students as a student member, I need to have some kind of liability protection in case I make a mistake or do something wrong and have an angry parent or administrator. (Q8, 133-136)

During Delegate Assembly (DA) training for members in Local Q's zone, the topic of legal services came up. A first-year delegate mentioned it as a way to recruit new members to the NEA. The member said, "Have you priced prepaid legal services lately?" The state president was leading the training and told those in attendance that their legal services covers divorce, wills, some adoptions, and credit disputes. He also said that a letter from their legal services is often enough to take care of things. The state president did not shy away from using legal services as a recruiting tool. Additionally, a list of free legal services was published in the state affiliate's August newsletter.

Besides legal services and insurance, people initially joined the NEA because they were recruited one-on-one, felt obligated, and/or had positive past experiences with the

organization. Clay and Helen, both members of Local Q, were approached by veteran teachers their first year on the job. Members at Local Q aggressively recruit members, as Norene can attest: “They really push to get the members to join. They almost make you feel guilty if you don’t join. They track you down and say, are you going to join?” (Q10, 143-144). Gina felt obligated to join when she was a new teacher because she was told her local needed the numbers. “That was when there was some problems going on with salaries and things like that and they just really pushed, you know, you need to be a member. And being a new teacher, you know, you don’t say no” (Q7, 43-45).

Dorothy and Julia both have parents who were members of unions. When Dorothy got her first teaching job, she joined the union immediately and was surprised that not every teacher was a member of the NEA. Julia’s parents were both members of the NEA. Her mom is now a retired member. Julia remembers as a child sitting outside of her parents’ local meeting at a neighboring school district to Local G. “I grew up them talking about the organization and and uh what [state affiliation] did for them. And all that so I was basically you know. I was EXPECTED to join [laughs]” (G1, 68-70).

Helen remembers when female teachers at her high school all wore pantsuits to school one day in hopes of getting the district’s dress code changed. The superintendent went from class to class checking the female teachers’ attire and writing notes on a clipboard. Helen was sure they would all lose their jobs, but instead the school board changed the dress code at the next board meeting. In junior high school, Helen recalled a similar situation in which all of the NEA members at her school signed letters of resignation that the state NEA affiliate “may or may not” use as leverage to get a state pay raise for teachers. Basically, the teachers sacrificed their jobs for a raise. Luckily,

the gamble paid off and the union members got their raise. Both of these experiences left an impression on Helen.

It should be noted that Ana, Bridget, Dorothy, and Julia were loyal members to the NEA even when they taught in districts with very detached locals. Julia and Irene said that new teachers are not loyal to the teachers' union like the generations before them were. Julia believes they are complacent because salaries are higher now for beginning teachers. Helen said that younger teachers just do not plan on staying in the profession long and do not worry much about security.

There are many reasons people join the NEA and remain loyal to the union. Most detached members keep paying their dues because they do not want to be viewed as freeloaders and they feel guilty when not pay their dues. Melissa left the NEA for a few years and then rejoined. She explained, "I want to do my part. I don't want to be a freeloader. And some people are" (G3, 86-87). Others feel obligated to support their professional organization. Norene left the NEA at one point and came back, citing guilt as her motivation for returning to the association.

I felt guilty. They had a march. During the time I was not a member, they had a march at the [state capital]. No, they staged a walk out....And I felt guilty then because these people were working for my benefit and I wasn't supporting them. And so probably it was right after that that I joined again and then unjoined again. (Q10, 87-88, 92-93)

The NEA and the state affiliate offered monetary incentives to their members in the form of low interest credit cards, house and automobile insurance, and a discount card. During the DA training the state president spent a lot of time talking about the discount card the state affiliate has with retailers, even citing the fact that his wife got a discount on pair of Eddie Bauer jeans. He encouraged all in attendance to look at the

program and to encourage other members to do the same. Additionally, much space is devoted to the discount program in the form of advertisements in the state newsletter.

Ana and Julia were the only people to even bring up discount programs during their interviews, and that was just to say that these incentives were not important to them. Ana said, “NEA more than anything, for me, the fights that they are willing to take on with the government are more important than monetary savings” (Q1, 118-119). Julia said that she has never even checked on the discounts and has never used the legal services. Her incentive is having a “voice at the capital for public education issues” (G1, 331).

The collective voice of the organization was cited time and time again as a reason to remain loyal to the union, as were dynamic colleagues, collective bargaining and local advocacy, and liability insurance. Ana said, “When you know that you have a chance of changing things, it makes it a lot different. It makes it more feasible for you to become active” (Q1, 85-86). Dorothy agrees:

When I’m frustrated legislatively of how things are going in this state and nationally for the profession of teachers, the [state affiliate] and NEA have provided me with a direction and a group of likeminded individuals who want to seek change. And so far, it is the only method of change that I’ve seen that is effective in this country for positive educational change. (Q4, 48-53)

The members perceived that the group had more power than each member did individually. When Rod Paige called the NEA a terrorist organization, NEA President Reg Weaver emailed all of the members and asked them to email President Bush. Clay was happy to oblige: “The email came to me, please email President Bush to express your thoughts. OK. Happily did that. I think this man needs to be removed from office” (Q3, 441-442). When Bridget attended the RA last summer she noticed computers that

were set up for delegates to email President Bush once again, this time encouraging members to express their thoughts to him on No Child Left Behind. “When I was at NEA this summer, they had computers so that we could email the White House. And I did—I went and I just emailed the White House” (Q2, 353-355).

The most frequently cited legislative concerns of the informants was funding (including teachers’ salaries) and testing (in particular No Child Left Behind). When the state legislature considered a pay raise for all of the teachers in the state, the state affiliate endorsed it and sent out an email encouraging their members to contact local members of the state legislature. The local president of Q forwarded at least four emails to his executive committee about the bill. He began one email by typing: “Hope you’re not tiring of these updates. I know this process is somewhat mind numbing, but our members continue to want this information. Share it as you have opportunity.”

In the December/January state affiliate newsletter, the phone numbers for both the state senate and state house of representatives were printed under the headline “Make sure they know how you feel.” At the DA training, the state president told the members to begin focusing on calling just the Speaker of the House because he seemed most opposed to the pay raise bill. During the state legislative session, the state affiliate provides weekly hotline messages and weekly updates on its website.

Another legislative concern of the informants was No Child Left Behind (NCLB). It was brought up time and time again during the interviews. The concerns were numerous. Bridget talked about having to teach to the test: “Too much emphasis is put on that bottom line as testing and improvement and things like that. And it’s really taking the joy out of education—out of teaching” (Q2, 405-407). Fran thought parents

should be held more responsible: “I could personally live with it and probably most of the other teachers could if they could just if somewhere there was accountability to the parents for these children” (Q6, 339-341). Others thought modifications needed to be made to the NCLB legislation. Clay said, “NEA is continually working on trying to say not all students will be engineers, scientists, professionals. Not all students will be that. We need to make modifications in the law” (Q3, 464-466). Bridget and Gina had concerns regarding NCLB included funding and future dropout rates of children who do not do well on the tests.

Helen believes some people get involved with the NEA in order to socialize with other people like themselves. Norene admitted that she wants a cohesive group that wants betterment of education. Fran began to cry during her interview when she talked about all the people she has met at assemblies and committees and national training. She goes places now and always knows somebody. This awes the new members. She encourages them to get involved. Dorothy was one of those new members who got involved:

The reason I stay involved in the [state affiliate] is because it's from what I've seen and the people I have met and worked with—they are very intelligent, talented teachers who have a social conscious. They're not just involved in their classrooms. They want to be involved in enacting change in the profession and um, in the education of children nationwide. (Q4, 235-239)

Another reason people remain loyal to the NEA is for collective bargaining and local advocacy. Keith said he “wouldn't work for somebody who wouldn't give me a negotiated agreement” (G2, 231-232). Before Ana was hired at Local Q, she worked in a school district without a negotiated contract. The teachers' salaries in that district were state base and the teachers could be made to work anytime, including holidays.



No one at that school thought that it would be worth the reputation that they would be given to fight it. In all reality, had they known anything about negotiating contracts, they would have known that they would be protected regardless of what they fought about. (Q1, 90-93)

The state NEA affiliate has a searchable database (to aid in negotiations) available to local presidents and bargaining chairs. According to the state's March newsletter, "The site allows users to search contracts for specific language, compare language on the same topic in a number of different agreements, or look at entire agreements for any local in the database." As an incentive for locals to submit to the database, the state affiliate offers a \$1-per-member-rebate to the locals that submit their negotiated agreements electronically to the state office.

Local advocacy usually takes the form of grievances, especially at Local Q where the 11 building representatives are contacted frequently to sit in on conferences between administrators and local members. It was stated in the Local Q's fall newsletter: "Please remember that your building reps are your first line of communication with your local; we are here to answer your questions, to assist in communication with site administrators, and refer issues to the grievance committee when necessary." Gina said that she feels like she can up the phone anytime and get help. Handling grievances is a daily concern for Q. Ana said that the only time most nonmembers regret not joining is when they run into trouble and need someone to represent them in a grievance. "We do not take over the grievance, we don't chair the grievance, we don't go over the statements or the procedures of the grievance" (Q1, 248-249).

Common grievances in Local Q included air quality in the high school and problems with the administration. A concern this year at Local Q has been who is

allowed to evaluate teachers and how the evaluation instruments are to be completed.

Both the who and how are addressed in the negotiated agreement and are enforced by the local affiliate. Gina had a question on whether or not an assistant principal could evaluate teachers:

I have a call in right now that I need to call back and someone has told me that they have an answer to that question because I want to relay that back to my teachers, saying yes, she can do this because she is qualified; no, she cannot do this. (Q7, 80-83)

Clay was late to the November local meeting because a teacher had stopped him in the office because she was upset about some qualitative comments that were written on her evaluation. Clay said he would not let an administrator run off their very good teachers and that it was “grievable.” Clay told the executive board that the comments were written in the wrong place on the evaluation instrument. He cited directly from the negotiated agreement to the executive board. Comments are only allowed at the bottom of the evaluation document. The principal had written harsh comments and in the wrong place. Irene believes that situations like this are not unusual. She has been called into the principal’s office a few times during her tenure. “A lot of times it’s just personality. I mean they’re [administration] trumping things up on them [the teachers]. And you know that” (Q9, 278-279).

While grievances and the threat of grievances are rather common at Local Q, they are a rarity at Local G. Oliver said he has never heard of any grievance for the 10 years he has been at Local G. Melissa, another member of Local G, said that their members are “pretty positive” and do not have grievances. The building representatives and officers at Local Q appear to be more assertive and tackle grievances head-on. Even Norene, who is a less involved member, seemed to appreciate that:

We have had some very um assertive people that got involved and really fought for the things they think they should fight for. So um you know, if they would like to have power and they try to wield it you know. But it's for my benefit so I don't care what they do. (Q10, 149-151)

Many people are loyal to the NEA for the legal representation and liability insurance. The NEA offers a one million dollar liability insurance and legal representation to its members. (AAE offers a two million dollar policy and often uses that information to try and recruit unhappy NEA members to the AAE). Fran is a special education teacher nearing retirement and admitted that being sued has always been her concern. She said that special education teachers are always being taken to court. Gina, like many of the informants in this study, admitted that the liability insurance and legal representation were the initial incentives for joining the NEA. "It was probably kind of a lame excuse that I joined. It was because I was afraid that parents may sue me for some unknown reason" (G3, 37-39).

The state newsletter affirms the members' needs for insurance by printing articles about members who have benefited from using the organization's legal services. For example, an article printed in the August issue tells the story of a teacher who contacted her advocacy specialist because she thought she was being short-changed in her paycheck. The final settlement involved 12 teachers and cost the district \$29,000 in back pay. In an article printed in the March newsletter, a 16-year member of the organization told her story of being accused of child abuse after breaking up a fight between two students. The state affiliate's legal counsel helped clear her of charges. In the last paragraph of the half-page article and directly under a photo of the teacher, she is quoted: "I also have not seen any bills or paperwork from this ordeal. It has all been covered.

This is something that could happen to any teacher to know that [state]/NEA is behind you is a great comfort.”

Keith recruits members by talking about liability insurance. He tells them that it is cheaper than the private insurance that he has checked on. “I went out and looked. The same thing we pay \$350 for, you could buy individual for about \$500....Only a dumb person wouldn’t have liability insurance. It’s cheap insurance; it’s tax deductible” (G2, 117-118, 158-159). In the December/January edition of the state affiliate newsletter a chart of the tax-deductible portions of the different memberships was printed just in time for tax season.

Many of the committed members have thought about their future plans in the organization. Fran said that she plans on being loyal to the organization even in retirement, when she plans on joining as a retired member. This is a growing segment of NEA members nationally. (Dorothy made mention at Local Q’s April meeting that a retired member of her local had approached her about wanting to be more active). Julia’s mom is a retired member. They have meetings and are active members. Julia’s mom and her cohorts plan on taking “another stab at the retirement system” (G1, 100). Clay, a teacher only six years into his teaching career, hopes to continue in leadership roles in the organization. “It could be anything from continuing to be a local president to going back to being a member, up to being a national officer and anything in between. Whatever God wants me to do, I’m happy to follow through” (Q3, 533-536).

Detached members do not talk about their futures in the NEA and are at risk for losing loyalty (i.e., paying their dues) to the organization. People quit the union for a variety of reasons. Helen, the state officer, said they lost support staff members statewide

when there was a funding cut and maintenance staffs were let go. Another reason people leave is because of local grievances when the NEA represents teachers that others think are wrong. Eve estimates that about 10 teachers at her school joined AAE after grievance with a principal that cost him his job. Eve was also unhappy with the way her local handled the grievance: “I think they [the local NEA affiliate] should have heard the other side....It split our faculty. We wouldn’t speak. We wouldn’t work together. It was really bad. Really bad” (Q5, 489, 491-492).

Julia said that when a principal was let go at Local G after a long legal process, about 15 teachers left the NEA shortly after. During Local G’s fall meeting the three members in attendance discussed how their current membership is less than 50% but that they had nearly 70% before the principal was let go. The Local G members who left formed a local chapter of the AAE. Oliver was one of those who left the NEA during that time, but he claims it was not because of the fired principal. He said it is because he and the other defunct members did not like the morals reflected by the NEA at the time.

Gina said that the main reason people have left the organization at her site is because of the moral issues dealing with homosexuality and abortion. The moral issues are more of a factor than grievances she said. At the 1995 RA, the resolution that called for the celebration of Lesbian and Gay History Month was rejected by all 127 of this state’s delegates. In fact, it is estimated that the state affiliation lost almost 100 members immediately after the resolution passed (Kirkwood, 1995). Fran said, “Our membership at my school went way down for a while after this whole homosexual thing and everything. Went down for a while” (Q6, 431-432). Gina and others said they often find themselves defending the NEA.

Just like with the gay rights. You know, I'm not joining because they support gay rights and dah, dah, dah. I says, guys, they don't support it. What they do is if we get in that situation, they're going to help us in the situations. I says they don't support it. I says it sounds like they do but they don't. They're supporting it for the teachers to help us get out of bad situations. (Q7, 190-194)

Dorothy said that the greatest excuse people give her for not joining the NEA is the organization's policy on gays and lesbians. Eve agrees: "The reason most always the reason they give is that the NEA supports the gay and lesbians issues and so they just don't want to have anything to do with it" (Q5, 166-168). It was one of four states that worked to appeal the decision. Helen was a state delegates at that RA.

It became an issue where majority rule didn't necessarily solve the problem. We really needed to get to consensus and a deeper understanding and the up and down votes on the floor of representative assembly were becoming divisive and were being attacked by outsiders who didn't understand our process. (Q8, 383-387)

#### Communication about the NEA

With whom NEA members talk about the organization (and whom they avoid) as well as topics of conversation are the focus of the third section. The findings described in this section will address research questions 2a: To whom do committed members talk about the NEA?; 2b: To whom do detached members talk about the NEA?; and 2c: What do members say about the NEA in these conversations? Goals of the organization and complaints about the NEA tend to be the most often discusses topics. Additionally, the AAE often comes up in the talk and will wrap up this section and will address 3a: How do committed members of the NEA talk about the AAE? and 3b: How do detached members of the NEA talk about the AAE?

*“A satanic organization”*: *Conversational partners*

Detached members of the NEA did not report talking to anybody about the organization. Committed members speak with teacher interns, other members and their building representatives, recruits and skeptics, their families, and regional NEA employees about the organization. Ana said that she was influenced to join the NEA by her mentor teacher when she interned. During the February meeting of Local Q, Clay’s intern sat in on the meeting.

The executive committee at Local Q communicates with its less active members with newsletters and memos. By February of the school year, Dorothy had published two newsletters for Local Q and had plans for one more. She had attended a state communication committee meeting in February to help decide who won the state affiliate’s awards for outstanding newsletter. After attending that meeting, Dorothy felt like her local was out of the loop as far as newsletters. “I hate those feel good newsletters that nobody has time to read.” She communicated a desire to the members of her local of creating a newsletter their members could read in 10 minutes, but she did not want to do the newsletter by herself. “They can be very time consuming and I don’t have unlimited time.” Bridget agreed to help Dorothy with the final newsletter.

At the end of the fall semester, Local Q administered a staff satisfaction survey to all of the district’s certified staff to measure their level of satisfaction with the local affiliate, amongst other variables. The survey was created by the state NEA affiliate. The surveys were distributed to building representatives at the November meeting. Clay said, “Mostly this is a tool to let them [local members] vent.”

The people NEA members say that they are most likely to converse with about the NEA are their family members. This group includes spouses, parents, and children. Fran has a daughter who is also certified to teach. Her daughter is a detached member of the NEA and has quit the union numerous times. “My son-in-law is an Independent—they own their own business. So they’re very against unions [laughs]. So we have quite interesting discussions, you know” (Q6, 353-355). Bridget and Oliver are married and have discussed the NEA many times. When Oliver left the organization a few years ago, it was Bridget who convinced him to come back to the NEA: “We discussed a lot about the roles of the organizations....She asked me, do you really feel like you and [AAE] are really accomplishing anything? Can you name anything that they’ve—no [laughs]” (G5, 364, 366-368).

Ana, Helen, Julia, and Dorothy have all spoken to their parents about the NEA. Julia’s mom is a retired member of the NEA. Dorothy’s father was a long time member of the crane operators’ union. Both Helen and Ana’s mothers have received information from their churches about the NEA. Ana did not speak to her mother for three weeks because of their disagreements regarding the NEA. Helen’s mother had received her information from Phyllis Schlafly’s newsletters. Helen said this publications portrayed the NEA as “a satanic organization out to do damage to the public schools and the future of America” (Q8, 180-181). When Helen was considering running for the NEA national board of directors, her mom sent her bible verses every week.

Members at Local Q communicate with the NEA regional specialists and state officers frequently. Contact information for the specialists and state officers is published in the monthly state newsletter. Helen, the state vice president, is from Local Q. When



Irene began teaching more than 20 years ago, she can remember the UniServ getting her a copy of her contract that she had never seen. The organization no longer has UniServs but they do have regional centers and specialists. The specialist for communication attends Q's meetings.

The advocacy specialist's name came up during many of the interviews. He is the person whom members contact in case of legal questions or concerns about grievances. Fran explained, "He's the person we can call and say, you know, 'How do I respond to this? What do I say to him? Did I do the right thing?'" (Q6, 129-130). Irene joked that she directly deposits her dues and calls the advocacy specialist frequently, no matter what time of day. The legal advocacy specialist also helps locals with negotiated agreements. Gina described him as a "Very nice gentleman. I mean, answer any questions that ever— He is so good" (Q7, 158, 162). The advocate helped Keith's wife with her local's very first negotiated agreement when she was local president: "We got to be friends and he's a smart man and he knows what he's talking about" (G2, 208).

*"They're kind of scary when you talk to them":  
Whom members avoid*

Overwhelming committed members said they avoid speaking to conservatives about the NEA. Helen, the NEA state officer, faces many critics:

As soon as I say [state affiliation] [state officer title] they done shut down because they automatically think liberal Democrat blocker. Bad [state affiliation]. And I have to not talk. I have to do a lot of listening and usually with a lot of listening, if you've got the time to do it, they'll get to a point where they've thrown out all of their venom and they want to understand something that they can't get to. (Q8, 811-815)

Clay does not talk about the organization to friends at church who homeschool.

Dorothy said she avoids the Rabid Republicans. "My friends who are Republicans could

not see a Republican union member. That would be an oxymoron for them” (Q4, 378-379). Fran avoids the ultra religious. “We have some ultra religious who want to get in the whole issue with you. There’s a couple of them in our building...They’re kind of scary when you talk to them [laughs]” (Q6, 379-381). Julia does not like discussing the NEA with local AAE members. “They get very, very defensive” (G1, 421). Irene avoids James Dobson listeners, but also says that if they believe that way, she would not want them to be members anyway. “I would say if you really believe what he says, then maybe you shouldn’t be a member. I mean I’m not going to force anybody to be one” (Q9, 745-747).

*“They’re more of a fence”:  
Communicating the goals of the NEA*

Committed members of the NEA communicate the organization’s goals amongst themselves and to others, including their previously mentioned conversational partners. They see the goals of the NEA as advocating for children and teachers (Q3, Q4); making public education better (Q8); providing support for teachers (Q7); protecting and preserving public education for students (Q1); protecting and promoting teachers (Q6); putting students first (Q2); and pushing the government to be accountable for legislation (Q2). Bridget views the NEA as her helper in educating children.

They’re there to make sure that the government provides the funding to take care of what they expect us to do and to keep the dirt from under our feet so that we can get to the kids. They’re more of a fence or whatever to hold back so that we can go straight to our job, which is to educate the child. (Q2, 155-159)

Committed members also believe a major goal of the NEA is to educate their members and the public on social issues, such as academic freedom (Q2), voucher systems and corporate sponsorships (Q1), literacy (Q8), national board certification (Q9),

and the Wake-Up Wal-Mart campaign (Q8). Helen believes Wal-Mart affects public education dollars because the state has to pick up the cost for medical emergencies for the unemployed Wal-Mart employees. Also, Wal-Mart supports vouchers at the national level. Helen was quoted in the November 2005 issue of the state affiliate's newsletter: "Not only are the company's profits helping fund the voucher movement, but it is well documented that taxpayers are providing medical insurance for Wal-Mart employees who are not provided with proper benefits" (p. 14).

Unlike members of Local Q, members of Local G did not have much to say about national goals of the association, instead their focus was more local. Both Julia and Keith said that their local is responsible for focusing on how money is spent in the district. No one at Local Q mentioned this as a goal of the association—either locally or nationally. Local Q's focus locally seemed to be grievances and negotiating.

*"National Everything Association":  
Complaints about the NEA*

There are many complaints about the NEA communicated both internally within the organization and externally to the general public. The discourse of the complaints took many forms during the interviews. Sometimes the informants were voicing complaints of their own and other times they were just repeating complaints they have heard from their conversational partners. Sometimes the members agreed with the concerns and other times they would defend the NEA. It should be noted that the negative publicity surrounding the NEA has caused the state affiliate to take notice. There is an ongoing media campaign in the state affiliate's annual budget.

The concerns brought up in the informants' interviews include mandatory membership requirements, administrators not being allowed to do their jobs because of

the NEA, the organization taking on issues that seemingly have nothing to do with education, and that the dues are too expensive.

Until 1975, education professionals could choose whether to belong to the local, state, and/or national levels of the NEA. Eve, a new building representative at Q, asked during the first executive meeting if local members had to belong to the NEA. Clay responded by telling her that we are all local, state, and national citizens. The day I interviewed Gina she said that one of the teachers in her building had asked her that day if she could write a check to the local only. (Both Gina and Eve teach in the same building). The potential member did not want to join the NEA because of its “liberal stances.” Gina had to explain to her colleague that she could not just join the local. This has not been allowed since the unification rule passed in 1975 (Shotts, 1976).

Norene, like many people interviewed for this study, said she would seriously consider dropping the NEA if she could just join at the state and/or local level.

For a number of years while I was at [another town] since we didn't have an active local chapter, I was NOT a member because that's when they were involved with lobbying for things that I didn't think was any of our business. And so I didn't want to give them my money. But it's one of those things that I do want to be supportive of my local and so I joined my local... (Q10, 19-23)

Although administrators started the NEA more than 100 years ago, very few administrators are involved today. While administrators are still allowed to join, many of them join administrator associations instead. In fact, at Local G one of the vice principals helped start the local association when she was a classroom teacher but stopped paying her dues to the NEA once she became an administrator. According to the informants, the relationship between building administrators and NEA members can be a tumultuous one. Irene said that once she got on the state board of directors for NEA her administration

saw her as a target. Others in situations similar to hers told her that would happen because it had happened to them as well.

Members of the NEA have been accused of not letting administrators do their jobs. Some have even had verbal conflicts with their building principals. This has been especially true at Local Q. Ana quoted administrators who did not believe they had to follow the local union's contract. Ana said the administrators' general sentiment was that it said "teacher" contract not "principal's" contract. Fran's principal told her that he did not care what her local affiliate had to say. "He thinks that he should be able to run his building the way he wants anyway he wants" (Q6, 129-130). Gina knew of a similar situation that occurred with another one of Q's principals. The principal was not following the negotiated agreement when it came to duty-free lunches. When it was brought to his attention, he threw it back at the person and said he did not have to do what the contract said.

Norene experienced a school district's distrust for the union when she as interviewed for a job in a neighboring district to Q. They asked her during the interview if having an active local affiliate of the NEA was important to her. Norene did not realize until she was hired at Q what a local could do for her:

I was in a meeting one day and they were talking about stuff. And I'm going, wow, I didn't know you could do that. Wow, I didn't know—I thought if the principal said do it, that was a done deal and you had to do it. (Q10, 54-57)

Much like Norene, Melissa also believed that she had to follow the administration blindly. When she was a new hire, she admittedly viewed her superintendent as a patriarchal figure. After all, the superintendent had been a teacher in her high school

when she was growing up and she trusted him. She had a hard time accepting a negotiated agreement at first because she felt like she was betraying the superintendent:

It was kind of like in my house growing up. I didn't know everything my daddy knew and I respected him and gave him the authority to make the decisions and everything. So when I started teaching school, I had a daddy at school that made all the decisions.(G4,302-304)

NEA members and others communicate their frustration with NEA for taking on issues that seemingly have nothing to do with education. Julia admits to not seeing the relevance in some issues: "There are some topics they get that are too politically charged that I don't think relate to public education so why do we take a stand on them one way or the other" (G1, 467-468). Helen said that many people refer to the NEA as the "National Everything Association" because of all the seemingly non-education issues they take on. Helen defended the NEA saying that it is "probably the most democratic organization where everyone has a right to speak and throw out their ideas" (Q8, 377-378). Ana believes there are enemies of the NEA who just want to make the organization look bad and are misrepresenting the NEA on most non-education issues.

In addition to irrelevance of non-education issues, people also talk to each other about the expense of being an NEA member. Lois said, "The lady across the hall here her husband is a lawyer and his lawyer association dues or whatever are LESS than what we have to pay for our dues" (G3, 117-119). Irene believes people use morals as an excuse to get out of the NEA when they really do not want to spend the money for the dues. "They always say they just don't agree with the things. And we all know that it really means it's too much money. Yeah. I'm going to give myself a raise" (Q9, 958-

959). To help combat the excuse the new hires at Local Q are given a dues-free year by the local during their first year in the district.

Ana always explains to people who complain about the cost that it is less than \$40 a month. Julia defends the price much in the same way Ana does: “When you divide out by 10, it’s only \$38. That’s how I say it. It’s only \$38. It’s tax deductible....Most of us go out and spend [that] when we go out to eat” (G1, 252-253, 255-256). Clay also brought up expense as a complaint he hears. He referred to the book given to members at delegate assembly that showed the formula for state dues to be .0066 rounded to the nearest whole dollar times the average teacher salary.

Whether teachers in a district are members of the NEA or not, they are all protected by the contract negotiated by the local members of their union. This bothers some dues paying members of the organization. Often these nonmembers find less expensive liability insurance somewhere, such as coaches’ associations or through prepaid legal service. These nonmembers do not get help with grievances, though. Ana believes these nonmembers are often targeted by administration: “It’s unfortunate to say that many of our teachers that have been placed on plans of improvement or have been in situations where they did have a grievable offense occur happen to be nonmembers” (Q1, 314-316).

*“They are the annoyance”:  
Discourse about the nonunion alternative*

Committed NEA members communicate many concerns about the AAE. They say the AAE is too negative about the NEA and its affiliates and too idealistic when it comes to school administrators and politicians. They say that the AAE guilts Christians

into joining the organization and are below par with their legal representation and liability insurance when compared to the NEA.

Bridget and Clay have both seen publications from the AAE. Bridget's husband was an AAE member, and Bridget would often look at his newsletters. She confronted her husband about it: "It seemed like all they would do is rip apart the [state NEA affiliate] and I pointed that out to [her husband]. You know, is this what you want to be part of?" (Q2, 224-225). Clay claimed that the AAE's website is full of negative messages about the NEA. "You'll find, hey we're anti-[NEA]. And that's what they are. Whatever they're for, we're against. And those unions are bad and you need to stay away from those bad unions" (Q3, 376-378).

Many informants did not like the AAE marketing their organization as the Christian alternative to the NEA. Dorothy said, "I think they have dirty tactics. I think that they try to lure teachers in with the Christian—to be the Christian alternative" (Q4, 171-172). Clay estimates that 80 to 90% of the state's NEA members are Sunday School teachers. Helen heard about a Jewish woman in the state who went to a presentation of the AAE and decided to join the NEA because she figured AAE would not want someone who was Jewish. Julia is a Christian and does not want to be involved with the AAE because they are not involved enough politically.

The AAE advertises as having double the insurance coverage of the NEA and just half the dues. Lois said Local G can not compete with the local AAE chapter when it comes to fees: "They've got \$10 dues and we've got \$396 or whatever it is dues. I can't compete against that. And neither can [state NEA affiliate]" (G3, 190-191). Helen feels the major recruiting tool of the AAE is double the liability insurance. Clay said that AAE



members are not getting near the services that NEA members get: “You’re not getting near the representation. Roughly 2,000 members in the state are [AAE]. Roughly 40,000 are [NEA]. We are the voice of education; they are the annoyance” (Q3, 332-334).

Some members admitted to being concerned about competition from the AAE. Irene said that the AAE is making inroads and “getting a little toehold” (Q9, 772). At Local G, the AAE has formed a pretty active local. Julia said they give awards out every year to outstanding employees and students in the district. They also give a scholarship at the annual National Honor Society banquet. Gina, a member of Local Q, is very concerned about competition from the state’s AAE: “And of course we have this other group that’s trying to pull a lot of our members out and everything....That’s hard when you have another group” (Q7, 243-245). Lois wanted to tell the NEA about the AAE: “I wished I could just say, [state NEA affiliation], we’ve got this other organization out there that’s eating us alive. And I’m sure they’re aware of it, but I just I don’t know if they’re aware of it or not” (G3, 420-422).

Helen, the state NEA officer, said the AAE is not an issue: “In terms of what we’re working towards—they aren’t an issue. You know, they have their agenda and their needs and they don’t impact our agenda or our goals for public education” (Q8, 1134-1136). Three of the 15 people interviewed for this study have left the NEA at some point in their careers and eventually returned to the NEA. All three of them left because they did not believe in some of the issues (i.e., homosexuality and abortion) they felt the NEA was endorsing. Out of the three defunct members, only Oliver joined the AAE after he quit the NEA. He actually helped charter the local AAE affiliate at Local G.

The future of the AAE in this state is unclear. In 2001, the state affiliate of the Southern Baptist Convention endorsed the AAE, stating that the NEA's resolutions and political endorsements do not reflect the traditional values of their state (Yeats, 2001). Dorothy admits she is concerned about the potential of the AAE: "If they're able to lure teachers into it, then they may—they may be—they may become a considerable force" (Q4, 186-187). Clay is a bit more skeptical of the AAE's future: "That [AAE] will continue to draw members—or gain members because they are cheaper until someone's in trouble. And then they're not able to defend them" (Q3, 346-347). Oliver, the NEA member who quit and joined the AAE for a while said that he expects the AAE affiliate at his school will "plateau and stay one little group. That'll be it" (G5, 293).

#### Ambivalence in the Talk

This section addresses the final research question: How do members of the NEA talk about dissonance caused by their commitment or detachment to the organization? Dissonance appears to create ambivalence in the informants because they have opposing feelings about the same organization. On one hand, they really like and respect the NEA, but on the other, they could not disagree more with some aspect(s) of the NEA. The ambivalent audience is somewhere between a committed audience and a detached audience. With the correct persuasive tactics, the ambivalent audience is still a reachable audience, but the causes of their ambivalence must be understood. Some causes of ambivalence to the NEA include: (a) internal and external anchors, (b) costs and benefits, (c) unions and collective voice, and (d) local and national. It should be noted that these categories are not mutually exclusive. For instance, a member may experience ambivalence because s/he does not like the union title but does like the benefits of the

association. That is a combination of the categories of “costs and benefits” and “unions and collective voice.”

*Internal and External Anchors*

Most of the controversy surrounding the NEA centers on the organization’s political stances. The political stances of the NEA (i.e., external anchors) often do not match the internal anchors of their members or potential members. The NEA has been attacked for being too liberal and for not focusing solely on education issues. During the interviews many of the informants voiced ambivalence and reasoned why they belong to an organization when they disagree with many of the supposed endorsements of the association.

Helen, a very committed member, said, “Sure, there are some policies and and some uh things that happen at the National Education Association that don’t truly represent my personal beliefs but that’s just—that’s so with any kind of affiliation we have” (Q8, 205-207). Lois looks at the larger picture to deal with her ambivalence toward the NEA:

So I shouldn’t support this organization because I don’t feel like I support those moral issues? Um, maybe I shouldn’t. But sometimes I overlook those things because I look at the whole picture and I think the whole picture is much more than these moral issues. (G3, 520-523)

Oliver, who left the NEA for a few years and then rejoined, has also taken the whole-picture approach: “There are some issues that I don’t necessarily agree with that they’re gung ho on...but I do favor more of things that they do and I do like that they’re working for teachers making it a better profession for us” (G5, 213-216).

Some members deal with the ambivalence by reasoning that they at least get the right to vote in the NEA. Bridget explained, “There’s probably a few things I don’t agree with but I get –I got my chance to voice my opinions on it” (Q2, 317-318). Julie agreed that the NEA and the state affiliate are democratic: “They stand for pro-choice. I may not be for that, but I have a right to vote... We have a delegate assembly. You have the right to vote” (G1, 244-245, 247). Keith said he would change things he did not like: “I don’t have to like everything the NEA does to see that the NEA is still a bigger benefit, yeah. My theory is, OK, I would rather change it from the inside than just ignore it” (G2, 499-501).

Melissa quit the NEA for a few years because she did not like the political stances of the organizations, but she did come back because she wanted to have a voice in the organization’s decision making. She is still not sure her voice really matters:

I decided that if I didn’t join, I didn’t have a voice in making decisions for what they did do, you know. Even though I feel like it’s not—we don’t have a real strong effect on that. But still every little bit helps, you know. (G4, 27-30)

### *Costs and Benefits*

Annual dues in the state where this research took place are about \$400. Many people complained about the price of dues for the association, but they also enjoy the monetary benefits of belonging to the NEA. The informants were especially complimentary of the liability insurance and the legal services, while only a couple mentioned the discount card the state affiliate gives them. Many of the informants admitted they joined the association as undergraduates for the liability insurance: “It wasn’t that I knew a whole heck of a lot about the [state] or NEA, but I knew that it was good insurance. And it was cheap to join as a student” (Q1, 49-51). Dues are

discounted for students and are less likely to cause ambivalence amongst this group because of the lower costs.

Once the members are paying hundreds of dollars for dues is when they start to feel torn between the cost and the benefits of the association. They may wonder if the insurance and legal services are worth it. Keith believes it is worth it and admitted he recruits people by emphasizing the NEA's monetary benefits:

They [potential members] look for the benefits they're going to get for them....I says OK, are you going to go out and buy liability insurance or are you going to wing?....You're going to tell me what if one day one of your kids gets up in your face—who's going to protect you? If you think the school district is—you're crazy because the school district's not going to get sued. I said the [state affiliate] is going to be the one standing up right next to you saying, excuse me, you cannot do this. (G2, 149, 151-152, 154-156).

### *Unions and Collective Voice*

It has been established in the previous pages that many people do not like the title of union. It has negative connotations, especially in the South where this research was conducted. Norene talked about when she first thought about the NEA being a union: "To be quite honest, I never thought about [local affiliate]/[state affiliate] those things as being unions but then one day I had this epiphany that oh yeah, that is a union. And I know there are people who really don't like unions" (Q10, 177-179). Norene may even fear people will not like her because she is a member of a *union*. The executive officers at Local Q were even told by their state communication specialist to not call themselves union members when dealing with the press.

While many of the informants are not comfortable with the thought of being a member of a union, most of them do like the collective voice the union gives them. Julia

explains the ambivalence she feels when playing the political game of being a union member:

What a lot of people don't realize is and my perception is it's a political process. Everything that has to do with public education is mandated by our legislature. So therefore, whether we like it or not, we need to play the political game...(G1, 175-178).

Whether Julia "likes it or not," she feels like she must play the game. She understands the importance of having a voice at the capital, as did many others in previous pages who expressed their loyalty to the organization because the NEA gives them a collective voice.

### *Local and National*

The unification rule passed in the mid-1970s requires all members of the NEA to belong to their local, state, and national associations. Thirty years later, many people still fight the battle of supporting their local while not fully embracing the ideals of the national association. Norene explains her ambivalence to the NEA while still wanting to support her local affiliate:

I don't want to give my money to support things that I don't believe we should be fighting for. I don't know where we ever got the notion that we should fight that battle. But at the same time I do believe that are local chapter is trying to. I mean, they're not being involved in those things. That's not our concern at the local level. Our concern is our kids and their education. (Q10, 297-301)

Most of the informants clearly separated the business of the national from that of the state and local levels. As previously mentioned, the members in this study did not identify with the NEA and would often only talk about the state or local affiliates. Lois even referred to the NEA as a distant great uncle, while saying that the state association was just a regular uncle and that the local was more like her mother.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to examine how committed and detached members of the National Education Association (NEA) talk about the organization. Initially the informants' locals were identified as committed or detached to the NEA using the characteristics found in existing literature on commitment. The characteristics included but were not limited to financial resources of the organization, age of the local, and demographics of members. As discussed previously, current research identifies three other concepts when identifying levels of commitment in an organization member: identification, involvement, and loyalty. These three concepts are best explored by listening to a person's talk about the organization.

When a member identifies with the organization, is involved, and is loyal, s/he is said to be committed. These members are at low risk for leaving the organization. On the other hand, when a person speaks negatively about the association, experiences dissonance, has a hard time identifying, and is not very active, that person may be at risk for losing loyalty and leaving the organization. In fact, three of the people interviewed for this study have left the NEA at one time or another. The present thesis extends current work on commitment and detachment by focusing on the communicative characteristics associated with the concepts. The present chapter discusses the findings and implications associated with this research and offers suggestions for the future. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of major findings, followed by applications of the research, study parameters and limitations, and a conclusion.

### Summary of Findings

Initially, the informants' levels of identification, involvement, and loyalty will be examined. See Table 3. The summary is based upon discourse during the interviews, observations made at local meetings, and information found in local and state newsletters.

**Table 3**  
**Levels of Identification, Involvement, and Loyalty**

	<b>Alias</b>	<b>Identification</b>	<b>Involvement</b>	<b>Loyalty</b>
Q1	<b>Ana</b>	High	Medium	High
Q2	<b>Bridget</b>	High	High	High
Q3	<b>Clay</b>	High	High	High
Q4	<b>Dorothy</b>	High	High	High
Q5	<b>Eve</b>	Low	Medium	High
Q6	<b>Fran</b>	High	High	High
Q7	<b>Gina</b>	Low	High	High
Q8	<b>Helen</b>	High	High	High
Q9	<b>Irene</b>	High	High	High
Q10	<b>Norene</b>	Low	Low	Medium
G1	<b>Julia</b>	Medium	High	High
G2	<b>Keith</b>	Medium	Medium	High
G3	<b>Lois</b>	Low	High	High
G4	<b>Melissa</b>	Medium	Medium	Medium
G5	<b>Oliver</b>	Medium	Low	Medium

#### *Identification*

During the interviews informants were asked to give human characteristics to the NEA. Many of the informants were resistant, saying that they do not know the NEA well enough to do that. Members appeared to identify with the local and the state levels but did not identify as well with the national level. A major barrier keeping these southerners from identifying more with the NEA was their political stances, specifically when it came to the topic of homosexuality. Most of the informants had been born and raised in the Bible Belt.



A lesser barrier to full identification with the NEA for these informants was the union label of the NEA. Unions have never been very dominant in this state and what few exposures most of these southern natives have had have not been positive. Finally, identification cannot be fully realized by these informants because some of them are happy with their local school administration and feel no need to be protected from them. This is especially true at Local G where we find more detached members.

Those who highly identified with the NEA through their talk are marked as “high” on the table. They spoke favorably of the union, supported or at least justified the political decisions of the organization, embraced the union label, and felt like they needed the support of the national organization at the local level. Those members marked with “medium” identification could not give the organization human characteristics, expressed a disconnect with the organization beyond the local level, and were usually happy with their local school administrations. Finally, members with the “low” identification label did not know much about the national level and what they did know about the organization’s politics they did not like. They also could not give the organization human characteristics and did not view the association as a union. The big difference between those marked “medium” and those marked “low” is that the mediums were better informed about the NEA.

### *Involvement*

Local Q had a very structured local organization and many opportunities for members to get involved. They had scheduled monthly meetings, multiple handouts at the meetings, a local newsletter, and committee opportunities for those not on the executive committee. Local G had no scheduled meetings and the local president only

called one meeting during the fall semester. Additionally, there were no minutes or budget presented at that meeting. They did, however, have both a calendar committee and a negotiations team that involved members who were not on the executive team. Members at Local Q seemed much more confident in their abilities to serve in leadership roles than members at Local G did. The leadership at Local Q handles grievances or the threat of grievances quite regularly. Ana, the grievance chair at Local Q, said that is what keeps people involved at her local. Oliver does not believe Local G has had a grievance in the 10 years he has been employed there.

Local Q has had numerous zone officers and currently has a state officer. They also have two people on state committees and send their maximum allotted delegates to DA and RA every year. In the recent past they have had people on the board of directors at both the state and national level. Dorothy was elected in the spring to be on the state board of directors next year. Local G has had no one involved above the local level this year or any time in recent history. All members are at risk for burning out (and possible detachment) because the job of education is draining them and/or because of family commitment created by the life cycle (i.e., marriage, children, church, social commitments).

“High” involvement members have been local officers for multiple years, and many of them have served in leadership positions beyond the local level. They have all attended meetings beyond the local level. Those members marked as “medium” are also local officers but are not as active as the “high” members. The “high” members are running their local organizations. The medium members do not attend as many meetings and do not have as many responsibilities as those members marked as “high” in

involvement. “Medium” members also do not attend meetings beyond the local level and have often been affected by life cycle obligations. For example, Ana used to be a “high” member. She was a local president and attended RA, but because of family obligations has fallen into the “medium” category. “Low” members are not now and never have been officers. They also show no interest in attending meetings beyond the local level. Both “low” involvement members in this study have quit the NEA in the past.

### *Loyalty*

Recruitment to the NEA, incentives for staying, future plans in the NEA, and reasons for quitting the organization all have to be considered when discussing member loyalty. Most of the informants for this study were recruited to the NEA as college undergraduates by their college professors who told them they would need the liability insurance and legal protection when they interned. The detached members admitted they have remained loyal for the insurance and protection. They also do not want to be viewed as freeloaders by other members of the local. Other reasons committed members joined is because they were recruited one-on-one by veteran teachers, felt obligated because their parents were in unions, and/or had positive past experiences with the organization. The monetary incentives and discounts offered by the NEA and state affiliate are not a motivator for these informants.

Committed members remain loyal because of the collective voice of the organization, dynamic colleagues, collective bargaining and local advocacy. Liability insurance is still a factor for committed members, but is less important to them the longer they are in the association. Committed members talk about their future plans in the NEA, such as the offices they are going to seek or their plans to join the association in

retirement. Detached members did not talk about their futures in the NEA. The predominant reasons members leave the NEA are because they lose their jobs or they disapprove of how the NEA handled a local grievance.

Those marked as “high” loyalty were recruited to the NEA, have multiple reasons to belong to the NEA (i.e., liability insurance, collective bargaining, local representation in case of a grievance, lobbying, social outlets, etc.), and often talk about their futures in the organization. These members are aware of the NEA’s stance on homosexuality and abortion, but even if they disagree with the organization, they do not view these specific political stances to be that significant in the larger picture. The three members who are marked as medium have all left the organization before and have come back, thus proving they have the ability to be disloyal to the NEA. They all left because of their concerns with the NEA’s political stances on abortion and homosexuality. Those concerns outweighed the benefits often evoked by the “high” loyalty members. These three members were not placed in the “low” category because none of them discussed leaving the NEA again during their interviews or observations. The main reason this group stays is out of a sense of obligation. They are normative members.

#### Applying the Research

All good communicators must start with audience analysis. They must understand just who their audience is and what messages they need to hear. The NEA has many committed members. These members support their union and every decision its leaders make. They are at very low risk for leaving the organization. Yet, on the other end of the spectrum, there are those members and former members who are very unhappy with the NEA. Just about every decision the leaders make is a bad one in the

opinion of these members. Neither the highly committed nor highly detached/withdrawn group are the audience that should be the biggest concern of the NEA.

If the NEA wants to retain and/or gain members, they must focus on the ambivalent audience and understand why they are ambivalent. The ambivalent audience is the NEA's target market and is much easier to persuade than the detached/withdrawn group. There is no need to spend time trying to convince those who are strongly anti-NEA to be pro-NEA, and those who are pro-NEA really do not need further convincing. The NEA should have three foci with their ambivalent audience: (a) improving their identification with the NEA; (b) improving their involvement with the NEA; and (c) improving their loyalty to the NEA. Additionally, this researcher believes it would benefit the NEA if this same research project were replicated in other geographic regions of the country.

#### *Improving Identification of Members*

As a means of aiding member identification, it is suggested that the NEA and its affiliates take three courses of action: (a) focus media campaigns at the local and state levels, (b) send people out from the national office to mingle with local members, and (c) focus on educational "core" issues.

In the state where this research was conducted, there is a line in the state affiliate budget for an ongoing media campaign. That money should be directed to strengthening the already strong identification members have with the state and local affiliates. Media campaigns need to take the focus away from the national level (and the political decisions made at that level) and put the spotlight on the state and local level. This would only strengthen the good feelings for these levels. After all, as long as the members feel a

need to stay loyal to the local and state, the national organization will get paid. As a result of unification rules passed in the mid-1970s, if members want to belong to one level of the organization, they must join all three (i.e., local, state, and national).

Additionally, if the national level would like to build better relationships with the local members, they could do so by making personal contact with local members. Currently the local members of Q and G make contact with their state officers and their specialists quite frequently at local meetings, zone days, and the state Delegate Assembly. They also make contact with them by phone and by email. The same contact does not happen with national officers or any of the 500-plus employees at national headquarters.

Another action the NEA can take to improve identification with its members and potential members is to stick to educational issues and avoid any other issues that seemingly have nothing to do with education. The most common complaint about the NEA in the media and with the members who were interviewed for this study was that the NEA takes on too many issues that have nothing to do with education. Even the NEA's most committed members experience dissonance when trying to rationalize the organization's involvement in such issues as homosexuality and abortion.

#### *Improving Involvement of Members*

Two suggestions for involvement surfaced as a result of this study: (a) strengthen local executive leadership and (b) encourage more people to attend DA and RA. It appears that the local leadership's commitment influences the commitment of the local members. Local leaders schedule meetings and prepare budgets and minutes. They are

also considered the face of the NEA at the local level. They influence how the others feel about the organization.

The interviewees who attended DA and RA seemed to better identify with the state and national levels of the NEA. These members were most likely to come to the defense of the NEA, especially when it came to the political stances of the organization. Even if the delegates did not like the decision of the national organization, they at least felt like they had a vote. These members also seemed to best understand the inner workings of the organization. Local affiliates should be encouraged to fill all their allotted slots at both DA and RA.

#### *Improving Loyalty of Members*

To increase loyalty in the NEA, two actions should be taken: (a) recruit heavily when the future teachers are undergraduates and (b) show the uniqueness of the NEA as opposed to the other alternatives. Most of the people in this study were persuaded by their college professors to become members of the association. They were told that it was important to be members of their professional association and, most importantly, that the NEA would protect them during their internship should they need any legal help. Paying NEA dues simply became a habit for many of them after that. Student dues are less expensive than member dues, and college students are often open to joining organizations for the line on their résumés since they are hitting the job market soon. It makes sense to recruit at this level.

The NEA must show off its uniqueness in order to combat the competition. For example, the AAE claims to have double the insurance and dues that are half the cost of the NEA's. The NEA must show how they differ from the alternatives. Maybe their

lawyers are more reputable or their national is more influential with members of Congress. The NEA must show that they offer advantages that nobody else does. They must appear unique just to maintain their 2.7 million members, much less gain members.

### *Replicate the Research*

Commitment research has progressed nicely in the last 30 years. Prior to this research many studies had been done on what committed members looked like and what they did that marked them commitment or not committed, but we had no idea what members said about their organizations or their commitment or detachment to those organizations. To that end, this research has completed its purpose. That is progress, but there is still much work to be done in terms of replicating this research and expanding on it.

This same study could be replicated in geographical regions that are less politically and socially conservative than the southern region where this research was conducted. Most of the informants in this study had a tough time identifying with the NEA because of its political stances and union label. Perhaps NEA members in other regions would talk about their identification, involvement, and loyalty to the NEA differently than those members in the south. It may also be helpful to observe at the national RA (if access can be gained on the floor) and interview members there about their commitment to the NEA. Some other populations that might have perspectives on the NEA are school administrators, AAE members, and the Wal-Mart consuming public. Additionally, the concepts of commitment and detachment could be explored with members of other organizations besides the NEA.



### Limitations of this Study

It is important to consider the findings and conclusions discussed in this chapter in light of the study's limitations. As a qualitative study, this research is subject to the associated benefits and limitations of qualitative research. First, the sample for the study was both a strength and a weakness. The 15 interviews obtained for this project were sufficient to reach thematic saturation. The study obtained an in-depth look at a wide variety of NEA members at both a committed and a detached site and found a large number of commonalities and themes. The researcher regrets not being able to obtain more than five interviews at the detached site, but willing informants were few at Local G. It would have also been nice to be able to observe more local meetings at G, but they only had one of which the researcher was aware during the time of data collection for this study.

The sample was quite homogeneous and was mostly white married females with children. The NEA members interviewed had a wide range of ages and incomes. Having such a homogeneous sample is a strength in that one does get a full, in-depth understanding of any one type of NEA member. Additionally, since the study only considers NEA members, it does not obtain the experiences and perspectives of school administrators or AAE members. Both of these populations were often evoked by the NEA members and should be given the chance to speak in future research projects.

Other limitations associated with this style of research are the retrospective nature of the interviews and the reliance on one-on-one interviews. Because the study included limited direct observation at local meetings, the data relied heavily on the NEA members' abilities to recall previous conversations and experiences. Because memories are limited

and selective, this research likely captures only a small percentage of NEA member's communication and experiences with and about the organization. Additionally, adding focus groups to this research would have been helpful in capturing how NEA members talk about the organization to each other and not just how they talk about the organization to a researcher who is also a stranger. However, the point of the thesis was to examine how the NEA members talk about their identification, involvement and loyalty to the organization. Therefore it was an advantage to use retrospective dyadic interviews that clearly capture what is meaningful and memorable to the participants. As a result, this study highlights these NEA members' experiences with the organization and how those experiences shape their commitment or detachment to the union.

Finally, some readers may be concerned with the lack of generalizability of qualitative research. This thesis was designed to expand on initial exploratory studies that relied on pencil-and-paper measures and non-communicative variables related to commitment and detachment. Additionally, past studies tended to focus on just identity and not involvement or loyalty. This researcher does not claim that these results are representative of all NEA members' experiences. However, they are certainly reflective of important elements of those experiences and the commonalities that have been found across these 15 interviews. This leads one to expect that other NEA members outside of this sample would at least report these elements of their experiences as similar. Thus, the strength of this research comes from gaining an in-depth understanding of how 15 different NEA members at two sites communicate their commitment and detachment to the national organization.

## Conclusion

In the past studies on commitment have been conducted outside of the field of communication and researchers have focused mostly on characteristics that lead to better *involvement* of members. These factors included but were not limited to demographics of members, financial stability of the organization, and age of the organization. The role of communication was a missing element in the previous research. This researcher wanted to contribute to the existing research in many ways: (a) not just focus on commitment but bring in the concepts of detachment, dissonance, and ambivalence; (b) define commitment as not just *involvement* but as including identification and loyalty as well; (c) use characteristics identified in the education and business research to identify potential committed and detached locals so that individuals could be located and their talk about the organization could be heard and examined; (d) add qualitative research to a predominantly quantitative area of study; and (e) study a large influential nonprofit organization.

The large and influential nonprofit organization was the NEA. The NEA has experienced negative publicity and discontent amongst its membership in recent years, thus causing some members to completely withdraw from the organization and still others to become detached. Yet some members remain completely committed. It is through examining the members' talk about identification, involvement, and loyalty that his/her level of commitment or detachment is explored. Prior to this research, commitment studies rarely address dissonance, detachment, or ambivalence. Furthermore, previous research on commitment and detachment has focused on factors that create committed and detached individuals. Those factors include, but are not

limited to, how the person was recruited, incentives for belonging, amount of influence that person has, local chapter autonomy, interpersonal ties within the organization, and demographics of the individual. The role of communication in identifying committed and detached members and how they talk about the organization have been underdeveloped.

While researchers have made considerable progress in understanding commitment, particularly identification as it applies to paid employees in organizations, very little is known about commitment and detachment in nonprofit organizations like the NEA and how that commitment and detachment is communicated by the membership. Accordingly, this researcher argued that we needed to discover how members of the NEA evoke the concepts of commitment and detachment when talking about the association. Only in gaining NEA members' perspectives of the organization can we seek to understand what commitment and detachment mean in this particular context.

In 1985, Haruo Ota ended his dissertation with the question: "What is teacher unionism after all, when there is not strong support from the rank and file members?" (p. 106). In listening to NEA members' talk about their union, we can gain more depth and a better understanding of members' commitment and detachment and generate a more comprehensive definition of the concepts. Ultimately this better comprehension will allow organizational leaders to better understand their members and aid in the communication between the national leadership of the NEA and the membership of the local affiliate.

## APPENDIX A

### INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

**Project Title:** How commitment and detachment influence members' discourse about the National Education Association

**Research Team:** Amy Aldridge, MAC, M Ed, BA Ed

#### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?**

This is a research study. You have been invited to participate in this research study because you are a teacher at a/an [state deleted] public school and a member of the National Education Association.

The purpose of this study is to find out how local members of the NEA talk about the organization. The information collected for the study will be used for a dissertation at The University of Iowa.

#### **HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL PARTICIPATE?**

Approximately 25 people will take part in this study.

#### **HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?**

If you agree to take part in this study, your involvement will last for one 45-90 minute face-to-face interview.

#### **WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?**

The interview will take place at a destination of your choosing such as your classroom, my NSU office, or a neutral site. You will be asked a series of questions about yourself such as how long have been teaching, the subjects and/or grades you teach, when you joined the NEA and why you joined, and your involvement in NEA and your local association.

I will ask about NEA issues that have been publicized and your feelings about these issues and the NEA. I will also ask for background information including your age, gender, race, marital status, number of children, education level, combined household income, and length of residence in the community. If you agree, I will record our discussion. You are free to skip any question that you would prefer not to answer.

#### **WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THIS STUDY?**

There are no foreseeable risks to participating.

**WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?**

I don't know if you will benefit from being in this study.

However, my hope is that in the future other people might benefit from this study because this information could be useful in understanding the relationship between commitment to an organization and members' communication about the organization.

**WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?**

You will not have any costs for being in this research study.

**WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?**

You will not be paid for being in this research study.

**WHO IS FUNDING THIS STUDY?**

The University and the research team are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study.

**WHAT ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY?**

Your participation in this research study is confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, it is possible that other people may become aware of your participation in this study. For example, federal government regulatory agencies and the University of Iowa Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. Some of these records could contain information that personally identifies you.

To help protect your confidentiality, I will use subject initials or identification code numbers only on data forms, have locked filing cabinets and storage areas, and use password-protected computer files.

If I write a report or article about this study or share the study data set with others, it will be done in such a way that you cannot be identified.

**Audio/Video Recording or Photographs**

One aspect of this study involves making audio recordings of you during the interview. These recordings will only be available to the researcher and her supervisor and will be destroyed after the research is complete.

**You can still be in the study without being recorded.**

Yes    No   I give you permission to make audio recordings of me during this

study.

### **IS BEING IN THIS STUDY VOLUNTARY?**

Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to be in this study, or if you stop participating at any time, you won't be penalized or lose any benefits for which you otherwise qualify.

### **WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

We encourage you to ask questions. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact: Amy Aldridge at amy-aldridge@uiowa.edu or 918.456.5511, ext. 2896 or Amy's supervisor Randy Hirokawa at randyh@hawaii.edu .

If you have questions about the rights of research subjects or research related injury, please contact the Human Subjects Office, 300 College of Medicine Administration Building, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, 52242, (319) 335-6564, or e-mail irb@uiowa.edu. General information about being a research subject can be found by clicking "Info for Public" on the Human Subjects Office web site, <http://research.uiowa.edu/hso>.

This Informed Consent Document is not a contract. It is a written explanation of what will happen during the study if you decide to participate. You are not waiving any legal rights by signing this Informed Consent Document. Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Subject's Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Subject)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

### **Statement of Person Who Obtained Consent**

I have discussed the above points with the subject or, where appropriate, with the subject's legally authorized representative. It is my opinion that the subject understands the risks, benefits, and procedures involved with participation in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Person who Obtained Consent)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

## APPENDIX B

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

**Introduction and Building Rapport**

- My name is Amy Aldridge. I'm an instructor at NSU and a PhD student in communication at The University of Iowa. This is a part of my dissertation research.
- I'm interested in the National Education Association, and I understand you're a member.
- I just want to assure you that all of your responses today are confidential and you will not be identified by name within the study. In fact, if you'd like you, you are more than welcome to pick your own pseudonym for the final paper.
- Is it OK if I start the tape recorder?
- Here's how this will work, I'm going to ask you a few questions today. Please know that there are no right or wrong answers. I'm just interested in your thoughts and experiences.
- At any time, feel free to ask questions or for any clarification. Basically, this is a conversation between you and me.
- We can pass on any question.
- Any questions right now? Ready to begin?

**Interview Questions***Background*

- Tell me a little about your teaching background.

*Need this info:*

- How long have you been teaching?
- What subjects and/or grades do you teach?
- When did you join the NEA? Why? How (recruited)?
- How long have you been a member?
- What are some incentives for belonging to the NEA?
- Tell me about your involvement in the NEA and your local association (building rep, committees, conventions?)
- What do you see as goals of the NEA? Your local affiliation?
- With whom to you talk about the NEA?
- What do you talk about? (probe a lot)
- Can you recall a conversation you had with someone about the NEA?
- Why do you talk or not talk about the NEA?
- If you had to give the NEA human characteristics, how would you describe him or her?
- How do you feel about the person you just described?



- Have your feelings about the NEA changed over the years? How? Why?
- Where do you get your information about the NEA? The state affiliate?
- Can you recall the last time you heard or read about the NEA in the media?  
*Platform Probes: Gay Marriage, Abortion, Death Penalty*
- What was the issue?
- What did the NEA have to say about the issue?
- How do you feel about that issue?
- How do you feel about the NEA's response?
- Have you ever thought about quitting the NEA?
- Why or why not?
- Why would you quit the NEA?
- If a person were to quit at this school, how would the other teachers respond?
- What is your future in the NEA?

A few more background questions for you. Again, remember feel free to skip any or all of them:

- Your education?
- Race?
- Marital status?
- Number of children?
- Length of residence in the community?
- Age?
- Gender?
- Combined household income?

### **Concluding**

- Is there anything else you'd like to add?
- Thank you so much for your time. I'm going to leave my business card with you. Feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns. Also, send me your email address if you're interested in reading the final study.

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