

WORKER-OWNED COOPERATIVES AND THE SOCIAL WORK  
COMMUNITY

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By  
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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

WORKER-OWNED COOPERATIVES AND THE SOCIAL WORK  
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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my beautiful partner, Geneva. May we look back on these times and laugh. Thank you for always believing in me. Words fail to express my love for you.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to my mom and dad, my sisters Jen and Lisa, and my good friends Jamin Thorne, Luke Temple and Alan Bigler. Dr. Elizabeth Breshears, thank you for conditioning me to aim for the stars with “fight apathy” letters. Barbara Dimberg, my guardian angel at CSU, Stanislaus, thank you for making sure I had all my ducks in a row. Ron Gilbert and Teri Collet, thank you for your time, support, and assistance during my internships. Dr. Shradha Tibrewal, thank you for your patience and guidance throughout the writing process. I hope this research will inspire other MSW students to learn more about cooperatives.

I am forever indebted to the nine members of the cooperative community who agreed to participate in this study. Thank you all for your kindness, generosity and encouragement. Our conversations gave me hope for the future and a little more faith in humanity. I wish you all the best.

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## ABSTRACT

Despite the shared values and goals of worker-owned cooperatives and the field of social work, a notable disconnect persists between these groups in the United States. This study served several purposes. First, it aimed to explore the appropriateness of the social work field's involvement with cooperatives. Secondly, it investigated the potential ways in which social workers, as well as social work institutions, could promote, support, and advance the American worker-owned cooperative movement. Thirdly, it sought to provide foundational knowledge for future research. Nine expert members of the cooperative community participated in semi-structured interviews. The nature of this research was exploratory and qualitative. The results of this study revealed that participants were able to identify four major similarities between cooperatives and the social work field. The existence of hierarchical structures in the field of social work was identified as a fundamental difference. Participants expressed a need for interdisciplinary partnerships among these two fields. Finally, some participants believed that, as social work moves further away from its social movement roots, micro practice is being overemphasized; typically at the expense of macro problems that cooperatives often address. Implications of this study include changes to social work curricula, additional interdisciplinary collaborations, and a call for cooperative advocacy among social work professionals.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Statement of the Problem**

The global financial crisis, which began to unfold in the latter half of 2007, prompted many people to seek new solutions for the injustices of global capitalism (Wolff, 2012). The subsequent bailout of the United States' financial industry gave birth to wide spread anger. One of the more notable manifestations of this anger was the social media driven, youth-led protest movement known as Occupy Wall Street. In *The Price of Inequality*, Stiglitz (2013) noted that during the protests in Zuccotti Park, two-thirds of Americans claimed to be supporters of the movement, which helped protesters rapidly collect 300,000 signatures to keep the protests going. In an attempt to explain Occupy Wall Street's widespread support, Stiglitz makes an interesting comparison between today's youth protesters and those of the civil rights movement.

In a way, in America and throughout the world, the youthful protesters took what they heard from their parents and politicians at face value—just as America's youth did fifty years ago during the civil rights movement. Back then they scrutinized the values *equality*, *fairness*, and *justice* in the nation's treatment of African Americans, and they found the nation's policies wanting. Now they scrutinize the same values in terms of how our economic and judicial system works, and they have found the system wanting for poor and middle-class Americans—not just for minorities but for *most* Americans of all backgrounds (2013, p. xlv).

Recent statistics on wages in America support this claim. Alperovitz (2013) explains that real wages have not risen more than a negligible amount in the past 30 years for the vast majority of Americans. During the same 30 year period, the richest one percent's collective annual income doubled. This means that the majority of profits have gone to a very select group of elites for at least a generation (Alperovitz, 2013). Today, the collective annual income of the richest one percent is greater than the lowest wage earning 100 million Americans combined (Alperovitz, 2005).

In response to these astonishing statistics, Alperovitz (2013) raises an important question: how should individuals deal with this fundamental flaw in the economic system? Well known intellectuals like Alperovitz, along with Chomsky and Wolff, have attempted to address this question by providing alternatives to conventional capitalism in their respective books. All three scholars have championed a small but growing movement in America that could potentially transform the current economic system and alleviate the pains of income inequality: the worker-owned cooperative.

Nadeau (2012) uses the International Co-operative Alliance's definition of a worker-owned cooperative: "An autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically controlled enterprise" (p. 4).

Cooperatives adhere to the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. Though each worker-owned company is unique, they are guided by seven commonly shared principles: voluntary and open membership,

democratic member control, member economic participation, autonomy and independence, education and training, cooperation among cooperatives, and concern for community (Nadeau, 2012).

As American worker-owned cooperatives continue to demonstrate their ability to distribute income more equitably, strengthen job security, and empower workers through economic democracy, mainstream media have begun to take notice. In a New York Times Magazine article, Dewan (2014) showcases the success of the worker-owned Arizmendi Bakery, located in the San Francisco Bay Area. Dewan (2014) also notes that one hundred percent of income goes directly to the worker-owners. There are no faraway shareholders who may be inclined to relocate or close the business as a result of poor sales numbers. In a cooperative, the terms “worker-owner” and “shareholder” are synonymous. As a result, bakers at Arizmendi make an average of \$24 per hour; more than twice the median wage for bakers in the private sector (Dewan, 2014).

While there are many large, successful networks of cooperatives around the world, the number of American worker-owned cooperatives is quite small by comparison and employ significantly fewer people. Using the broadest definition, there are currently less than 500 of them in the U.S. (Kreiner, 2013). Inadequate legislation is one reason for these meager numbers. The board president of the U.S. Federation of Worker Co-ops states that worker-owned cooperatives cannot organize in more than a dozen states due to this issue (Nadeau, 2012). Another problem American cooperatives face is adequate capitalization; an issue that is linked to

government regulations. Nadeau (2012) notes that some cooperatives face high capitalization costs and require government assistance to remain in business.

In addition to good legislation and adequate funding, Nadeau (2012) identifies another vital component for successful co-ops: passionate, proactive supporters who appreciate the core values of cooperatives. In a study which focused on cooperative success, Ciplet (2007) interviewed members of American worker-owned cooperatives to develop strategies for advancing the movement. The results of this study revealed that one of the key elements of advancement involved cooperatives forming alliances with other organizations that value social and economic justice (Ciplet, 2007).

Of the American organizations that champion social justice, one could argue that social workers, along with the institutions associated with them, are natural born allies of worker-owned cooperatives. The juxtaposition of their value systems reveal many striking similarities. In fact, the preamble to the National Association of Social Worker's Code of Ethics (2008) specifically states that social workers, in regards to social justice, should strive to address issues of poverty and unemployment. It also implores social workers to be promoters of decision making powers for all people, in addition to ensuring access to needed information and resources. But despite the fact that cooperatives value democratic decision making (meaningful participation for all), education and training (access to needed information), equality of opportunity, and a concern for community (Nadeau, 2012), there appears to be an odd disconnect between the social work community and the American worker-owned cooperative movement. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no formal alliances exist

among these groups. Also, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, accredited social work programs in the United States are not obliged to include information about worker-owned cooperatives.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which social workers, and social work institutions, could advance the American worker-owned cooperative movement. The nature of the study was exploratory, utilizing interviews with cooperative experts and worker-owned cooperative members. Questions were semi-structured and open-ended in order to maximize the range of potential answers. The study was guided by the following research questions: 1. Do social workers have a role in supporting, promoting, and advancing worker-owned cooperatives in the United States? If so, how could they support, promote, and advance the cooperative movement? 2. What roles can nationally accredited social work programs play through their curriculum to raise awareness or increase the field's knowledge about worker-owned cooperatives?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study aimed to add foundational knowledge needed for future research on the advancement of American worker-owned cooperatives. The study also intended to begin a dialogue among social work professionals who may be unaware of worker-owned cooperatives and their similar value systems. The primary goal of this researcher was to document a detailed list of strategies that may be used to form powerful alliances between these two agents of social and economic justice in the

future. The research findings may also suggest needed changes in the curriculum of accredited social work programs, potentially making the subject of worker-owned cooperatives a new addition to social work curricula.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Overview**

Having recognized the potential for cooperatives to serve as a vehicle for social justice and grassroots activism, a select number of social workers in the United States have either joined or formed cooperatives. Social work literature, however, has yet to thoroughly explore this trend and its implications for social work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While the existing literature typically speaks of cooperatives in positive terms, it often fails to expand on the ways in which social workers, or social work institutions, could be more connected to, and aligned with, the cooperative community. Therefore, this review will primarily focus on related literature and highlight current trends that have shaped the overarching research questions for this study. It begins by discussing the common values of cooperatives and their social justice roots, followed by the widely accepted values and ethical principles of the National Association of Social Workers. The relevance of empowerment-based social work practice will be addressed. The review will also discuss the roles of social workers in macro practice, the obstacles they face regarding cooperative development, and how macro social work roles (advocate, activist, community organizer, and the like) relate to organizations dedicated to social justice. To reinforce this point, the review provides two current examples of social workers engaged in

U.S. cooperatives. Finally, a relatively new type of social organization, the social (or solidarity) cooperative will be discussed; namely the social cooperatives of Italy.

### **Cooperative Principles and Values**

The International Cooperative Alliance has created a set of seven core principles that guide cooperatives. They are 1) voluntary and open membership, 2) democratic member control, 3) member economic participation, 4) autonomy and independence, 5) education, training and information, 6) cooperation among cooperatives, and 7) concern for community. These principles are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity (International Cooperative Alliance, 2015).

Cooperatives are voluntary organizations that will accept anyone willing to agree to the terms of membership. They are run democratically and are egalitarian. Members have equal voting rights; a right based upon an individual's membership, not upon their power or status. Members democratically control the cooperative's capital, dividing a portion of it equitably among themselves and setting the remainder aside for their surplus. If or when cooperatives choose to do business with other organizations, they act to ensure that the cooperative will continue to operate democratically and autonomously. Cooperatives are dedicated to providing important information and training for every member and strive to educate the public through community outreach. They often help one another in order to strengthen the cooperative movement both here and abroad. Cooperatives are also anchored to the

communities they serve and are obliged to grow sustainably (International Cooperative Alliance, 2015).

The frequent use of the word “democracy” is no accident. Democracy is a central tenet of cooperatives for good reason. Restakis (2010) explains that “one of the chief virtues of democratic civic life is that it teaches people how to be citizens” (p. 239). According to Restakis (2010), the nature and structure of organizations define how people see themselves and others. Institutions that promote and reward cut throat competition and individualism produce the predictable results of isolation and disempowerment (Restakis, 2010). Alternatively, social institutions that link individual needs with cooperation and mutual aid serve to foster habits that create healthy communities (Restakis, 2010).

### **Social Justice Roots of the Cooperative Movement**

The earliest cooperative movements between 1817 and 1840, began to grow, in part, as a response to the destabilizing effects of the Industrial Revolution. These early movements predate Marxism’s efforts to rectify the economic inequalities of capitalism. But unlike Marxism, the early cooperative movements were focused on controlling markets for social purposes at the local level, avoiding issues of state power. The main intent of the movement’s leading theorists was the creation of an ideal, all-inclusive, equitable society; a cooperative society safeguarded from the injustices of free market capitalism (Restakis, 2010).

In 1844, much of England’s skilled workforce had experienced the negative impacts of automation, as well as outsourcing of labor to cheaper markets. Once

again, economic turmoil breathed new life into the cooperative movement and ushered in a new wave of cooperatives that would eventually inspire cooperative development worldwide by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. By the 1980's, the movement's social justice roots had manifested in the formation of cooperative social services. As many western governments began to reduce funding for social services through privatization, cooperatives began to fill the gaps of newly privatized care. Today, in response to an ongoing global economic crisis, the world has witnessed a renewed interest in cooperative models, especially in developing countries (Restakis, 2010).

### **National Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics**

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (2008) lists a set of ethical principles based on the core values of 1) service, 2) social justice, 3) dignity and worth of the person, 4) importance of human relationships, 5) integrity, and 6) competence. Social workers aim to confront social problems and help those who are in need. Self-interest is secondary to the service of others. Social workers also seek out and challenge social injustice, especially those injustices that effect the most vulnerable and oppressed populations. The pursuit of social justice can take many forms, such as community organizing, social and political action, advocacy, lobbying, and research. Efforts for social change are mainly focused on issues of poverty, employment, and equality of opportunity. Through these efforts, social workers promote awareness, sensitivity, and knowledge about issues of cultural diversity and oppression (NASW Code of Ethics, 2008).

The inherent worth of each person, regardless of their wealth or status, is of great importance. So is each person's right to self-determination. To the greatest extent possible, social workers seek to empower people to take charge of their own destiny, which in turn strengthens self-esteem. In addition to serving individual clients, social workers are also mindful of their responsibility to serve the broader society. At the micro, mezzo, and macro level, social workers seek to strengthen human relationships to improve the well-being of all community members. In relation to this obligation to the broader society, professionals are committed to promoting institutions that are compatible with social work's primary objectives and values. Ethical and responsible behavior is of great importance as well. Therefore, social workers continually strive to refine their professional skills. Additionally, they are expected to contribute to the professions knowledge base (NASW Code of Ethics, 2008).

In regards to social and political actions, a social worker's main objective is to seek and promote conditions that satisfy basic human needs so that all people may develop fully. Basic needs may include adequate housing, food, resources, employment, a living wage, services, and affordable healthcare. Efforts to expand choices and opportunities, especially among vulnerable populations, are also an integral part of the profession's social and political actions. These issues may also be coupled with the need to eliminate unfair practices, discrimination, and exploitation within institutions (NASW Code of Ethics, 2008).

Regardless of practice setting, all social workers are obligated to preserve the profession's ethical responsibilities in the workplace. Social work administrators, especially, should ensure that employers are familiar with the NASW Code of Ethics and, if necessary, take measures to eliminate organizational policies or practices that violate it. The Code of Ethics also allows professionals to establish collective bargaining power (labor unions) for the sake of improving client services and work environments (NASW Code of Ethics, 2008).

### **The Empowerment Tradition in Social Work**

Within the social work profession, the word *empowerment* refers to the ability of an individual, group, or community to take control of their own lives, to exercise power, and in doing so, improve the wellbeing of themselves and others (Adams, 2008). While empowerment-based practice is as old as the profession itself, this term was not commonly used among professionals until the past few decades. It is also important to note that empowerment-based practice represents one segment of social work professionals, rather than the profession as a whole, and is at odds with social work's long legacy of paternalism (Simon, 1994). Simon explains that the social work profession is, and always has been, "an amalgamation of diverse actors who have agreed at only the most general level of abstraction about common tasks, problems to be solved, techniques to employ, and knowledge bases upon which to rely" (1994, p.5). Despite this fact, empowerment-based practice has endured as the loyal opposition to the paternalistic roles of benefactor and liberator. Rather than rescuing individuals and groups from their circumstances, an empowerment-minded social

worker aims to interact with people in a way that will inspire them to develop their own plan for a better life (out of respect for their right to self-determination), while collaborating in a reciprocal fashion (Simon, 1994).

This idea of self-help is a significant aspect of empowerment. Adams (2008) identifies five elements of self-help that contribute to empowerment. They are 1) advocacy and self-advocacy, 2) self-management, 3) anti-bureaucracy, 4) cooperation, and 5) common experiences. In regards to the element of cooperation, Adams (2008) notes that it is “often expressed in a belief in democracy, equality of status and power within groups and organizations, shared leadership and cooperation in decision-making” (p. 15). Adams (2008) also mentions that several self-help or mutual aid initiatives have a lot in common with cooperatives.

For members of a radical social worker’s movement established in New York City during the 1930’s (The Rank and File Movement), this concept of empowerment and its connection to cooperatives was applied to practice. With the aid of government organizations, activists worked to create self-help cooperatives. This initiative was partly inspired by the cooperatives of Europe and by the writings of American social work theorists Lindeman and Follett. During this era, a new social work journal, *Social Work Today*, promoted group work, a social work method that was considered to be in harmony with the values of self-help cooperatives (Reisch & Andrews, 2014).

## **Community Organizing and Cooperatives**

Regardless of a social worker's area of expertise, all social workers have a dual orientation of serving individuals and the broader society. All social workers are obligated to consider engaging in community-based economic, social, or political projects. Social workers may choose to become activists involved in the political process, advocating for socially just policies. Others become community organizers, dedicated to the tasks of building or promoting social organizations that advance social and economic justice (Brueggemann, 2013).

Of the organizations that champion social justice, Brueggemann (2013) acknowledges cooperative development as a way to organize and empower low-wage workers, specifically immigrant workers. "The potential for cooperatives to act as a catalyst for community action", Brueggemann explains, "is a function of their unique structure, which dissolves the labor-capital division characteristic of traditional business forms" (2013, p. 311).

Despite the potential power that cooperatives possess for organizers, Dastur (2012) notes that many activist groups have continued to pursue traditional policies (such as lobbying for an increased minimum wage) to reduce income inequality and improve labor conditions, rather than developing structures which give communities more control over economic resources. In an effort to encourage community organizers to promote cooperative ownership, Dastur (2012) highlights some of the common interests of these groups. First, both groups promote community control. Cooperatives bring this value into the marketplace, blurring the line between

advocacy and private businesses. Second, both groups are strengthened by their group members assuming leadership roles; which in turn can inspire a sense of greater self-worth and increase civic participation. And finally, in addition to promoting equity, egalitarianism, and democracy, both groups value responsible, sustainable development within their communities (Dastur, 2012).

### **Obstacles to the Introduction and Development of Cooperatives in Social Work**

The pluralism that Simon (1994) and Dastur (2012) describe within the social work profession is one of many factors that has prevented cooperatives from becoming widely known among social workers. Soifer and Resnick (1993) identify five external obstacles. First, the free market system, which promotes a competitive and individualistic society, discourages collectivist values which lie at the heart of cooperatives. Secondly, as a result of America's cultural assumptions, students are provided little, if any, information about cooperatives in most educational settings. Thirdly, politicians have shown little support for legislation that would be conducive to cooperative development (although this trend has shown recent signs of change). The fourth reason revolves around issues of funding and social controls. Federal, state, and private foundations, which control and fund most social service programs, have been reluctant to consider, much less support, alternative models like cooperatives. And finally, unlike many regions of Europe, the average American does not come into contact with cooperatives on a regular basis (Soifer & Resnick, 1993).

Throughout social work history, there have also been internal forces in opposition to cooperative development (Soifer & Resnick, 1993). In regards to

organizational structure, one of the profession's earliest influences were the hierarchical and bureaucratic Charity Organization Societies. Medical and psychiatric organizational models were also influential. Soifer and Resnick (1993) contend that the contradictions social workers often face between agency and community needs, professional and bureaucratic efforts, as well as interests of staff and management, are closely related to the existence of traditional hierarchical structures within social service organizations. Furthermore, they posit that the replacement of hierarchical structures with cooperative models would eliminate these contradictions and lay the foundation for increased productivity, a deeper commitment to agency objectives, and a more positive work environment. In a survey of NASW members, Jayaratne, Siefert and Chess (1988) reported that many agency-based social workers experience a loss of control over their work environments as a result of organizational structure; a factor which may contribute to lower quality services. With this in mind, Soifer and Resnick (1993) call for the development of cooperative models that are more aligned with the mission and values of social work, warning that if social workers fail to push for structures that are more conducive to social work practice, the profession will likely witness "continued bifurcation in the field, with private sector social workers becoming more and more narrowly therapeutic and public sector social workers becoming increasingly burned out..." (p. 114).

Statistics show that the divide between public, agency-based social workers and private clinical social workers is widening. As Specht and Courtney (1994) explain, "Between 1975 and 1985, the number of social workers in full-time private

practice increased more than fivefold” (p. 124). As of 1994, roughly 40 percent of social workers were in private practice (Specht & Courtney, 1994). Shoring up the assertions of Soifer and Resnick (1993), Specht and Courtney (1994) link the growing trend of private practice to social workers’ loss of control over agency-based workplace environments:

Therefore, it is no wonder that social workers—if they are paid badly enough, treated with ill regard, and given the worst of working conditions—will want to open stalls in the psychotherapeutic marketplace. This option was not available to them earlier in the century, but it is now, and they are flocking to the market in droves (p. 5).

The growing number of social workers engaged in clinical/micro practice also coincides with the fact that mental health is now the largest portion of the profession’s labor force. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts this trend will continue well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Specht & Courtney, 1994).

According to Soifer and Resnick (1993), another contributing factor for social workers’ steady shift toward micro practice, and away from macro issues like cooperative development, is social work educations’ emphasis on clients. They argue that social work students have been conditioned to almost exclusively focus on the individual, often at the expense of larger systemic issues. “One of the ironic consequences of such attitudes”, Soifer and Resnick (1993) explain, “is that the organizational structure of working conditions within our workplaces are seen as having no bearing on the nature of work...or potential client satisfaction” (p. 111). Specht and Courtney (1994) point to the state of California as an exception to this

trend. One of the primary objectives of the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) is to ensure the majority of its graduate students complete their fieldwork in public service agencies. Educators who are involved in CalSWEC have developed programs for the purpose of preparing students for work in public, agency-based services, leading the way for other accredited programs nationwide (Specht & Courtney, 1994).

The profession's push for professionalization and credentialing has been cited as an obstacle to the formation of cooperatives in social work. As the field of social work continues to model itself on older, more established professions, it risks acquiring the more conservative and antiquated attributes of those professions, hierarchies included (Soifer & Resnick, 1993).

Finally, the orientation of social workers has been considered a potential roadblock to cooperative development. Since many social work professionals do not see their work as being business oriented, it is often difficult for social workers to think in business terms required for successful cooperative development (Soifer & Resnick, 1993). But given the labor intensive nature of social work, Soifer and Resnick (1993) contend that the social work profession may favor cooperative formation if they are provided with the necessary skill sets.

### **Social Workers Currently Involved in Cooperative Development**

Despite the many technical, cultural, or political challenges that may discourage American social workers from creating and maintaining cooperatives, a select number of professionals remain undaunted. In 2011, the rural town of Viroqua,

Wisconsin became the home of the first and only mental health cooperative in the United States. Center Point Counseling Services consists of a diverse group of 12 member-owners, including Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW). Seven additional clerical workers are also member-owners. Center Point's clientele, however, are not member-owners. While the young cooperative must be mindful of its budget, it strives to serve as many people as possible. To help the most vulnerable populations, Center Point established a "Your Community Cares" fund which provides financial assistance for those who are unable to pay. One of the main goals of the cooperative is to serve the community based on need, and to compensate for dysfunctional care delivery systems and insurance plans that allow a growing number of clients to fall through the cracks. In 2012, The United States Federation of Worker Cooperatives invited a member of Center Point to speak at their national conference. The Federation's response was overwhelmingly positive. Since then, Center Point has helped and encouraged other mental health providers that are interested in converting their own agencies into cooperatives (Johnson, 2013).

The Center for Family Life (CFL) is a community-based social service organization located in the south Brooklyn neighborhood of Sunset Park. Since its inception in 1978, the organization has served a very large immigrant population. Today, nearly half of the community residents are foreign born, and most speak a language other than English in their homes. In addition to providing residents with counseling programs and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, CFL also focuses on job readiness. In circa 2004, the CFL began to look for alternatives to their

traditional job readiness model, namely due to the large number of immigrant workers who failed to meet the standards of admission for their program. During their research process, social workers within the CFL discovered examples of immigrant-run worker cooperatives. In a collaborative effort with fellow CFL staff members, the organization developed a 12-week training program for cooperative development. The CFL also serves as a cooperative incubator, providing office space, support, and technical assistance (for up to three years) until cooperatives are able to operate independently. During this incubation period, members are still able to receive other organizational services, such as family counseling, child care, and ESL courses. CFL Co-op Program staff members work closely with cooperative members, providing consultation and aid with conflict management (Bransburg, 2011).

In 2006, the CFL witnessed the launch of Si Se Puede! Women's Cleaning Cooperative. It is incorporated as a Not-For-Profit Cooperative Organization, which allows the CFL to continue providing job referrals. This cooperative now serves over 1,000 homes and offices. Each of its member-owners earn an average of 20 dollars per hour. As of 2011, the CFL had developed and incubated three additional cooperatives. They are also a proud member of the NYC Network of Worker Cooperatives, also known as "Nick Nock" (Bransburg, 2011).

### **Social Enterprise and the Social Cooperatives of Italy**

The term "social enterprise" is used to describe a variety of organizations that exist to achieve social objectives. Since the 1960's, the Western world has seen its social safety nets slowly disintegrate as a result of globalization, dwindling Federal

budgets, and a host of other reasons. The rise of social enterprise, and its continued growth around the world, is a result of the public and private sector's continued failure to satisfy basic needs. Social cooperatives are a part of this growing movement (Thomas, 2004).

Social cooperatives, also known as solidarity cooperatives, provide a variety of social services such as in-home healthcare, child care, elder care, or drug and alcohol rehabilitation. As in other forms of cooperatives, member-owners make decisions democratically. However, a social cooperative can be structured in a way that allows for multiple groups to be represented on its board of directors, including care providers, clients, family members, and professionals linked to the service. This type of cooperative is not well known in the United States, but several countries in Europe and Asia have found that social cooperatives can often lower costs for recipients while providing superior care (Nadeau, 2012).

The key to success, according to Restakis (2010), has much to do with the principles upon which social cooperatives are predicated. The principles of reciprocity, equality, and accountability are inseparable from the cooperative model and represent the pillars of humane care. There are stark contrasts between these values and the nature of charity, where power differentials are clearly recognized by both the provider and the recipient. It is this type of relationship that perpetuates isolation and disempowerment (Restakis, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

While the related literature in this review points to several commonalities between cooperatives and the field of social work, there is hardly any social work literature that discusses this particular relationship at all. Therefore, a detailed discussion of this topic was in order. The purpose of this research was to explore the ways in which social workers, as well as social work institutions, could advance worker-owned cooperatives. The results of this study, presented in narrative form, aimed to provide foundational knowledge needed for future in depth studies.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Overview**

This study explored the ways in which social workers, along with social work institutions, might serve to advance the American worker-owned cooperative movement. The study utilized phone and in person interviews with worker-owned cooperative experts and worker-owned cooperative members. Interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended. The main research questions are as follows: 1. Do social workers have a role in supporting, promoting, and advancing worker-owned cooperatives in the United States? If so, how might they support, promote, and advance the movement? 2. What roles can nationally accredited social work programs play through their curriculum to raise awareness or increase the field's knowledge about worker-owned cooperatives?

#### **Research Design**

An exploratory research design was used to collect qualitative data from participants. According to Rubin and Babbie (2014), research of an exploratory nature is “typical when a researcher is examining a new interest, when the subject of a study is relatively new and unstudied, or when the researcher seeks to test the feasibility of undertaking a more careful study...” (p. 153). While research devoted to worker-owned cooperatives is not in short supply, the social work field's involvement with cooperatives, namely in the United States, is new by comparison. Since the researcher expected to explore potential alliances between organizations, human

relationships and personal experiences, the study utilized semi-structured, open ended interviews to collect qualitative data. Rubin and Babbie (2014) describe qualitative data as being “theoretically richer observations that are not easily reduced to numbers” (p. 471). The open-ended interview style gave participants the freedom to relate their lived experiences to each research question, allowing for a broad spectrum of ideas.

### **Sampling Plan**

Participants selected for an interview consisted of worker-owned cooperative members and cooperative experts. For the purpose of this study, the term “expert” included university professors with expert knowledge of cooperatives, presidents and board members of cooperative associations, consultants, as well as professionals who are (or have been) actively involved in the formation of worker-owned cooperatives.

The researcher utilized a nonprobability (non-random) sampling technique known as purposive (or judgmental) sampling (Rubin & Babbie, 2014, pp. 383-385). Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to hand select community members, experts, and leaders in the field who, in the researcher’s judgment, were best equipped to provide informed opinions (Rubin & Babbi, 2014, p. 386). Initially, a list of prominent figures in the cooperative movement were compiled through internet research and they were contacted by the researcher via phone or email. The researcher also utilized snowball sampling to recruit participants. Participants whom the researcher could reach were asked to refer the researcher to other potential

participants who meet the criteria for the study (Rubin & Babbie, 2014, p. 134). The sample size was expected to be eight to ten participants.

### **Instrumentation**

The semi-structured and open-ended questions, developed by the researcher, allowed participants to freely elaborate on any strategies and professional opinions they may have in regards to the research topic. Follow up questions and comments from the researcher encouraged participants to expand even further, making for a rich, highly detailed narrative experience. All interviews began with the researcher asking participants the central questions that guided this study. Follow up questions posed by the researcher depended on the responses of each participant. The semi-structured questions were developed through a thorough review of the literature and guided by the researcher's professional knowledge and experience.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected by the researcher exclusively. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to alter the sequence of questions during each interview while still covering the same material. This strategy made for a more organic conversation and allowed the researcher to respond to participants' unique answers (Rubin & Babbie, 2014, p. 503). The duration of each interview was approximately forty five minutes to an hour. Phone interviews were conducted at the request of the participants or when geographic location would make in person interviews impractical. All interviews were recorded with the participants' permission in order to accurately capture their

responses. The recorded interviews were transcribed on a personal computer. Prior to the interview, participants received a consent form, along with a copy of the lead interview questions. The data collection process was anticipated to commence during the latter part of March, 2015. Data were expected to be finalized by the end of April, 2015.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher utilized Neuman's (2003) five-part plan for creating themes to analyze qualitative data collected in the interviews. Neuman's (2003) five steps are as follows: sorting and classifying, open coding, axial coding, selective coding, and interpreting and elaborating. Using this process, themes from the interviews will be identified and coded in order to categorize and consolidate information. During the first step, sorting and classifying, all data were organized around the research questions. The second step, open coding, entailed identifying important events, key terms, and themes. During axial coding, the data were reexamined to help identify any missed themes. During selective coding, the data went through a final review in order to identify specific quotes or cases to help illustrate the themes. During the final stage, interpreting and elaborating, the findings were compared and contrasted to existing literature to form working theories (Neuman, 2003). All data were presented in a narrative form.

### **Protection of Human Participants**

All data were collected after receiving approval from the University IRB. Participants in this study were informed by the researcher about the purpose of the

study upon initial contact. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they may choose to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants were informed that their refusal to participate would not result in any penalties, which ensured that participants would not feel coerced into participating. Upon agreement to participate in the study, the researcher provided participants with an informed consent form (See Appendix A), which explained participants' rights. In addition, each participant received an advance copy of the lead interview questions. The consent form explained how identities would be protected and how information would be recorded and used. Participants were informed that all findings in this study would be presented in aggregate and would not be shared individually for the purpose of protecting participant identities. Participants were also informed that all notes and recordings would be destroyed one year after the completion of this study.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which social workers, and social work institutions, could advance American worker-owned cooperatives. Given the fact that this specific topic has yet to be thoroughly examined, semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine cooperative experts to gain in depth understanding of the topic. The results of this research are presented in a narrative form. Direct quotes are used throughout this chapter to accurately capture the diverse opinions of all participants. The guiding research questions for this study were: 1. Do social workers have a role in supporting, promoting, and advancing worker-owned cooperatives in the United States? If so, how might they support, promote, and advance the movement? 2. What roles can nationally accredited social work programs play through their curriculum to raise awareness or increase the field's knowledge about worker-owned cooperatives?

#### **Overview of the Sample**

A total of nine participants were interviewed for this study. Five participants reside in the United States (California, Virginia, Wisconsin, and New York), and four reside in Canada (Ontario and Nova Scotia). Of the nine expert participants, three have earned an advanced degree in social work. The remainder included experts currently involved with cooperative education, cooperative development, or

cooperative consulting groups. All nine participants were interviewed by telephone as none of them were located locally.

Participants were willing to field the majority of questions posed by the researcher. However, the level of detail provided by each participant varied considerably. This chapter presents all data pertaining to this study's overarching research questions. Topics of discussion include the following: similarities and differences between cooperatives and social work, the appropriateness of alliances, suggestions for alliance development, and suggestions for the inclusion of cooperatives in social work education. In addition, two unsolicited themes emerged: the social cooperatives of Italy, and the need for viable alternatives to capitalism.

### **Cooperatives and the Roles of Social Workers**

The first research question explored the potential roles social workers could play in supporting, promoting, and advancing cooperatives. One of the major themes that emerged regarding the roles of social workers in cooperatives related to the perceived similarities between these two fields. Specifically, the similarities addressed were: 1) community based organizations and community improvement, 2) the common goal of empowering people and communities, 3) social and economic justice, and 4) the common value of putting people first.

### **Similarities between Cooperatives and Social Work**

Three participants believed that cooperatives and the field of social work are both community oriented, place based organizations that are often part of a larger network of organizations aiming to improve the community as a whole:

I guess what I would say...I'm not a professional social worker. I would say that social workers believe in individual and community agency, in terms of resolving issues. Although that's not, strictly speaking, in the international cooperative principles, I think that is a fundamental motivation for cooperative formation. People are trying to offer employment, but also other community improvement types of goals. They're taking action through cooperatives to try to improve their own individual lives as well as the lives within their community. The other thing involves knowledge sharing and support, which is a cooperative value. Cooperatives support other cooperatives and share knowledge with one another. In social work, more broadly speaking, certainly the value of peer networks of support have been so broadly accepted within social work practice. Although it may not be specifically articulated as a principle or value, I think it's implicitly there.

Another participant shared:

I could see co-ops and social work also being similar in the fact that they are kind of place based. They're very much community based in terms of services being focused on a certain group of people or a certain neighborhood, area, or municipality. So that kind of place based, locally based aspect is very similar.

The second sub-theme within the theme of similarities was the common goal of empowering people and their communities. Three participants explained that both fields can address empowerment by prioritizing self-determination and by facilitating a person or group's journey toward greater independence. The following participant noted this similarity and proceeded to illustrate how parents have become empowered through a recently developed childcare cooperative:

Well, there's this theme of empowerment. I would imagine that's a prevalent theme in social work...empowerment of people. When we really talk about empowerment, it's giving power to people, and that is what a co-op is. It's saying, 'Here, you're in charge, you own it.' That is true empowerment and I see the results of that in my work, and it's really exciting... And you know, childcare co-ops are another way that

people become empowered. There's a [childcare] co-op I helped start. In that co-op, the board of directors are parents. And when you get parents involved in that way...I know PTA's are always trying to recruit people...but in this co-op, they are a part of everything, and they have a very strong relationship with everyone because they volunteer in the classroom...So by getting parents involved in that way, they become part of the school and they see that role. Whereas a lot of parents, especially ones that don't have a positive relationship with schools, they see school as something beyond them. But by involving parents in a meaningful way, where they are true partners, it really changes everything. And with the kids at that school, the principal came to the director of the pre-school program and said, 'What are you doing? The kids from this program are consistently scoring in the eightieth or above percentile.' And for this school, that's unheard of. I think it's because the parents are becoming involved, and the parents see their role as being involved. They become part of the PTA, they become involved in every other way in the program. So I think that's real empowerment...not just a little taste of it.

A second participant described the common goal of empowerment as the transition from dependence to independence:

And I think this is right for social work...moving from dependence to independence? So for co-ops, this is definitely very important because, in many ways, the initial problem that brought people together was about dependence. And the co-op is a way, a structure, for people to become more independent; to solve the problem, but to solve it in a way that gives more control and independence to the members. So in some ways, I see social work as having that similar goal and mission.

A third participant expressed distaste for the word "empowerment", claiming that the word is often used inaccurately, but used the word nonetheless to describe the initial experience of working within cooperatives, saying:

I don't really like the word 'empowerment' that much, but it was [empowerment]. It was organizing people that were feeling disempowered and who were experiencing a lot of exploitation. [Cooperatives] created a platform for them to kind of look at things differently and create their own standards.

The third sub-theme dealt with the common goal of advancing social and economic justice. Two participants highlighted the fact that cooperatives and social workers aim to create social systems that are fair and equitable for all. Additionally, they explained why more social workers should consider utilizing cooperatives as a tool to achieve this goal:

For me, I have my own interpretation of what drives social work values. I think one of the most important ones is to work towards building an economic and social system that can be equitable for people. So I'm really driven in my work, as a social worker, in the field of social justice and economic justice. It's not just about alleviating certain problems that we see in society, but really looking at the poor, and the systems that are not working, and people experiencing a lot of barriers because systems are not working for them. So for me, I'm very driven by the value of being inclusive and trying to have a good analysis...making sure that we're building a system that is working for everybody. And in terms of the co-op connection [to social work], absolutely, one hundred percent connected. That's why I do the work I do. And I think of the co-op model as a really interesting tool or mechanism to get at that. Specifically in the work I do, we focus on working with people who experience many barriers to finding good employment; mostly undocumented people or immigrants who have been marginalized. So it [co-ops] has been a way to get people to be drivers of their own economic trajectory...for them to be leaders and to take matters into their own hands by creating businesses for themselves, collectively.

A second participant echoed the sentiment that cooperatives can be an effective way to advance social and economic justice. Moreover, this participant stressed the importance of working within structures that facilitate the application of best practices:

One of the things I talk about a lot is: how do you take all these best practices, the theory of social work, and how do you apply it? The actual application of theory to practice? How does it show up? You can't just walk down the street and scream out your theories. You have to go rent an office somewhere, or be with other people and draw up a

plan of some kind. So you're joining in with a structure of some sort. Well, co-ops are a choice. Co-ops are a fairly plastic, nimble model that certainly is useful as an option. It's not like every social worker needs to consider being in a co-op, but there's such a breadth of things that social workers can do. But I think it [co-ops and social work] is a logical combination. If you have a principle based mission, you need a principle based business model. When you go to apply these theories, you need a principle driven model; as opposed to just any old structure that you build... a non-descript model. Well this is better than a non-descript model. This is a model steeped in solidarity. Just study the principles and any social worker would be inspired by some of them. So when you have a business model that's a principle driven model, and a graduate degree that's a principle driven degree, [combining the two] merits consideration.

The fourth and final sub-theme within the theme of similarities addressed the common value of placing people over capital. One participant highlighted this similarity and noted that the refusal to make profit the highest priority is perhaps one of the most fundamental connections between cooperatives and social work:

As I understand social work, it is focused on people. It's focused on helping people be whole, both individually and in society... And so the purpose of a cooperative is to meet member and community need. And that, it seems to me, is very strongly in tune with... the goals of social work. I think the values are so close, and so relevant, that if you went through the values like honesty, openness, and education, all of those things, those are also important in social work. They all fit, so there's a nice fit. But the basic fit is that both are focused on people, not on capital, which I think is [America's] biggest problem and our [Canada's] biggest problem.

### **Differences between Cooperatives and Social Work**

The second major theme that emerged with regard to the roles of social workers in cooperatives related to perceived differences between fields. Three participants discussed what they deemed to be a notable difference between

cooperatives and social work. One theme emerged from their comments: the existence of hierarchies in the field of social work, or alternatively, the absence of hierarchies in cooperatives:

Participatory democracy is at the heart of a cooperative. Many of the organizations that are involved in social work are, in fact, hierarchical. They're organized at a government level or an institutional level, and they are run hierarchically. So they could be quite different. Cooperatives...they all run on the same seven principles. Those are at the core of how they are organized, and that sets cooperatives apart from many kinds of social work organizations, which can be organized in hundreds of different ways.

A second participant went further, providing a rationale for why social workers should be opposed to workplace hierarchies in general:

My dissertation was on the effects of worker ownership...It was really clear that some of the issues social workers would normally be dealing with, whether it be family problems or marriage conflicts, were being handled differently now that the employees had changed their values as a result of experiencing consensus based decision making and conflict resolution. They [the workers] said very clearly that they were using some of that [co-op] training and experience in resolving conflicts within their families. I had always heard that an abused worker goes home and beats up on his wife or his dog, or whatever, because he's been beaten up at work. So this is the other side of that... if you are in a more democratic workplace where you're treated with respect, where you're treated as an equal...it's really clear to me that there is an incredible connection, and that social workers should be advocating for the end of these hierarchical workplace structures as a way to prevent social problems, so that there doesn't need to be as much social work [intervention] as a way to deal with these problems after the fact...So again, co-ops give a voice to everybody on a fairly equal level...it gives voice to everyone, respecting the individual humanity of each individual. So, as a way to be organized as human beings, I think it's the preferred way that would fit with social work ideals.

Aside from hierarchies, one participant commented on the respective populations that are being served by cooperatives and social workers, addressing their differences:

[Social work] is a profession of people who want to help people better themselves, in a variety of different ways, not just their work. I think that worker co-ops could be consistent with that, but most worker co-ops [in the United States] are actually not people who would fall under the quote-unquote helping profession.

### **Support for Alliances**

With respect to the potential roles of social workers in cooperatives, all participants were asked if they supported the idea of formal or informal alliances between social work institutions and cooperative organizations. The majority of participants (six out of nine) were in favor of the proposition. Most responses were succinct, such as “I don’t see why not.” Only two participants gave a more detailed answer. One said, “Oh yes, I think it [alliances] would be very beneficial...I think that it would improve social work practice if they saw co-op development as actually part of what they [social workers] do on a daily basis.” A second participant attached a proviso to their support for alliances, saying,

Well, I think it’s important to look at it in terms of type of worker co-ops because most of the co-ops are not really for underserved people. So I think a lot of worker co-op people would say, ‘Well, why do I need a social worker?’ But I think in terms of [social workers] developing cooperatives...probably.

Of the three participants who either had no opinion or expressed opposition to alliances, only one provided a reason for their position:

I find that I have a better success rate at convincing people who are already in the co-op family...it's easier to teach those folks about different types of co-ops than it is to teach people who don't know anything about co-ops. Since the pool of people I can reach, who are members of co-ops, is greater than I will ever be able to reach in my lifetime, I focus most of my work on staying with people who are already connected to co-ops.

### **Suggestions for Alliance Development**

Participants who supported the idea of formal alliances were asked to provide suggestions for alliance development. For those who expressed ambivalence toward alliance formation, or had no opinion whatsoever, further questions related to this topic were omitted. Detailed suggestions for building alliances proved to be scant. Several participants either declined to respond or were unable to think of an answer. However, one theme did emerge: a call for social work trade organizations (namely the NASW) to become engaged with cooperative trade organizations. One participant remarked, "I've always thought about reaching out to the NASW for them to lead the effort; to have this business model be a part of their interests. I think that's where my mind goes...to speak at NASW conferences about co-op models."

A second participant concurred, saying:

I was thinking the first coalition that maybe we would want to build is the trade associations between the two groups. It seems like trying to get those groups to do some kind of coalition with the U.S. Federation of Worker Co-ops, or even the National Cooperative Business Association, or some regional co-op development association like Cooperation Texas. The Midwest has some places. Ohio has Ohio Employee Ownership. If we could get those social work associations to do some kind of coalition, even just through co-op education perhaps...it could even be 'Co-op education day' once a year. Everyone who is a member of that social work association could

receive materials, or a special program for a webinar. I think that's the first place I would start if I wanted to connect social workers.

### **Cooperatives and the Roles of Social Work Education**

The second research question was an extension of the first. If social workers have a role in supporting and advancing cooperatives, what about social work education? In regards to social work education's potential relationships with cooperatives, three themes emerged: 1) course content that addresses cooperatives, 2) the need for interdisciplinary partnerships, and 3) the utilization of cooperative field placements.

#### **Course Content**

Three participants suggested that social education programs should consider developing course content that is devoted to the study of cooperatives. The first participant suggested that an online module on cooperatives and community development be included in elective courses.

I think it could be an interesting thing...maybe to talk to your trade association to see if they would put a module online, and then begin to encourage some of the [social work] schools to offer an elective. They have so many other interesting electives, like trauma, death and dying. I remember the ones my son was taking. You could certainly see either co-ops or community development, or something along those lines that students could study. A school of social work actually hired me to create a module on gentrification. They were trying to do these modules that would educate their social workers much more on local urban issues. And I believe that we put co-ops in there in the last module, under 'solutions' or 'moving forward'.

This participant continued by saying, "A bunch of us could help with the co-op side, but in terms of social work, [co-op members with a social work background] might be

able to gear it more toward social work. The whole co-op field...we're talking about how to do much more public education on this.”

A second participant mentioned that some Canadian schools of social work have already paved the way for students to become familiar with cooperatives.

The Community Economic and Social Development (CESD) program, here at Algoma...It takes a holistic view of community development. So it looks at the social factors, the cultural factors, and policy issues, the economic and environmental factors. All first year social work students take the first year community economic and social development courses. So they take an intro to social work course, but they also take an intro to CESD course to strengthen that foundation. And quite a number of those social work students go on to earn a certificate in CESD. So they get that well-rounded, broad general idea of how social issues are imbedded within the economy, with what is happening with the environment, with globalization. They then see, and are able to make those connections...Any of the students who go on and do a certificate in CESD, they get a course specifically on the social economy that looks at different forms of social enterprise, which includes cooperatives. So the social work students are exposed to looking at cooperatives. Some of those co-ops hire people with mental health issues, or employ people with intellectual disabilities. There are cooperatives that are so applicable to both resolving social issues, as well as the economic needs of the community.

### **Interdisciplinary Partnerships**

Throughout discussions related to education, three participants acknowledged a need for interdisciplinarity (combining two or more academic disciplines); specifically business and economic partnerships with social work programs. One participant stated, “There is a growing awareness in Canada, among academics, around the value of interdisciplinarity. Making those linkages and partnerships with other fields. So I think there is a need for more generalists out there.”

A second participant claimed that social workers would be better equipped to develop cooperatives if social work programs pushed for interdisciplinarity:

Any regular person can do that [start a cooperative] if they have some guidance in developing a business plan. So I think that's something to be aware of, something that could inform social work curricula. But there could be some incorporation of business [in social work programs]; an alliance with the business school on campus, so that some of those skills can be learned early on by social workers.

A third participant thought the inclusion of economic related courses in social work education continued to be a somewhat controversial topic among fellow social work faculty members, but held firm to the belief that such courses are valuable to social work practice, saying,

My frustration with some of the other faculty in the social work program is that they're concerned about Community Economic and Social Development (CESD) courses having too much economics in them and not enough social work. So, it's really something that is so overlooked in the social work discipline in general. The economic...it's the key to everything else in my opinion.

### **Field Placements**

Two participants emphasized the importance of students experiencing cooperatives first-hand, suggesting that cooperative field placements for social workers should be more readily available. One of these participants said the following:

First thing, definitely have it [co-ops] as a field placement. I've had a couple of students from social work programs who come here to complete their year-long field placement. So if that were actually encouraged...that's a key thing, to actually experience co-ops, not just learn about them through books. I wonder if the NASW could also do workshops on it. And what you were saying earlier...creating formal partnerships with cooperative incubators or centers so that there could

actually be utilization of worker co-ops in the [social work] programs, so people could actually use co-ops and experience them.

### **The Social Cooperatives of Italy**

The social cooperatives of Italy was one of two unsolicited themes that repeatedly emerged. In addition to the worker-owned model (the main focus of this study), four participants believed that the social/solidarity cooperative model exhibited strong ties to social work values. In fact, three participants had previously traveled abroad to study the model in Italy. Each of them shared their personal experiences, but no clear themes emerged.

The first participant began by describing how the model's conceptual framework relates to social work:

So if social work is focused on people, then the cooperative model, and clearly the worker co-op [fits]....the other model that highly recommends itself is...a lot of people in the U.S. call it the stakeholder model, but in Italy, they call it the solidarity co-op model; which I think is a much better mind framework, or conceptual framework to think about it... If you focus on stakeholders, you tend to build a co-op, then, on the differences between people, rather than what binds them together. Whereas if you focus on it as a solidarity co-op, it's a conceptual image that focuses people on what they have in common, what they share... If you take it from a stakeholder concept, you'll say 'what do I get out of this as a worker, or what do I get out of this as a parent?' Rather than, 'how do we do this together?' So, at any rate, so those are the two models I think that conform most closely to your social work ideals.

The participant then proceeded to discuss the involvement of social workers in social cooperatives:

In Italy, by the way, many of the solidarity co-ops are involved in social work.... [They] have people with mental disabilities in the membership. There are drug addicts and ex-cons who are members of

the co-op. There are social workers who are members of the co-op. And there are the cooperatives in Imola [Italy] that buy services from these co-ops who have a seat on the board. So, they're not members of the co-op, but they do have a seat on the board because they have a commitment to making the thing work... They've made a deliberate, conscious decision to build a cooperative to provide services, but to also provide work, either transitional or long-term work, for people who are struggling. So it's a nice model, I like it a lot... And again, it's all about 'What do we have in common? Why do we have this organization? What's the purpose of it? How do we each have a share in that purpose?'

The second participant highlighted some of the ways that social cooperatives have empowered vulnerable populations:

So [social co-ops] have what's called A and B co-ops. The A co-ops are a direct service; the social workers or teachers or whatever, own the co-op and provide the service. Then they have a B class of co-ops... part of the therapy for their clients is to help them own their own companies. So for example, they help a recovering addict to set up a landscaping company, something that they own themselves. Or they help the mentally challenged to do landscaping or garbage pickup, and to run their own company doing that. And they help them form a second level worker-owned company. So they actually build the co-op, a worker co-op ownership, into the treatment in addition to the fact that the service agency is owned by the service providers. They have a really interesting, promising model I think.

The third participant explained how some of Italy's local governments and universities have formed partnerships to foster growth within the social cooperative community:

One of the places I've visited is Trento, Italy. There's a very strong cooperative movement there. They have health care co-ops... all different kinds. And the municipal government there gave a lot of incentives in the early 90's when they were going through a period of high unemployment and restructuring. They [the municipal government] hired the University of Trento to support development of cooperatives, and that's when they really started to expand day care

co-ops, health care co-ops, social services, end of life care co-ops. And I would assume that quite a number of them have social workers engaged in them.

Those who mentioned social cooperatives agreed that the Italian model of social enterprise deserved much more attention. One participant said, “I don’t think it’s an area that we have done a great deal with in the United States. There’s no reason why it shouldn’t be done [here].” When questioned about the likelihood of the United States adopting and applying aspects of the Italian model, participants doubted that any progress would happen in the near future.

### **A Call for Viable Alternatives to Capitalism**

Issues related to the flaws of capitalism and the need for viable alternatives was yet another unsolicited topic that surfaced during six interviews. Critiques of capitalism were often coupled with concerns related to the social work profession’s role in reinforcing capitalism; fueling what four participants perceived as the primary cause of many social ills. Embedded in these discussions were participant critiques of what, in their view, social work education generally emphasizes, and what it tends to overlook. One common theme emerged with regard to a perceived overemphasis of micro practice in social work education and the social work field at large.

#### **Overemphasis of Micro Social Work Practice**

Four participants expressed frustration related to social works’ emphasis on micro practice, and its reluctance to seriously examine alternatives to current systems:

I think there should be a lot more, specifically, on co-ops as an alternative model. It is one thing to critique a negative system, but it’s really hard to have [social work] students see that there are

alternatives, to really conceptualize an alternative. So I think it should be included more. I think that has been a real oversight... In Canada, there's a third view of social work that is referred to as structural social work. Whenever I see American texts, they usually refer to residual and institutional approaches. In the U.S., there's something called radical social work...that's the term I think, or progressive. And structural social work here is really a strong critique of capitalism. From colonialism and capitalism come the structural barriers that cause poverty, racism, women's oppression, and so on.

This participant continued by suggesting that the field of social work has become somewhat disconnected from part of its history:

[I] get very frustrated with the way social work puts so much emphasis on being therapists, and being clinical professionals, and how it has lost its social movement roots, which is the way it started. Well, as you know, it started as two different streams: one with charity workers, who were terrible, and then you have the social movements, the social gospel movements that led to social democracy. [The social movement] part of it has become very weak.

A second participant offered a word of caution about the overemphasis of micro practice, claiming that an emphasis on micro solutions can often reinforce macro problems related to capitalism:

The micro concept really isn't about joint solutions and macro solutions, or system changing solutions, right? So you can see how maybe, in some ways, the whole [social work] field is trying to make sure that you can get people who can cope with capitalism. Because in some ways, you want to get down to...I'm sorry for being a bit crass about it but, in some ways, social work is like policing. It's really all about reinforcing capitalism, getting people to cope with capitalism. If you think about it, [capitalism is] so much of what you're trying to help people deal with, right? Housing issues, getting jobs; it's all about the failures of capitalism. And some of the health problems are all about the failures of capitalism. And yet we're trying to patch them up to fit them back in the system. So in some ways, I can see why social work programs wouldn't discuss that.

A third participant reflected on the degree to which social workers view themselves as macro professionals dedicated to creating “permanent fixes” to the social problems linked to capitalism, then implored social workers to help create inclusive, cooperative systems:

Things have to be done on the micro level first in a stabilized place. But going forward, you need a way of offering people greater hope. I try and live my life pretty optimistically, but I will share with you that I am quite pessimistic about what our globally economy offers people who are at risk. And if we don't work hard to take some control over our own destiny, then we will continue to recycle the same problems over and over. That's why I'm interested in creating a more cooperative economy. Obviously social workers care about these issues...so now it's a matter of applying that caring in a way that creates more permanent structures.

A fourth participant offered a broader explanation for why the field of social work might be tempted to devote less time and energy on complex, macro issues like capitalism:

Part of the problem that we have in our societies, yours and mine, is that we have come to regard universities more and more as vocational training. We're training people for the job market. We're not training people for democracy. We're not training people so that they can build a caring and sharing society. We're not training people for life, for living, for human relationships. We're training them to be good little employees.

### **Summary**

Upon review of all results, this researcher identified five major findings related to the overarching research questions of this study. In reference to the first major finding, participants collectively identified four significant similarities between cooperatives and the field of social work. They believed that both groups are: 1)

community based and focused on community improvement, 2) dedicated to putting people first, 3) dedicated to social and economic justice, and 4) focused on the empowerment of people. Secondly, the existence of hierarchies within social work organizations was noted as a fundamental difference between these two fields. Moreover, one participant suggested that social workers should seek to end hierarchical structures in the workplace and advocate for cooperative models that are more aligned with social work ideals. For the third finding, participants expressed a need for more interdisciplinary collaborations in social work education, namely with schools of economics and business that are knowledgeable of cooperative structures. They believed these partnerships could further enrich cooperative related course content in social work education and prepare social workers to navigate issues related to cooperative development and maintenance. The fourth major finding dealt with further investigation of social cooperatives within social work research. Participants believed that, in addition to the worker-owner model, the social cooperatives of Italy showed close ties to the goals and values of social work. Finally, during discussions related to viable alternatives to capitalism, participants believed that social work education and the field at large tends to overemphasize micro practice, while simultaneously failing to thoroughly explore viable alternatives to capitalism, including cooperative models.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

#### **Overview**

This study explored ways that social workers and their respective institutions could advance worker-owned cooperatives. Since social work literature has yet to explore this subject thoroughly, an exploratory study was necessary to provide foundational knowledge for future research. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with nine experts from the cooperative community.

This chapter provides a summary of this study's major findings and connects these findings to existing, albeit limited, literature. Findings discussed in this chapter include the following: similarities and differences between cooperatives and social work, the social cooperatives of Italy, the need for interdisciplinary partnerships, and participant's views regarding a perceived overemphasis of micro practice in the social work profession. Additionally, this chapter addresses implications for social work practice and policy, the limitations of this study, and provides recommendations for future research.

#### **Major Findings Related to Existing Knowledge**

The first research question explored whether or not social workers have a legitimate role in advancing worker-owned cooperatives. The first major finding suggests that social workers are an appropriate fit for cooperatives by virtue of a shared set of values. Seven participants collectively identified four significant

similarities between cooperatives and the social work field. These similarities included: 1) community based work and a focus on community improvement, 2) dedication to putting people first, 3) dedication to social and economic justice, and 4) the empowerment of people.

The first similarity that participants named was community based work and a focus on community improvement. They believed that both cooperatives and social work organizations are community oriented and strive to improve the communities to which they are anchored. This finding shows strong ties to the fourth value of the NASW Code of Ethics (2008): *Importance of Human Relationships*. It states that social workers aim to strengthen relationships between individuals, families, groups, and organizations within the communities they serve. The seventh core principal of the International Cooperative Alliance (2015), *Concern for Community*, appears to dovetail into the statement above. It illustrates the loyalty cooperative members should have for the communities in which they are located, along with their dedication to responsible growth. It should be noted that the methods with which cooperative members and social workers achieve these objectives may differ at times. Methodology notwithstanding, this literature still supports participant assertions that both organizations are in fact community oriented and committed to improving the communities they serve.

The second similarity named by participants was dedication to putting people first, rather than capital. In other words, both organizations make member and community need the highest priority. Monetary gain is, at best, a secondary concern.

This finding points to the first value of the NASW Code of Ethics (2008): *Service*. It explains that the main goal of social work is to assist people in need and to address social ills. This primary objective requires social workers to place the needs of communities and individuals above their own personal desires. Furthermore, professionals are expected to donate a portion of their time and expertise with no expectation of financial gain (NASW Code of Ethics, 2008). While the seven core principles of the International Cooperative Alliance (2015) do not explicitly touch upon the prioritization of people over profits, one could argue that the message is implicit. For example, a portion of every cooperative's capital is deemed common property and utilized for the benefit of all (International Cooperative Alliance, 2015). Furthermore, Nadeau (2012) contends that cooperatives are representative of an economy that is primarily focused on human needs, rather than one focused on short term profits. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest this similarity represents another common bond between cooperatives and social work. As one participant noted, it is arguably one of the most fundamental common threads.

Dedication to social and economic justice was also identified by participants as being a similarity. In their view, both organizations aim to create and maintain systems that are fair and equitable for all members of society. According to the NASW Code of Ethics (2008), social workers strive to advance issues related to social and economic justice, especially those related to vulnerable and oppressed populations. This mission includes efforts to provide necessary information, access to community resources, and services to those in need. While there are no specific

references to social and economic justice within the International Cooperative Alliance's seven core principles, it is embedded in the Alliance's stated purpose of a cooperative, which is to meet member's *common* economic, social, and cultural needs (International Cooperative Alliance, 2015). Additionally, this common bond of social justice is supported by Restakis (2010), who contends that the leading theorists of early cooperative movements envisioned a just and equitable society for all; a society protected from the ravages of free market capitalism. Given this information, cooperatives and social workers are unquestionably kindred spirits in regards to issues of social justice. The self-evident nature of this truth could serve as an excellent starting point for those interested in building alliances between trade organizations or academic disciplines. It could also be argued that social justice involves a particular way of speaking. For many disciplines, this "language" of social justice may seem foreign and inaccessible. However, it seems unlikely that the two organizations in question would experience any difficulty in this regard.

Finally, the fourth similarity named was the empowerment of people. Participants believed that both fields promote empowerment by helping individuals, groups, and communities help themselves to a greater extent. According to Adams (2008), self-help is a vital aspect of empowerment in the social work profession; adding that mutual aid or self-help initiatives have much in common with cooperatives. This finding also relates to the third value of the NASW Code of Ethics (2008): *Dignity and Worth of a Person*. Social workers are champions of self-determination, striving to increase each person's capacity to confront and solve their

own problems through collaborative partnerships. This dedication to empowerment applies to the community as well, as social workers observe their dual obligation to empower both individuals and the broader society (NASW Code of Ethics, 2008). The fourth core principle of the International Cooperative Alliance (2015), *Autonomy and Independence*, directly addresses the empowerment of collectives. Cooperatives are self-help groups that aim to preserve their collective power and independence at all cost. If and when a cooperative agrees to work with an external organization, they do so on the condition that democratic member control and autonomy remains intact (International Cooperative Alliance, 2015). In light of this literature, empowerment seems to be yet another unifying characteristic that shapes and defines both fields. However, there is much to be explored regarding the various ways social workers might empower clients and communities through the use of cooperatives on micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Future research devoted to the second major finding of this study, social cooperatives, may provide answers.

The second research question aimed to explore the ways social work institutions could raise awareness or increase the field's knowledge about cooperatives. A strong theme emerged as a result of this query and is the second major finding of this study. In addition to the worker-owned cooperative model, four participants believed that the social cooperatives of Italy resonated with the values and goals of social work. To review, social cooperatives offer a variety of social services such as in-home healthcare, child care, elder care, or drug and alcohol rehabilitation. Like other cooperative models, member-owners make decisions

democratically. Social cooperatives, however, can be structured in a way that allows for multiple groups to be represented on its board of directors, including care providers, clients, family members, and professionals linked to the service. These structures are also known as multi-stakeholder cooperatives (Nadeau, 2012). The participants informed the researcher that many Italian social workers were already members of social cooperatives, some of which are directly involved in social work. To the best of this researcher's knowledge, social cooperatives, as well as social workers' involvement with them, have not been explored in social work literature. These four participants agreed that the social cooperative model should be closely examined by the American social work community, since the subject has been largely ignored nationwide. These assertions are consistent with Nadeau (2012), who explains that social cooperatives remain rare and unfamiliar in the U.S. This researcher concurs that foundational knowledge of social work's connection to social cooperatives is desperately needed in the profession's literature. In reference to participant information regarding Italian social workers involvement with social cooperatives, case studies of such cooperatives would provide helpful clues for further investigation.

The third major finding spoke to the first and second overarching research questions. If social workers and their respective institutions have a role in advancing cooperatives, how can they support, promote, and advance them? Participants' views on the flaws of capitalism and social work's role in perpetuating the social ills of capitalism, addressed this question. Four participants described what they believed

was an imbalance between micro and macro social work practice, lamenting that social work practice and education are often reluctant to consider cooperative structures to be a viable alternative to capitalism. This perceived emphasis on micro practice in social work education and the profession at large is supported by the findings of Specht and Courtney (1994), who show that the number of clinical social workers in the U.S. has increased fivefold in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. They also explain that the growing number of clinical social workers coincides with the fact that mental health now makes up the largest portion of the profession's labor force. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics expects this trend to continue. (Specht & Courtney, 1994). In regards to social work education's historical emphasis on clients, participant's sentiments are consistent with Soifer and Resnick's (1993) assertion that social work education has conditioned students to almost exclusively focus on the individual. Consequently, macro subjects such as cooperative advancement or development tends to be neglected. Attempts to correct this imbalance will undoubtedly involve changes in social work curricula nationwide. Specht and Courtney (1994) highlight California's effort to strike a balance between micro and macro practice through the advent of the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC), which strives to ensure that most fieldwork placements are based in public service agencies. If other states choose to follow California's lead, it will likely be the result of steady external pressure from the social work community. Regardless of subject matter, any changes to social work curricula in other regions are less likely to occur if a demand for it

does not exist. Therefore, cooperative advocacy among social work professionals, teachers and students will be crucial going forward.

The fourth major finding dealt with the first research question: how can social workers advance cooperatives? Participants identified hierarchical structures as being a fundamental difference between cooperatives and the social work profession. Additionally, one of these participants suggested that social workers could do more to challenge hierarchies within their profession and advocate for cooperative structures that are more aligned with their values. Soifer and Resnick (1993) agree that social workers should aim to eliminate hierarchical structures in social service agencies. The replacement of hierarchies with cooperative models would, in their view, eliminate many of the contradictions social workers face in traditional structures. These contradictions include those related to professional values versus agency demands. For example, a professional's desire to utilize strengths based practice approaches in a paternalistic work environment (Soifer & Resnick, 1993). Again, this information points to a need for more cooperative advocacy among social work professionals, students, and teachers. Also, the degree to which cooperatives can eliminate contradictions in social work practice has yet to be thoroughly explored. This subject, along with studies devoted to social cooperatives, would be valuable additions to future social work research.

The last major finding dealt with social work education and relates to the second research question. In terms of recommendations, participants expressed a need for social work education to develop additional interdisciplinary partnerships; namely

schools of economic and business that are familiar with cooperatives. These partnerships could facilitate the development of cooperative education materials for social workers and, for those who are interested, provide the necessary skills for cooperative development and maintenance. Soifer and Resnick (1993) claim that social workers, generally speaking, do not think of their workplaces as businesses, and consequently do not think in terms of business. However, they contend that the labor intensive nature of the social work profession would lend itself to cooperative ventures, provided that social work professionals are given the proper set of skills. In Canada, interdisciplinary partnerships of this type already exist among schools of social work. One participant in this study is a current faculty member of such a program. This researcher assumes that similar partnerships exist in other parts of the world as well. In this respect, American schools of social work seem to be behind the curve. Therefore, a formal investigation of this subject would be another welcome addition to social work literature.

### **Implications for Social Work Practice**

Based on the findings of this research, it is reasonable to assume that worker-owned cooperatives may lie within the scope of social work practice. Therefore, it stands to reason that social work education programs should at least consider developing course materials and hands-on experience for students interested in pursuing cooperatives. The respective histories of these fields reveal a mission rooted in the pursuit of social justice, individual and community empowerment, and a desire to promote the general welfare. Interdisciplinary partnerships (which include the aid

of cooperative community members), cooperative field placements (although limited at this time) and course content designed to fit social work practice, could serve as a starting point in social work education. One successful pilot project could potentially inspire changes in social work curricula regionally, or even nationally. If student exposure to cooperatives became commonplace in social work education, the researcher is confident that more members of the social work community would pursue cooperative ventures upon graduation.

The prevalence of hierarchies within social work institutions should also give social workers pause for reflection. Since cooperative structures are more aligned with social work ideals, why are hierarchies the predominant way of organizing social work institutions? More importantly, why *must* they be? Surely there must be instances where social work hierarchies fail to legitimate themselves. This researcher believes that if social workers are to stand any chance of effecting positive change through the use of cooperatives, they would be wise to begin with their own institutions. In order to be true to the rhetoric of what the profession of social work stands for, it is imperative that non-oppressive models be sought after and implemented. Mere condemnation of hierarchies will not suffice. Critics of this line of thinking may point to the need for certain social work institutions to use coercion (Child Protective Services, for example). The researcher does not negate this fact. It is true that social workers sometimes face situations where hierarchies, executive decisions and coercion are unavoidable. Nevertheless, it seems that the elimination, or at least minimization, of hierarchies within most social work agencies would be

feasible. The rejection of hierarchies at the outset is perhaps the most efficient way to eliminate them. Rather than taking the traditional route of changing systems from within, social workers could instead begin with a cooperative model that would require no alteration. In order for this new pattern to become a reality, it is crucial that social workers be equipped with the proper skill sets needed for cooperative development and maintenance. As mentioned earlier, exposure to cooperatives in social work education is one component. Alliances between respective trade unions may be another appropriate starting point, as participants suggested, in an effort to establish interdisciplinary partnerships.

The increasing number of social workers gravitating toward psychotherapy and private practice, and away from macro issues, is obviously a complex problem. The implications of this trend are no less complicated. This researcher contends, as do Soifer and Resnick (1993), that a major consequence of this trend will be a wider chasm between private sector professionals seeking increased pay and autonomy, and alienated, defeated, and disempowered public sector employees. Like Soifer and Resnick (1993), this researcher posits that cooperative structures could serve to empower social workers, giving them far more control over their workplace environments. If Soifer and Resnick (1993) are correct in their assumption that shifts toward private practice are related to workers' loss of control in the workplace, the existence of cooperative structures in social service agencies may prevent further hemorrhaging of social workers involved in macro practice. One model that Soifer and Resnick (1993) propose is a "private practice collective" (p. 113), where groups

of social work professionals could practice within cooperative structures. This model, and models similar to it, have proven to be successful among a handful of social work cooperatives internationally, including the two examples provided in this study. Other variations, namely the social cooperative models of Italy, have the potential to be equally successful in the United States. But the gap in social work research must be closed first.

### **Implications for Social Work Policy**

As mentioned earlier, political support for cooperative ventures in the U.S. has been limited (Soifer & Resnick, 1993). However, the 2016 presidential race has been an exception to this rule. Vermont Senator and Presidential hopeful, Bernie Sanders, recently introduced his plan to support the development of worker-owned cooperatives. In 2014, Sanders introduced a bill that would provide funding to states via the Department of Labor for the purpose of creating and expanding cooperative development centers. These centers would exist to provide training and technical support for new cooperative businesses. A second bill would establish a U.S. cooperative bank, which would provide loans for prospective cooperative developers (Lynch, 2015). The size and scope of this legislation is a golden opportunity for social work professionals to publically show their support for cooperatives, initiate a dialogue with social work colleagues, and raise awareness among community members. Advocacy among cooperative allies will no doubt be a crucial component of the movement's future success.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One of the most significant limitations of this study is sample size. The nine participants selected for this study do not represent a typical sample showing all characteristics of the cooperative community. In an attempt to compensate for this weakness, the most well versed cooperative experts were sought after and recruited. Some of this study's more subtle limitations may be related to the researcher's obvious affinity for cooperatives.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Considering the small sample size of this study and the limited amount of social work literature devoted to this subject, similar exploratory studies are necessary. In addition to producing more narratives from within the cooperative community, it is also vital to hear from more members of the social work community. Initially, this researcher intended to interview an equal number of professionals from the social work and cooperative community, but ultimately experienced great difficulty in locating and interviewing social workers who had any knowledge of cooperatives.

For the sake of concision, the worker-owned cooperative model was the main focus of this study. But this model happens to be one of many cooperative structures and, based on the findings of this study, is not the only model that relates to social work practice. Several participants felt that the social cooperatives of Italy were worthy of investigation. This researcher agrees that social cooperatives are an important aspect of future social work research since they, too, have yet to be

thoroughly examined. Also, a detailed investigation of foreign social work programs that currently expose students to cooperatives would be invaluable. Studies of this kind could create an educational blueprint for U.S. social work programs. It could also serve to expedite the process of implementation and prevent American social work institutions from reinventing the wheel.

### **Conclusion**

It is difficult to predict the extent to which cooperatives will be a part of American social work practice going forward. Will cooperatives reach a tipping point in the social work community and flourish? Or will they continue to be one of profession's better kept secrets? Answers to these questions will likely depend on the social work community's collective willingness to consider viable alternatives to the status quo (like cooperatives), as well as the degree to which it continually re-assess its role in a system that both creates and perpetuates human tragedies. Modern day social workers have inherited the challenge of helping clients cope with the aftermath of an unprecedented global economic crisis that continues to unfold. And as always, social workers face the daily decision between gatekeeper and reformer. The passive acceptance of traditional structures, a sign of the former. The push for viable alternatives, an indication of the latter.

During the course of an interview, one of this study's participants happened to summarize this researcher's main reasons for investigating cooperatives. The participant's sentiments accurately reflect those of the researcher, and they are worth repeating:

...going forward, you need a way of offering people greater hope. I try and live my life pretty optimistically, but I will share with you that I am quite pessimistic about what our global economy offers people who are at risk. And if we don't work hard to take some control over our own destiny, then we will continue to recycle the same problems over and over. That's why I'm interested in creating a more cooperative economy. Obviously social workers care about these issues...so now it's a matter of applying that caring in a way that creates more permanent structures.

It is also worth noting that, upon completion of this study, one could not ignore the sense that each participant, in their own way, was an invaluable ally of the social work field. A common bond revealed itself through participants' choice of language, their concerns, their passion for people, and their desire to learn more about this particular subject. It is the sincere hope of this researcher that meaningful connections between social workers and members of the cooperative community will continue to develop.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Participant:

My name is Matt Scallion. I am a student in the Master of Social Program at California State University, Stanislaus. You are being asked to participate in a research study that is being done to fulfill requirements for a Master's degree in Social Work at CSU Stanislaus. We hope to learn more about the potential role(s) the field of social work might play in the advancement of worker-owned cooperatives. No monetary benefits or incentives will be offered to participants.

If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to participate in one face-to-face or telephone interview that will last approximately forty five minutes to an hour. The interview will be recorded with your permission in an effort to capture your responses accurately. The purpose of the interview is to explore your thoughts and feelings related to the social work field's involvement with worker-owned cooperatives. The sample size in this study is expected to be eight to ten participants.

There are no known risks to you for your participation in this study. It is possible that you will not benefit directly by participating in this study. The information collected will be protected from all inappropriate disclosure under the law. All data will be kept in a secure location. All findings in this study will be presented in aggregate and no individual names will be mentioned for the purpose of protecting participant identities. All notes will be shredded and recordings erased and destroyed one year after the completion of this study.

There is no cost to you beyond the time and effort required to complete the procedure described above. Your participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. You may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

If you agree to participate, please indicate this decision by signing below. If you have any questions about this research study please contact me, Matt Scallion, at mattscallion@gmail.com or my thesis advisor, Dr. Shradha Tibrewal at 209-667-3951. If you have any questions regarding your rights and participation as a research subject, please contact the Campus Compliance Officer by phone (209) 667-3794 or email IRBAdmin@csustan.edu.

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature and Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What is your understanding of the values that drive the social work profession? Would you say the goals or values are similar to worker-owned cooperatives?
2. Do you know of any social workers who engage with worker-owned cooperatives now? If so, in what capacity?
3. Do you believe that alliances between these two fields would be beneficial? Please explain how/how not?
4. Do you think the majority of cooperative members would view social workers as welcome allies?
5. How do people learn about worker-owned cooperatives currently?
6. Could social work education programs play a role? What role(s) could they play?
7. How could social work programs increase social workers' knowledge of cooperatives?
8. If given the opportunity to speak to a group of social work students or professionals, would you be willing to provide them with information about worker-owned cooperatives?