

## Union Commitment: Is There a Gender Gap?

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Volume 46, Number 3, 1991

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/050696ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/050696ar>

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### Publisher(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

### ISSN

0034-379X (print)

1703-8138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

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### Cite this article

Wetzel, K., Gallagher, D. G. & Soloshy, D. E. (1991). Union Commitment: Is There a Gender Gap? *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 46(3), 564–583.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/050696ar>

### Article abstract

In the context of the growing feminization of membership in Canadian labour unions, this study examines the relationship between gender and multiple dimensions of worker commitment to the union organization. Based upon survey responses from 223 female and 222 male union members in Saskatchewan, the results reveal no gender differences with regard to expressed levels of union "loyalty" and "responsibility to the union". However, a small but significantly lower level of "willingness to work for the union" was expressed by female union members. In comparative analyses of males and females, the results are generally supportive of greater commonality than differences in the correlates of union commitment for men and women.

# *Union Commitment*

## *Is There a Gender Gap?*

**Kurt Wetzel**  
**Daniel G. Gallagher**  
**and**  
**Donna E. Soloshy**

*In the context of the growing feminization of membership in Canadian labour unions, this study examines the relationship between gender and multiple dimensions of worker commitment to the union organization. Based upon survey responses from 223 female and 222 male union members in Saskatchewan, the results reveal no gender differences with regard to expressed levels of union "loyalty" and "responsibility to the union". However, a small but significantly lower level of "willingness to work for the union" was expressed by female union members. In comparative analyses of males and females, the results are generally supportive of greater commonality than differences in the correlates of union commitment for men and women.*

During the past few decades, the gender composition of the Canadian labour force has been sharply reshaped by women entering and remaining in paid employment. Between 1970 and 1988, the female labour force participation rate rose from 38,6 percent to 57,4 percent (Kumar and Coates 1989; Statistics Canada 1989). Unions have become more adept at organizing working women. For example, an increasing share of the female work

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\*\* The authors gratefully acknowledge the financial support provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and the Saskatchewan Health Research Board. Assistance provided by Pradeep Kumar, Queen's University, concerning labour force and unionization data is appreciated.

force belongs to unions. In 1970, 21,5 percent of the women and 39,6 percent of the men in the labour force were unionized. By 1986, the most recent year for which data are available, these percentages had changed to 28,7 percent for women and 38,9 percent for male workers (Kumar and Coates 1989). Within organized labour, the proportion of female membership increased from 23,5 percent in 1970 to 37,2 percent in 1987 (Kumar and Coates 1989; Statistics Canada 1989).

A good deal of recent research activity has addressed the propensity of women to join unions (e.g. Antos, Chandler and Mellow 1980; Fiorito and Greer 1986; Kumar and Cowan 1989; Leigh and Hills 1987) as well as the particular challenges which the increasing feminization of the work force presents for union organizers (Goldberg 1983; Needleman and Tanner 1987; Marchak 1973; Moore 1986; White 1980).

A related, but less pursued, line of inquiry concerns differences in union-related attitudes and behaviors of female members compared to their male union colleagues. Benson and Griffin (1988) note that relatively little research attention has been paid to micro level gender based differences in union participation and priorities. However, in recent years, considerable behavioral research has been directed to the identification and measurement of correlates of union member commitment to the representing union (e.g. Barling and Fullagar 1989; Fukami and Larson 1984; Fields and Thacker 1989; Gallagher and Wetzel 1989; Fullagar and Barling 1987; Gordon, Philpot, Burt, Thompson and Spiller 1980; Magenau and Martin 1985; Martin, Magenau and Peterson 1986; Sherer and Morishima 1989).

As noted in the path breaking work of Gordon et al. (1980), the fundamental importance of union commitment rests in the fact that the ability of unions to attain their goals is generally based on the members' loyalty, belief in the objectives of organized labour, and willingness to perform voluntary services for the union. It is also argued by Gordon et al. that member commitment is part of the very fabric of unions since membership commitment influences the strength of a union which, in turn, affects the union's power to impose internal sanctions and bargain externally. As further suggested by Fullagar and Barling (1987), the understanding of union commitment can provide useful information about the psychological processes related to unionization and union effectiveness. As has been implied by many studies on the topic of union commitment, membership commitment itself may be shaped by a variety of factors both internal and external to the union organization (Gallagher and Clark 1989).

In the context of the growing level of female membership in Canadian unions, this study attempts to determine the extent to which gender relates

to local union members' commitment to their unions. In particular, the study will examine the question as to whether or not female union members are as committed to their local unions as their male counterparts.

The study will also seek to ascertain the extent to which factors which have been commonly associated with union commitment are common for both male and female members. If the results show that the correlates of union commitment are different for the sexes, it might be advisable for unions to consider adjusting the ways in which they relate to their members by adopting gender-specific commitment-building strategies.

### **GENDER AND UNION COMMITMENT**

There is no consensus in the literature which clearly suggests the likely relationship between gender and union commitment. The issue may be confounded by the possible correlation of gender with other determinants of union attitudes and behaviors (Antos et al. 1980; Fiorito and Greer 1986).

It had been argued that women are less committed to unions due to the nature of their attachment to the labour force. More specifically, women have been viewed as being less interested in unions because of the transitory nature of female attachment to the work force, their secondary employment status, and their family obligations (Blum 1971; Antos et al. 1980; Moore 1986). Anticipation of a future domestic role has been used as a basis to suggest that women have treated work force attachment as a temporary endeavor and a less central life concern (White 1980). Therefore, in an expectancy-value context, female workers may perceive less benefit in union membership than do male workers. Unions' lack of appeal for women may also stem, in part, from unions' history of being male dominated institutions which discriminated against women (Fiorito and Greer 1986).

Such observations concerning the work-related orientation of female workers has been used, in conjunction with structural variables, to explain their relatively lower rates of unionization compared to men (Antos et al. 1980). Extrapolating from this, one might conclude that, even where women are organized, they would be less committed than men to their unions.

According to Marchak (1973), the assertion that women are loosely attached to the labour force and career has become less relevant. For economic and professional reasons, women are more interested in and committed to their jobs. The need and desire for unions to represent their long term interests has become increasingly important. From an expectancy

theory perspective, it may be argued that as work force attachment increases for women, the expected value of union membership will rise.

Union commitment among women may also be increased by the fact that the wage effect associated with unionization is more pronounced for women than men (Freeman and Medoff 1984). The beneficial consequences of collective bargaining efforts may be more apparent to women.

In a discussion of commitment to work organizations, Grusky (1966) observes that because women must overcome more entry barriers, organizational membership and status becomes more important once attained. Extending this logic, women's commitment to unions may be stronger where they perceive the union as a vehicle for achieving goals and protecting gains.

While gender may be related to union commitment, the relationship between gender and commitment may not be all revealing. Rather than simply being a function of gender, there is evidence to indicate that a gender difference on union commitment might reflect differences in the job, occupational characteristics, and non-work demands placed upon men and women. Fiorito and Greer (1986) suggest that many union-related attitudes associated with women may be incorrectly attributed to gender. In fact, they are more a function of occupational and industrial status. Hence, differences in union memberships' preferences and levels of commitment which appear to be a function of gender, decline drastically when the relative effect of occupation and industry are explained (Kumar and Cowan 1989).

The effect of sex on union-related behaviors and attitudes may be less reflective of gender *per se*, than a function of gender-role conflict which women experience (Chusmir 1982; Fullagar and Barling 1987). Fullagar and Barling (1987) conclude that family commitments are more likely to be a barrier to participation in union activities for women than men. Gender may be a "marker" variable for other work and non-work factors upon which the genders tend to be differentiated in the work force.

A number of studies have addressed the relationship between gender and union commitment. In most of these, the focus upon the relationship between gender and commitment has been tangential. Gender has been inserted into commitment models as a demographic control variable rather than the focus of research attention. Moreover, research findings on the gender/union commitment relationship have been mixed, depending upon the measure(s) of union commitment that have been utilized and the nature of the sample.

For the purpose of measuring member commitment to his/her union, researchers have utilized scales which originate from work on the measurement of commitment to employer organizations (Porter, Steers, Mowday and Boulian 1974). Many union commitment studies use some form of the multidimensional union commitment measure developed by Gordon et al. (1980). This scale characterizes union commitment along four dimensions: union loyalty; responsibility to the union; willingness to work for the union; and general belief in unionism. According to Gordon et al., the loyalty dimension of union commitment is reflective of the individual member's pride in the union and awareness of the benefits accruing to the individual as a result of union membership. Responsibility to the union is characterized by Gordon et al. as representative of the member's degree of willingness to fulfill the day-to-day obligations and duties of a member in order to protect the interests of the union. The third dimension, willingness to work for the union, is defined by Gordon et al. as a measure of the member's propensity to do special work on behalf of the union (i.e., expend extra effort in the service of the union). In recent years, a number of studies have addressed the dimensionality of the Gordon et al. measure of union commitment (Friedman and Harvey 1986; Fullagar 1986; Thacker, Fields and Tetrick 1989). Friedman and Harvey (1986) have argued for a more parsimonious representation of the dimensionality of union commitment. In particular, Friedman and Harvey contend that the Gordon et al. measures are representative of only two dimensions: union attitudes and opinions, and pronoun behavioral intentions (a combination of responsibility to the union and willingness to work for the union). However, a more recent work by Thacker, Fields and Tetrick has tended to confirm the dimensionality argued by Gordon et al. that the dimensions of responsibility to the union and willingness to work are, in fact, both distinct from each other and the dimensions of union loyalty and general belief in unions. Collectively, these studies tend to suggest that responsibility to the union and willingness to work are differentiated by the degree of extra effort which is required in terms of union support. Despite these discussions concerning the dimensionality of the Gordon et al. measure, most existing research on the topic of union commitment utilizes some form of this scale, or similar items derived from the Porter et al. (1974) organizational commitment questionnaire (OCQ).

Using an abbreviated version of the union loyalty dimension developed by Gordon et al. (1980), Sherer and Morishima (1989) found that, within a sample of airline industry employees, gender was significantly related to reported levels of union commitment. When controlling for other demographic, job, and union-related variables, female gender emerged positively associated with overall union loyalty. Martin, Magenau, and

Peterson (1986) found a similar gender effect among union stewards but no gender difference in union commitment among rank and file union members (Magenau and Martin 1985).

Utilizing multiple measures of union commitment, Gordon et al. (1980) found gender to be differentially correlated with three measures of union commitment within a sample of nonprofessional white collar workers. On the union loyalty dimension, women were found to have higher levels of commitment than men. However, males indicated greater levels of responsibility to the union and willingness to work for the union. These mixed gender findings were partly attributed to possible non-work barriers to behavioral participation which might be more problematic for women than men.

In a study of communication industry workers, Thacker and Fields (1986) also found that, on the commitment dimensions of willingness to work for the union and responsibility to the union, men had significantly higher levels of commitment than female members. However, unlike Gordon et al.'s (1980) findings, their results showed that, in a multiple regression framework, male gender was positively and significantly associated with the attitudinal dimension of union loyalty. In contrast, Glick, Mirvis, and Harder (1977) found no gender effect associated with union members' expressed willingness to provide assistance or work for the union to which they belong.

Although the literature generally suggests that gender may be related to union commitment, the direction and magnitude of the effect is not consistent across the different dimensions of union commitment. Furthermore, to date, no study of union commitment has sought to determine whether union commitment of the sexes is shaped by common or different factors. The lack of investigation comparing factors which shape commitment for men and women is largely a result of the limited focus which gender has received in the union commitment research, outside of the common use of gender as a demographic control variable.

The objective of this research is to reexamine the relationship between gender and three specific dimensions of union commitment. In addition, the study will seek to determine whether union commitment is associated with similar or dissimilar variables for men and women members. If the study reveals gender differences, the findings might be useful for trade unions in developing strategies to improve their appeal to unorganized women as well as their effectiveness in representing current members. Unions' effectiveness in dealing with management could be also enhanced if they represent a more committed membership.

## RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS

Reflecting union commitment scale development work done by Gordon et al. (1980) and subsequent empirical investigations of its dimensionality (Friedman and Harvey 1986; Fullagar 1986; Thacker, Fields and Tetrick 1989), this study examines three specific forms of union commitment: Union Loyalty, Willingness to Work for the Union, and Responsibility to the Union.

The dimension of union loyalty is essentially representative of "passive" union support. Therefore, it is hypothesized that there will be no significant difference in the loyalty to the union of male and female union members.

In contrast, it is expected that if gender differences exist, they are likely to appear in the commitment measurements which are more representative of active behavioral intent or willingness to provide support. More specifically, it is speculated that women for reasons of possible role-conflicts between work and non-work responsibilities, are less able to commit to further potentially active role responsibilities than their male union counterparts. Additional role demands may be more problematic for women (Antos et al. 1980).

Two of Gordon et al.'s (1980) union commitment dimensions, "responsibility to the union" and "willingness to work for the union" are comprised of items which suggest varying degrees of "active" union member commitment. The primary focus of commitment in terms of "responsibility to the union" deals with issues associated with the member's willingness to protect union interests as part of the "regular" performance of the job (e.g. individual member responsibility for having management and workers live up to the terms of the collective agreement, alertness to information which may be useful to the union). By contrast, the "willingness to work" dimension of union commitment characterizes commitment as a readiness to engage in even more active support or participation on behalf of the union. As previously noted by Gordon et al., this dimension is more reflective of a member's willingness to work for the union above and beyond the normal call of duty (e.g., willingness to serve on union committees, run for union office, do special work for the union). Given consideration of the additional role demands which may be associated with female gender (Antos et al. 1980), it is anticipated that men are more likely than women to express higher levels of commitment for dimensions of commitment which are more active in content. It is further hypothesized that the most prominent male/female difference will be found



on the dimension of union commitment which involves the greatest potential expenditure of additional external role effort (i.e., "willingness to work for the union").

Based on the supposition that gender may serve as a "marker" variable for other job-related or demographic factors, it is hypothesized that the correlates of each dimension of union commitment may significantly differ between male and female workers. The strongest expectation is that variables which capture family responsibilities will be more significantly associated with union commitment for women than for men. It is also anticipated that the relationship between commitment and family responsibility variables for the genders will be more notably different as the level of active commitment increases (e.g. loyalty versus willingness to work).

Based on research by Fabiano and Adams (1980), it is also suggested that variables related to union socialization experiences will be more highly correlated with commitment for men than women. Those researchers contend that women identify less strongly with unions in part due to their lack of previous familiarity with unions through friends and coworkers.

In the absence of specific rationales to suggest otherwise, it is anticipated that other, frequently identified correlates of union commitment will equally relate to the commitment levels of both male and female union members.

## **METHOD**

### **Sample**

The sample utilized in this study was drawn from a large multi-union survey of Saskatchewan union members. The study was designed to assess worker commitment to both the union and employer organizations as well as to examine inter-relationships between commitment and other job and union experiences.

The survey questionnaire was mailed to the homes of 900 union members employed on a full-time basis in the retail and wholesale food sector and health care industry. Survey participants were randomly selected from the membership rosters of the representing unions.

Of the 595 full-time food sector employees surveyed, 275 responded, representing a response rate of 46,1 percent. Of the 305 full-time health care workers to whom questionnaires were distributed, 188 or 61,6 percent returned them complete.

Based on prior findings that there is considerable fluctuation in job attitude scores during the first year of employment (McCloskey and McCain 1987), only those respondents employed one year or more are included in the analysis. The total usable sample for this analysis consisted of 445 union members, 222 men and 223 women.

## Measures

### *Dependent Variables*

For this study, union commitment is measured using a shortened, seventeen-item version of the Gordon et al. (1980) union commitment instrument. Consistent with Gordon et al. (1980, 1984), the items were confirmed by factor analysis to fall into one of three dimensions of commitment. *Union Loyalty* (alpha = ,88) is comprised of seven items. It addresses the degree to which a member demonstrates a sense of pride in the union and awareness of its instrumentality in obtaining benefits. *Responsibility to the Union* (alpha = ,81) contains five items assessing the degree to which the member accepts union membership expectations and is willing to fulfill day-to-day membership obligations and duties to protect union interests. The third dimension, *Willingness to Work for the Union*, consists of five items (alpha = ,87) measuring member readiness to do special union work and expend extra effort in the service of the union. All three dimensions were scored on a five-point Likert scale, with a higher value indicating greater commitment.

### *Independent Variables*

Reflecting the research which has examined the correlates of union commitment, a number of independent variables were included in the study for the purposes of: 1) controlling for the influence of variables other than gender which may contribute to commitment and 2) to determine the degree to which these common correlates of union commitment differ according to gender. A number of the independent variables are also included to determine the extent to which certain gender "marker" variables have an independent effect on commitment, beyond the effect of gender per se.

The independent variables are classified into five groupings. *Gender*, the primary independent variable of interest is dichotomously coded (0 = male, 1 = female). The second category of variables consists of measures of personal (demographic) and job-related characteristics.

Included in this grouping are: *Age Group* which measures age on a categorical scale of five-year intervals beginning at age sixteen (1 = 16-20 years to 12 = over 70 years of age), *Education* which is measured on a six-point scale (1 = Grade 8 or less to 6 = University Graduate), *Children* which measures whether the respondent has children currently living at home (0 = no, 1 = yes), *Marital Status* which is a dichotomous variable (0 = single, 1 = married), and *Tenure* which measures the length of employment with the current employer, specified in months.

The third category of independent variables relates to respondent perceptions of their jobs as measured by two dimensions of job satisfaction. *Extrinsic Satisfaction* is a five-item scale ( $\alpha = .83$ ) measuring union member satisfaction with pay, benefits, job security, working conditions and opportunities for promotion. *Intrinsic Satisfaction* is a five-item assessment of worker satisfaction with intrinsic aspects of the job (i.e. sense of accomplishment, degree of challenge, personal growth —  $\alpha = .72$ ). Both satisfaction measures are based on a five-point Likert scale (1 = low to 5 = high).

The fourth category of independent variables draws heavily from the work of Gordon et al. (1980) which identified socialization experiences as fundamental determinants of union commitment. The possible effect of social influences were measured by three items. The first, *Friends' Attitudes*, measures the respondent's perception of the extent to which his/her friends are supportive of unions. *Co-Workers' Attitudes* measures the member's perception of the degree of union support found among his/her co-workers. The third measure of social influences is *Family Attitudes*, assessing the respondent's opinion of parental attitudes toward unionization. All three social influences variables were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly dislike to 5 = strongly support).

The final category of independent variables relates to the member's first year of membership in his/her union. Based on items developed by Gordon et al. (1980), *Early Experiences* is a six-item composite scale measuring the extent to which the respondent had experienced one or more favorable social interactions with other union members during the first year of membership, with scale values ranging from 0 = no positive interactions to 6 = extensive interaction. *Early Feelings* is a five-item scale assessing the extent to which the respondent formulated a favorable impression of the union during the first year of membership (Gordon et al. 1980). The responses were averaged across items and resulted in a five-point measure (1 = strong negative feelings to 5 = strong positive feelings) ( $\alpha = .75$ ).

## Procedure

For the purpose of contrasting male and female perceptions on each dimension of union commitment and the identified independent variables, a comparison of means test was performed. Second, examination of the relative effect of gender on the three commitment measures was conducted using standardized hierarchical multiple regression analysis. Finally, excluding the gender variable from the equation, the procedure was repeated for each gender group to determine the commonality of union commitment correlates. Moderated regression analysis was used to identify the statistical significance of any differences in the degree of association among regression coefficients and commitment measures between the genders<sup>1</sup>.

## RESULTS

A mean comparison of male and female respondents' union commitment on each of the three dimensions measured reveals some significant differences. As noted in Table 1, female union members have significantly higher levels of "union loyalty" than their male counterparts. These initial results also confirm previous research findings that commitment as expressed in terms of "willingness to work for the union" is significantly greater for male than female members. No difference between the two gender groups was observed in terms of "responsibility to the union".

Regarding the characteristics of this particular sample, the comparison of mean responses illustrate a modest number of differences between male and female members on the basis of demographic characteristics, job perceptions, and union socialization experiences.

The more extensive tests of gender-related differences in union commitment are presented in the three standardized multiple regressions analyses found in Table 2. The results indicate that, when controlling for the relative effect of other commonly identified correlates of union commitment, gender remains only significantly associated with the "willingness to work" dimension of union commitment. Men appear to have a higher expressed level of this more active form of commitment or behavioral intent.

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<sup>1</sup> A copy of the Inter-item correlation matrix is available upon request from Professor Kurt Wetzel, College of Commerce, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Sask., S7N 0W0

**Table 1**  
**Mean Comparisons of Male and Female Full-Time Workers**  
**(Mean Score, Standard Deviation)**

	<i>Male</i> ( <i>N</i> = 222)	<i>Female</i> ( <i>N</i> = 223)	<i>T-Value</i>
<b>Dependent Variables:</b>			
Union Loyalty	3,05 (,45)	3,15 (,41)	-2,49*
Responsibility to the Union	3,66 (,60)	3,68 (,57)	-0,35
Willingness to Work for Union	3,08 (,81)	2,93 (,81)	2,01*
<b>Personal and Job Tenure:</b>			
Age Group	4,73 (2,38)	5,43 (2,44)	-3,08**
Education	4,11 (1,12)	4,27 (1,43)	-1,26
Children	,55 (,50)	,46 (,49)	1,93
Marital Status	,73 (,45)	,69 (,46)	0,94
Tenure	120,46 (87,1)	122,85 (84,0)	-0,29
<b>Job Satisfaction:</b>			
Extrinsic Satisfaction	3,31 (,69)	3,36 (,69)	-0,74
Intrinsic Satisfaction	3,16 (,91)	3,35 (,90)	-2,26*
<b>Social Influences:</b>			
Friends' Attitudes	3,11 (,78)	3,17 (,87)	-0,77
Co-workers' Attitudes	3,33 (,99)	3,53 (,96)	-2,10*
Family Attitudes	3,08 (,96)	3,08 (,92)	-0,04
<b>Early Union Membership:</b>			
Early Experiences	1,84 (1,42)	1,62 (1,47)	1,59
Early Feelings	3,19 (,69)	3,30 (,63)	-1,77

\*\*\*  $p < ,001$  \*\*  $p < ,01$  \*  $p < ,05$

For all three dimensions, union commitment appears to be most strongly correlated with socialization experiences, both external and internal to the union organization. As indicated in the test of group effects at the bottom of Table 2, the results reveal that socialization experiences have a far greater impact on all three dimensions of union commitment than the effect associated with gender per se.

**Table 2**  
**Regression Analysis of Factors Related**  
**to Dimensions of Union Commitment**

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Dependent Variables</i>		
	<i>Union Loyalty</i>	<i>Responsibility to Union</i>	<i>Willingness to Work for Union</i>
Gender			
Gender	,051	-,011	-,138**
Personal and Job Tenure			
Age Group	,092*	,020	,104
Education	-,019	,021	,012
Children	,018	-,020	-,023
Marital Status	-,004	,014	-,022
Tenure	-,037	-,008	-,040
Job Satisfaction			
Extrinsic Satisfaction	,001	-,090	-,145***
Intrinsic Satisfaction	-,067	-,076	-,040
Social Influences			
Friends' Attitudes	,104**	,078	,058
Co-workers' Attitudes	,190***	,135**	,157**
Family Attitudes	,075*	,037	,092*
Early Union Membership			
Early Experience	,048	,146**	,129**
Early Feelings	,542***	,352***	,300***
R <sup>2</sup>	,56	,30	,29
R <sup>2</sup> adj	,55	,28	,27
Change in R <sup>2</sup>			
Gender	,014*	,000	,009*
Personal and Job Tenure	,080***	,033*	,033*
Job Satisfaction	,001	,008	,015*
Social Influences	,243***	,125***	,132***
Early Union Membership	,219***	,138***	,102***

N = 445

\* p < ,05

\*\* p < ,01

\*\*\* p < ,001

Table 3 reports the results of the within-gender analysis of union commitment correlates for each of the three dimensions. The findings reveal that demographic characteristics are not particularly important determinants of union commitment within separate samples of male and female union members. However, the results affirm the observation that, within both gender groups, socialization influences and feelings developed about the union in the first year of membership are significant correlates of union commitment. For women, co-workers' attitudes toward unions and the extent of positive union experiences during the first year of membership appear to be particularly important correlates of all three dimensions of union commitment.

**Table 3**  
**Regression Analysis of Factors Related**  
**to Dimensions of Union Commitment By Gender**

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Dependent Variables</i>					
	<i>Union Loyalty</i>		<i>Responsibility to Union</i>		<i>Willingness to Work for Union</i>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Personal and Job Tenure						
Age Group	,094	,083	,153	-,074 c	,239**	,026 c
Education	-,011	-,022	,016	-,030	,093	-,036 c
Children	,014	,024	,036	,016	,097	-,052
Marital Status	-,007	,001	-,105	,080 c	-,181*	,056 b
Tenure	-,051	-,021	-,110	,084	-,140	,070 c
Job Satisfaction						
Extrinsic Satisfaction	-,002	,002	-,140	-,050	-,130	-,202**
Intrinsic Satisfaction	-,062	-,074	-,051	-,061	-,03	,005
Social Influences						
Friends' Attitudes	,119*	,090	,068	,059	,095	-,020
Co-Workers' Attitudes	,178**	,210**	,054	,229** c	,105	,230**
Family Attitudes	,022	,127	,043	,028	,055	,125*
Early Union Membership						
Early Experiences	,011	,084	,150*	,173*	,117	,130
Early Feelings	,596***	,494***c	,386***	,299***	,313***	,279***
R <sup>2</sup>	,56	,53	,31	,34	,30	,32
R <sup>2</sup> adj	,55	,50	,27	,30	,26	,28
Change in R <sup>2</sup>						
Personal and Job Tenure	,078**	,103***	,039	,073**	,065*	,073**
Job Satisfaction	,001	,001	,014	,002	,012	,022
Social Influences	,253***	,232***	,098***	,149***	,118***	,139***
Early Union Membership	,244***	,195***	,159***	,119***	,103***	,090***

N (male) = 222

N (female) = 223

Significance of regression coefficient: \* p < ,05; \*\* p < ,01; \*\*\* p < ,001

Significance of difference between male and female coefficients: c p < ,05; b p < ,01

Although the results generally fail to indicate any strong differences in the correlates of union commitment between the two gender groups, a more detailed examination of the comparative size of the regression coefficients reveals some surprising results. More specifically, the demographic variables of age, marital status, and tenure are more strongly related to the commitment dimensions of "responsibility to the union" and "willingness to work for the union" for men.

Increased age is more likely to be associated with stronger commitment levels among men than among women. Tenure is more strongly related to the "responsibility" and "willingness to work" dimensions of commitment for men than women.

An interesting result emerged for the two groups regarding their respective relationships between marital status and the commitment dimensions of "responsibility to the union" and "willingness to work for the union". For the men, being married is more likely to be associated with reduced support in these more active forms of commitment.

Regarding other gender differences in the correlates of union commitment, the results suggest that "early feelings about the union" are more strongly associated with current "union loyalty" among the male members. Conversely, the influence of co-workers' positive union attitudes on "responsibility to the union" is greater for women than it is for men.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

In the context of the increasing feminization of union membership, the findings of this study suggest that gender is not a particularly prominent correlate of union member commitment to the local union organization. To a lesser extent than that indicated in prior union commitment research, this study reveals that gender relates to only one of the three commitment dimensions examined when controlling for the influence of other key commitment correlates. Although statistically significant, gender explains only one percent of the total variance in the "willingness to work" dimension of union commitment.

Beyond the main relationship between gender and union commitment, comparative analysis of the correlates of union commitment for male and female workers indicate only modest differences. These differences are most pronounced in the relationships between demographic variables (i.e. age, marital status) and the "willingness to work" dimension of union commitment.



This suggests that perhaps unions need not develop strategies to increase union support which are based on gender-specific commitment factors. Instead, the results point to the need and likely payoffs from more general efforts to build membership commitment.

Overall, the findings suggest that as women become more attached to the work force and increasingly represented by unions, their union-related attitudes are similar to those of the men. Earlier gender-related research concluded that women's weaker attachment to the labour force is associated with a lower interest in unionization. The results of this study suggest that as women's attachment to the labour force increases, not only does female union membership climb, but commitment to their unions strengthens.

For labour unions, these findings have particular relevance to rank-and-file commitment-building efforts. Among the variables found to be most associated with all three dimensions of union commitment are the members' perception of experiences and feelings developed toward the local union during the first year of membership. This finding has particular significance for union organizations in terms of the importance of creating an early positive impression by new members toward the local union. Unlike demographic or job characteristics variables over which local unions have little control, new member socialization represents a potential course of action and policy which unions can emphasize as a mechanism for building future support.

Although this study provides an extensive analysis of the relationship between gender and union commitment, it is limited by the experimental design. Due to the cross-sectional nature of the sample data, only the issue of association can be established. The question of causal relationship among many of the variables remains unanswered. In addition, concern may be raised over the generalization of these findings to other industries and geographic areas. Although the types of industries examined in this sample offer an advantage because of the proportionate mix of female and male members, the extent to which gender is associated with union commitment in other industries and where women are underrepresented in the work force is less certain.

As currently conceptualized, the constructs of union commitment do not address actual behaviors. Rather, they primarily focus on attitudes and behavioral intent. An extension of gender-related research regarding union membership into an examination of the relationship between gender and actual behavior may prove interesting. This issue merits more detailed analysis of the effect, if any, of gender.

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### *L'engagement syndical: y a-t-il des différences entre les hommes et les femmes?*

Au cours des dernières décennies, la composition de la main-d'oeuvre au Canada s'est nettement modifiée à cause de la croissance du pourcentage des femmes qui sont entrées et sont restées sur le marché du travail. Parallèlement à l'augmentation du taux de participation de la main-d'oeuvre féminine, les femmes en sont venues à former une part de plus en plus grande de l'effectif syndical. La présente étude veut aller au-delà de la question de la propension des femmes à adhérer aux syndicats et comparer leurs comportements et ceux des hommes dans leur engagement respectif envers l'organisation qui les représente. Fondé sur un échantillon de 223 femmes et de 222 hommes, membres d'un syndicat, qui travaillent dans le commerce de gros et de détail de produits alimentaires ainsi que dans le secteur de la santé en Saskatchewan, nous cherchons à découvrir si les syndiquées sont aussi engagées dans les organisations syndicales locales que leurs collègues de sexe masculin. Cette enquête vise aussi à établir dans quelle mesure les facteurs que l'on associe généralement à l'engagement syndical sont les mêmes pour les femmes et pour les hommes.

À partir des recherches antérieures touchant l'engagement syndical, nous en étudions ici trois dimensions spécifiques: 'la fidélité au syndicat', 'les obligations envers le syndicat' et 'la volonté de travailler pour le syndicat'. Nous avançons l'hypothèse que les différences entre les hommes et les femmes sont plus prononcées pour les formes d'engagement syndical qui requièrent un degré plus élevé d'action. En particulier, la plus grande divergence susceptible d'exister dans l'engagement syndical entre les sexes devrait se retrouver dans 'la volonté de travailler pour le syndicat' plutôt que dans la forme moins active des 'obligations' ou dans celle plus passive de 'la fidélité'.

La comparaison des tests de moyennes révèle que les syndiquées se sont déclarées, de façon significative, plus loyales envers le syndicat que leurs collègues masculins. Cependant, les hommes ont exprimé dans une plus grande proportion leur

intention de 'travailler' pour l'association syndicale locale. Aucune différence entre les employés des deux sexes quant aux 'obligations' envers le syndicat n'a été constatée. On a utilisé un modèle de régression multiple pour isoler l'influence de d'autres facteurs identifiés dans les recherches publiées sur l'engagement syndical. Les résultats révèlent que la variable sexe a un effet statistiquement significatif sur l'engagement syndical seulement pour la dimension 'volonté de travailler pour le syndicat'. Et bien que son effet soit significatif, cette variable n'explique qu'un pour cent de la variance totale pour ce qui a trait à cette dimension. Par ailleurs, l'analyse des autres facteurs associés à l'engagement syndical, tant pour les femmes que pour les hommes, n'indique qu'un écart minime.

En résumé, les résultats suggèrent que le sexe est tout au plus un facteur mineur dans la détermination de l'une des trois dimensions étudiées de l'engagement syndical. De plus, la plupart des facteurs qui concourent à l'engagement syndical sont partagés tant par les membres masculins que féminins des organisations syndicales locales. Par rapport aux politiques syndicales, ces résultats font particulièrement ressortir l'importance des efforts des syndicats en vue de socialiser les nouveaux membres dès le début de l'adhésion et de se préoccuper de leurs besoins, sans égard à leur sexe. Pour les deux groupes, les expériences de socialisation dès le commencement de la syndicalisation sont très liées au degré d'engagement personnel dans l'organisation syndicale locale.

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ISBN 2-7637-7246-3

1 volume, 1990, 176 pages, 21 \$

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