Preemployment Predictors of Children's Union Attitudes: The Moderating Role of Identification With Parents

E. KEVIN KELLOWAY  
Department of Psychology  
University of Guelph, Canada

JULIAN BARLING  
School of Business  
Queen's University, Canada

SHARON AGAR  
Department of Psychology  
Simon Fraser University, Canada

ATTITUDES TOWARD LABOR UNIONS fulfill a central role in the unionization process as predictors of diverse union-relevant criteria (Barling, Fullagar, & Kelloway, 1992). Barling, Kelloway, and Bremermann (1991) drew on Bandura's (1977) social learning theory to suggest that individuals develop attitudes toward unions in general as a result of a process of family socialization. In particular, they suggested that children develop their union attitudes through vicarious learning: As children see their parents become involved in union activities and talk about unions, they form their own attitudes toward labor organizations.

Subsequent research has largely supported this model. Kelloway and Watts (1994) used data from 87 student--parent pairs and found that the students' own union attitudes were predicted by their perceptions of their parents' union attitudes and involvement. Of note is the finding that the students' perceptions of their parents' attitudes and participation were significantly associated with the parents' self-reported attitudes and participation.

Barling et al. (1991) also suggested, but did not have results to support, the hypothesis that the effects of parental socialization are moderated by the gender...
of the student. In the present research, our purpose was to refine and reexamine this hypothesis. We suggest that in operationalizing “similarity” based on demographic variables, Barling et al. (1991) assumed that sons would identify with fathers and that daughters would identify with mothers. In the present study, we directly assessed the psychological identification of students with their mothers and fathers. In doing so, we hypothesized that the parents’ union involvement and union attitudes would be stronger predictors of the children’s attitudes when they identified strongly with the parents.

The participants were 1st-year psychology students (N = 267) at a Canadian university. They completed measures of their union attitudes (16 items, α = .89), their identification with their parents (4 items; mother: α = .88; father: α = .90), and their perceptions of parents’ union attitudes (8 items; mother: α = .80; father: α = .83) and union participation (5 items; mother: α = .80; father: α = .83). To test the proposed moderating effects, we followed the hierarchical regression strategy outlined by Aiken and West (1991). Separate analyses were conducted for each parent as well as for perceptions of parents’ union involvement and perceptions of parents’ union attitudes.

Three of the four interaction terms were significant. Perceptions of fathers’ union participation did not predict students’ union attitudes when identification with the father was low (β = .12, ns), but it did predict at medium (β = .27, p < .01) and high (β = .38, p < .01) levels of identification. Although perceptions of mothers’ union attitudes predicted students’ own attitudes when identification with the mother was low (β = .47, p < .01), the effect was stronger for medium (β = .61, p < .01) and high (β = .74, p < .01) levels of identification with mothers. Similarly, perceptions of fathers’ union attitudes predicted students’ union attitudes for low levels of identification with fathers (β = .58, p < .01). The effect was stronger for medium (β = .53, p < .01) and high (β = .70, p < .01) levels of identification with fathers.

These results offer strong support for our original hypotheses. In three of four cases, identification with parents moderated the relationship between perceptions of parents’ union involvement and union attitudes and the students’ own union attitudes. Taken with previous findings suggesting the accuracy of students’ perceptions of parents’ union involvement and attitudes (Kelloway & Watts, 1994), our current findings offer further support for the process of family socialization suggested by Barling et al. (1991).

REFERENCES

*Received June 9, 1995*