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## **To vote or not to vote: abstaining from voting in union representation elections**

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### **Summary**

We conducted two studies addressing abstaining from voting in union representation elections. In Study 1 of a faculty representation election, we showed that compared to voters abstainers possessed less extreme work and union attitudes, believed less in the ability of their vote to affect the election outcomes, and were less involved in the election (e.g., less interested, felt less responsibility to vote). To assess the practical utility of these findings, Study 2 used vignettes in a 2 (traditional bread-and-butter issues)  $\times$  2 (emerging issues related to fairness)  $\times$  2 (voting instrumentality)  $\times$  2 (responsibility to vote) experimental manipulation. Results showed that the likelihood of abstaining is reduced when efforts to emphasize the responsibility to vote are presented together with information on both traditional and emerging issues. The two studies show why people abstain from voting in union representation elections, and suggest how abstaining might be reduced. Conceptual implications, practical interventions and research directions raised by the two studies are discussed. Copyright © 2001 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

### **Introduction**

Union density in the American labour force fell from 22 per cent in 1980 to only 14 per cent in 1994 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1997). England also has experienced a decline in the percentage of unionized workers and both declines are attributed to a variety of causes, including greater employer efforts to oppose unionization, failing union organizing strategies, and right-wing government agendas (Goldfield, 1987; Lawler, 1990; Neumann and Rissman, 1984). Similarly, although it has maintained a 30 to 34 per cent union density throughout the 1980s and 1990s, continuing failures to organize the growing service sector may result in a drop in Canada's union density (Galarneau, 1996; Reshef, 1990). Not surprisingly, research is now addressing all aspects of union organizing, including union voting behaviour. One issue that has escaped empirical attention is why individuals choose to vote or abstain from voting in union representation elections, and we turn our attention to this issue in the current research.

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Abstaining from voting in a union representation election is a behaviour with critical consequences for unions, management, and workplace democracy. The outcome of representation elections is usually decided by small margins. Roomkin and Block (1981) suggested that as few as eight votes could alter the outcome of a typical American representation election and a recent representation election among university graduate students in Canada was decided by four votes, although there were 410 abstentions (Hepburn *et al.*, 1997). Despite such evidence, and continuing calls to study abstaining from voting (Barling *et al.*, 1992; Gordon *et al.*, 1995; Roomkin and Block, 1981; Summers *et al.*, 1986), research of individual voting behaviour has focused almost exclusively on the *direction* of individuals' votes (i.e., a vote in favour or a vote against union representation) rather than their decision of *whether* to vote or to abstain from voting. Even more telling, researchers usually restrict references to abstainers to a passing mention of their numbers, as they summarily exclude abstainers from any data analysis (e.g., Deshpande, 1995; Montgomery, 1989).

Perhaps one reason for the reluctance to examine abstaining from voting in union representation elections is that abstaining appears to be a non-behaviour. We argue that abstaining is a specific and conscious decision, with consequences for union and workplace democracy. Reluctance to study the decision to abstain also may stem from election-level study findings suggesting that unions are at a disadvantage if turnout increases (Becker and Miller, 1981; Delaney, 1981; Florkowski and Shuster, 1987). However, the statistical magnitude of these results are modest (Barling *et al.*, 1992), and some studies report no relationship between turnout and election outcome (e.g., Devinatz and Rich, 1993; Hurd and McElwain, 1988). In any event, as Barling *et al.* (1992) note, given their democratic ethos, unions should encourage individuals to participate in the vote. Thus, we investigated the predictors of abstaining from voting in union representation elections.

There are several literature reviews focusing on both real and hypothetical representation election contexts (e.g., Barling *et al.*, 1992; Fiorito *et al.*, 1986; Heneman and Sandver, 1983; Villa and Blum, 1996; Wheeler and McClendon, 1991). Most of the studies reviewed were conducted within the context of 'business unionism', wherein work factors are the focus of bargaining, rather than social issues. The majority of North American studies of the individual decision to vote in favour or against unionization explain their findings with a form of utility analysis or a rational calculation (Wheeler and McClendon, 1991) that is reminiscent of expectancy-value theory (Vroom, 1964). Individuals decide whether or not a union is capable of bringing about positive change and vote accordingly. Further, job dissatisfaction is often included either as a cognitive dissonance trigger of this calculation or as an additional factor that can lead to the decision to support union representation (Wheeler and McClendon, 1991). Therefore, individuals who are dissatisfied with their work, and who believe that a union will be instrumental in improving their workplace, will tend to vote in favour of unionization.

We propose to extend this logic to explain not only the decision of whether or not to vote in favour or against union representation but also to explain the decision of whether or not to vote at all. In Study 1, we investigate this decision in a group of university faculty members engaged in a union representation election. We expected to replicate and extend our findings from an earlier study (Hepburn *et al.*, 1997). In Study 2, we create vignette manipulations designed to test the practical merit of our Study 1 findings. We examine their impact on turnout in a hypothetical union representation election among a group of part-time academic workers.

## Study 1

Typically, the individual decision to vote in favour or against union representation involves a utility analysis: dissatisfied individuals who believe the union will be instrumental in bringing about valued

change will vote in favour of representation. In contrast, individuals who believe the union will have no such value will vote against representation. However, these studies seem only to address those individuals with either positive or negative opinions.

Hemmasi and Graf (1993) studied potential voters a few weeks prior to a faculty union representation election. Their analysis revealed a group with less polarized views. 'Undecided' faculty members expressed views about union instrumentality and job satisfaction that fell between decided voters in favour of representation and decided voters against representation. Those individuals who were not extreme in their views were uncertain about which way to vote. This study was conducted prior to any vote and, unlike voting studies wherein abstainers are traditionally removed, no individuals were dropped from the analysis. Therefore, we suggest that abstainers hold less extreme work and union attitudes than voters.

Support for this idea is apparent in the political voting literature. Turnout in political elections is typically lower than that in union representation elections (Bronfenbrenner and Juravich, 1995; Elections Canada, 2000; Federal Election Commission, 2000), perhaps due to the convenience of the union representation vote being cast in the workplace, and this low voter turnout has stimulated great interest in research on individual voting behaviour in political elections. One finding indicates that in the absence of any clear choice, voters in political elections do not vote. For example, when potential voters in an American presidential campaign were indifferent to the candidates they did not vote (Brody and Page, 1973). Those who perceived the candidates' views as equally distant from their own, regardless of the direction of that difference, were less likely to vote (Zipp, 1985). Further, as people perceived fewer differences between political parties' abilities to solve problems, they were less likely to vote (Southwell, 1985). In such instances, the cost of voting would not provide any benefits, as no one candidate is viewed as superior to another. It is possible that individuals who hold neither positive nor negative union attitudes see no significant change as a result of unionizing and therefore no benefit in voting.

In political elections, the importance of potential voters' perceived ability to cast the deciding vote, or their regret if they failed to vote in an election and theirs could have been the deciding vote, also have been discussed (for a review see Aldrich, 1993; Green and Shapiro, 1994). Given the sheer number of potential voters in a political election, it would be difficult to believe that a single vote could change the outcome. This is not the case in a union representation election: with the closeness of most union representation elections, and the relatively smaller number of potential voters, individuals could see the potential importance of their vote more readily. Thus, we extend the utility analysis to include an instrumentality judgement about the impact of any single vote. Individuals will choose not to vote if they do not believe their vote will have a real impact on the outcome of the representation election. In other words, abstainers will have lower voting instrumentality beliefs than voters.

We have provided some support for these ideas in a recent study with graduate student part-time academic workers (Hepburn *et al.*, 1997). Abstainers' views of work and the union fell between those of voters who voted in favour of representation and those who voted against representation. Further, the graduate students who abstained from voting reported voting instrumentality beliefs that were lower than that of voters'. Our questionnaire ended with a section inviting student commentary and, in general, these written comments reinforced the results: voters were extreme in their expression of pro- or anti-union sentiment, while abstainers rarely expressed an opinion on the topic. With respect to the voting instrumentality judgement, for the most part only those respondents who voted wrote in comments on how the votes were tallied and the subsequent importance of each vote.

Two trends in these informal written comments suggested areas for further study, both of which relate to individuals' levels of involvement in representation elections. First, abstainers spoke of not having enough information to make an informed decision and frequently indicated they had 'forgotten' to vote. In political elections, knowledge of the campaign (Gant, 1983; Ragsdale and Rusk, 1993), and

## Contextual Sidebar

### Canadian University

#### National

Canada has maintained a 30–34 per cent union density throughout the 1980s and 1990s. However, continuing failures to organize in the growing service sector is likely to result in a decline in Canada's union density. The rules governing the process of unionization in Canada are determined by the individual provinces. In the province where these studies were conducted, a union will be certified if more than 50 per cent of those turning out to vote vote in favour of union representation. In some Canadian provinces certification is granted only if more than 50 per cent of the potential bargaining unit vote in favour of unionization. In both studies a single union was seeking to represent the potential bargaining unit.

#### The faculty

Study 1 was conducted in the mid 1990s at a Canadian University. We surveyed university faculty about their voting behaviour in the days immediately following their union representation election. Primary election issues were faculty participation in decision making and salary concerns; many faculty believed they were losing power in decisions affecting the university and that they were underpaid compared to faculty at other universities. The election campaign was characterized by heated debate among the faculty, with some members expressing strong and vocal opposition to unionization. The union was certified with a small majority of faculty, 57 per cent voting in favour of union representation.

#### The graduate students

Study 2 was conducted in the late 1990s at the same Canadian University. Participants in this study were graduate student teaching and research assistants. We studied their intent to vote in a 'hypothetical' union representation election. Nonetheless, graduate students at the university were actively discussing unionization. Articles debating unionization had appeared in university newspapers and newsletters, and an informal meeting had been held with union organizers and unionized graduate students from other universities. Issues included working conditions and workload, as well as pay and job security in a time of increasing tuition and cost of living. It should be noted that this debate did result in a union representation election being held approximately one year following data collection for this study: The union was not certified, 59 per cent of voters voted against union representation.

having interest in politics and the campaign, both positively influence voter turnout (e.g., Fife-Schaw and Breakwell, 1990; Sigelman *et al.*, 1985; Traugott and Tucker, 1984). We suggest that voters would indicate that they have greater knowledge of and interest in the election than abstainers.

Second, abstainers frequently commented on the fact that they were soon to leave the university (e.g., they were graduating) and chose not to participate because the election outcome would not affect them. In this way, abstainers distanced themselves from the potential bargaining unit, no longer feeling responsibility to their peers and certainly not future students. However, voters were quick to comment on their feelings of responsibility to vote indicating that their current position gave them a right and responsibility to participate. Feelings of civic duty are related to voter turnout in political elections (Aldrich, 1993). In these instances the act of voting is itself instrumental in bringing about

reward – one has fulfilled a civic duty by voting. Thus, we predicted that voters will have stronger feelings of responsibility to vote than abstainers.

Our previous study had focused on part-time graduate students, leaving the question of the generalizability of the findings to await replication. Study 1 focuses on a faculty union the day after a representation election took place. We expected to replicate our findings to support our use of the utility calculation to explain abstaining from voting and our addition of voting instrumentality. Further, we extended this research area by investigating voters and abstainers' perceived levels of involvement in the election.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were 243 faculty members of a Canadian university (a response rate of 29 per cent). Sixty-four per cent were male, 29 per cent were female, and 7 per cent did not provide this information. They ranged in age from 28 to 66 years ( $M = 48.14$ ,  $SD = 8.73$ ), and they had been employed by the university between 1 and 35 years ( $M = 16.02$ ,  $SD = 9.83$ ). Seventy-four per cent of the participants indicated that they were tenured faculty.

Of the 243 participants, 205 voted in the election: 109 in favour of representation, and 96 against representation. Thirty participants indicated that they abstained from voting in the election. The remaining eight individuals did not provide the information necessary to make these distinctions and were excluded from subsequent analyses. Therefore, this sample had an 87 per cent voter turnout rate, predicting a union victory with 53 per cent of the vote. In the actual election, of the 910 faculty members eligible to vote, 730 did so (a turnout rate of 80 per cent) with 419 votes in favour of representation (a union victory with 57 per cent of the vote). We conducted two analyses to compare these proportions. Our sample's turnout rate was significantly higher than the actual election's turnout rate,  $\chi^2(1, N = 1145) = 6.14$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . However, the proportion of voters in favour and voters against representation in our sample did not significantly differ from that in the actual election,  $\chi^2(1, N = 935) = 1.16$  *n.s.*

### Procedure

One day following the representation election, faculty members whose names appeared in the university directory of academic programmes received a questionnaire via campus mail. Recipients who had been eligible to vote in the previous day's election were asked to complete the questionnaire and return it in an enclosed envelope through campus mail.

### Measures<sup>1</sup>

Reliabilities for all study measures appear in Table 1. Unless otherwise indicated, measures used a 7-point response scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) and scores were obtained by calculating the average of the responses to the items.

*Voting behaviour.* Participants were asked to indicate if they had voted in the recent representation election. Those who indicated that they had voted were asked if they had voted in favour or against unionization. Individuals indicating that they did not vote were asked if external events prevented them from voting (e.g., illness, or being out of town), and if they were in favour of, against, or undecided about unionization.

<sup>1</sup>Copies of all the questionnaires used in this study are available from the first author.

*Measures related to utility analysis.* We measured *decision-making satisfaction* by having respondents indicate their degree of satisfaction with the power and decision making structure, the way their workplace is managed, the way financial decisions are made, and their opportunities to influence university decision making. We measured *pay satisfaction* by having respondents indicate their degree of satisfaction with their salary, their salary compared with salaries of other faculty at the same university, and with the salaries of faculty at other universities. These items were adapted from Zalesny (1985). Items used a 7-point response scale (1 = extremely dissatisfied, 7 = extremely satisfied) and scores were obtained by calculating the average of responses to the items. Two items based on those used by Zalesny (1985) addressed respondents' *union attitudes* toward collective bargaining in academic institutions, namely 'Collective bargaining for faculty is consistent with my professional values' and 'Collective bargaining is an appropriate form of representation for academics'. To measure perceived *union instrumentality*, respondents indicated their agreement with the proposed union's ability to improve seven aspects of faculty employment: academic freedom, tenure procedures, salary, fringe benefits, relations between faculty and administration, faculty participation in university decision making procedures, and support systems. These items were based on those used by Bigoness and Tosi (1984).

*Voting instrumentality.* Three items developed by Hepburn *et al.* (1997) from Chacko's (1985) perceived union instrumentality scale assessed respondents' perceived voting instrumentality, for example 'Every vote in a representation election is critical'. This measure used a 7-point response scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) and scores were obtained by calculating the average of the responses to the items.

*Involvement.* Two items used by Hepburn *et al.* (1997) measured *interest* in the election, namely 'I was interested in the recent representation election', and 'The issues in the recent representation election were of concern to me'. Two items developed for this study measured *knowledge perceptions*: 'I was very familiar with the issues surrounding the recent representation election', and 'I had enough information to make an informed decision in the recent representation election'. Feelings of *responsibility to vote* were measured using four items developed for this study, for example 'Whether I agree with having a union or not, I had a civic responsibility to vote in the recent representation election'.

### Data analysis

Sixteen respondents indicated that they did not vote in the election because they were ill, out of town, or away from the university on sabbatical. These individuals did not have the choice of whether or not to vote, they were simply unable to vote. Most commented on their frustration at being unable to participate in the vote. Thus, as in Hepburn *et al.* (1997), only the remaining 14 abstainers were used in the subsequent analyses on the assumption that they were real abstainers, i.e., not voting was their choice.

The size of the abstainers group precluded the use of multivariate analyses. Thus, we conducted a series of one-way ANOVAs for each variable to determine between-group differences. Due to concerns that the small sample size may reduce statistical power (reducing the likelihood of significant differences) we included measures of effect sizes. Cohen (1977) suggests that an omega squared ( $\omega^2$ ) of 0.01 indicates a small effect size, 0.06 indicates a medium effect size, and 0.15 or greater indicates a large effect size.

### Results

Table 1 contains the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for all Study 1 measures. Thirteen of the 14 abstainers responded to the question 'Were you in favour of the union?' One responded 'Yes', five responded 'No', and seven indicated that they were undecided.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for all study 1 variables

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Pay satisfaction	3.80	1.61	(0.92)							
2. Decision-making satisfaction	3.81	1.38	0.54 <sup>‡</sup>	(0.90)						
3. Union attitudes	3.86	2.10	-0.38 <sup>‡</sup>	-0.52 <sup>‡</sup>	(0.96)					
4. Union instrumentality	3.81	1.48	-0.45 <sup>‡</sup>	-0.61 <sup>‡</sup>	0.80 <sup>‡</sup>	(0.91)				
5. Voting instrumentality	5.79	1.05	-0.03	-0.08	0.25 <sup>‡</sup>	0.18 <sup>†</sup>	(0.69)			
6. Interest in election	6.00	1.26	-0.07	-0.03	0.14 <sup>*</sup>	0.07	0.41 <sup>‡</sup>	(0.91)		
7. Knowledge of election	5.76	1.26	0.06	-0.05	0.04	-0.01	0.25 <sup>‡</sup>	0.49 <sup>‡</sup>	(0.87)	
8. Responsibility to vote	5.50	1.57	-0.03	0.02	0.05	0.06	0.57 <sup>‡</sup>	0.40 <sup>‡</sup>	0.26 <sup>‡</sup>	(0.89)

Note. Cronbach's alpha appears on diagonal in parentheses.

\* $p < 0.05$ ; <sup>†</sup> $p < 0.01$ ; <sup>‡</sup> $p < 0.001$ .

Table 2. Means and standard deviations of study 1 predictors separately for abstainers and voters

Variable	Abstainers		In favour		Against	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Pay satisfaction	3.90	1.19	3.24	1.41	4.43	1.65
Decision satisfaction	3.85	1.10	3.08	1.16	4.64	1.16
Union attitudes	2.61	1.39	5.44	1.39	2.23	1.39
Union instrumentality	3.30	1.19	4.98	0.73	2.56	1.01
Voting instrumentality	4.67	1.27	6.05	0.91	5.66	1.05
Interest in election	3.64	1.76	6.22	0.83	6.11	1.25
Knowledge of election	4.18	1.68	5.96	0.99	5.76	1.31
Responsibility to vote	3.20	1.89	5.62	1.32	5.69	1.54

Table 2 contains the means and standard deviations for those voting in favour of representation, those voting against representation, and those abstaining from voting<sup>2</sup>.

### Measures related to utility analysis

The ANOVAs for pay satisfaction,  $F(2, 214) = 15.75$ ,  $MSE = 2.27$ , decision making satisfaction,  $F(2, 216) = 46.14$ ,  $MSE = 1.34$ , attitudes toward faculty unions,  $F(2, 216) = 142.57$ ,  $MSE = 1.93$ , and union instrumentality beliefs,  $F(2, 215) = 187.02$ ,  $MSE = 0.80$ , were all significant,  $p < 0.001$ . Effect sizes ( $\omega^2$ ) were 0.12, 0.30, 0.56, and 0.63, respectively. In all instances, abstainers scored between those in favour of unionization and those against unionization. Newman-Keuls *post hoc* tests revealed that the three groups differed significantly from one another with respect to decision making satisfaction, and union instrumentality beliefs. Voters in favour of unionization differed from both abstainers and voters against representation in their attitudes toward faculty unions and pay satisfaction, but abstainers and voters against representation did not differ significantly from one another on these variables.

### Voting instrumentality

The ANOVA for voting instrumentality was significant,  $F(2, 215) = 13.42$ ,  $MSE = 1.00$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . The effect size ( $\omega^2$ ) was 0.10. Newman-Keuls *post hoc* tests showed that abstainers scored significantly lower than both types of voters on this variable. Also, those who voted in favour of

<sup>2</sup>All ANOVA results were confirmed using the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test.

representation believed significantly more in the instrumentality of their votes than those voters against representation.

### Involvement

The ANOVAs for interest in the election,  $F(2, 215) = 34.53$ ,  $MSE = 1.22$ , perceived knowledge of the election,  $F(2, 216) = 13.86$ ,  $MSE = 1.42$ ; and feelings of responsibility to vote,  $F(2, 215) = 18.63$ ,  $MSE = 2.12$ , were also significant,  $p < 0.001$ . Effect sizes ( $\omega^2$ ) were 0.24, 0.11, and 0.14, respectively. Newman-Keuls *post hoc* tests showed that abstainers scored significantly lower than both types of voters on these variables.

Correlations show that responsibility to vote was positively and significantly related to interest in the election and knowledge perceptions, as well as voting instrumentality. The variables in the utility analysis, pay and decision making satisfaction, attitudes toward faculty unions, and union instrumentality beliefs, are polarized in nature i.e., voters score at extremes. For example, those voting in favour of representation score high on union attitudes but those against representation score low on this variable. As such, we would not expect them to have a linear relationship with voting instrumentality or the involvement variables because all voters would be expected to score high on these variables regardless of the direction of their vote.

### Discussion

Abstainers have not been considered in past studies of union representation elections. We showed that a utility analysis, traditionally used solely to explain why people vote in favour or against representation, also can explain abstaining. We know that individuals decide to vote in favour of a union if they believe a union is able to bring about valued change and that they vote against a union if they believe the union is unable to bring about valued change. Further, individuals who vote in favour of unionization tend to be dissatisfied with their jobs. We proposed that those individuals who view the situation more neutrally, those who do not possess positive or negative views of unions and who are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their jobs, would choose not to vote. In Study 1, faculty who abstained from voting reported levels of satisfaction with pay and decision making, attitudes toward unions in academic institutions, and union instrumentality beliefs between that of voters in favour and voters against representation.

We extended the utility analysis to include voting instrumentality, the belief in how influential one's vote is to the outcome of the election. The findings of Study 1 supported our contention showing that voters believed more in the instrumentality of their vote to affect the outcome of an election than abstainers. Essentially, these findings allow us to generalize previous findings with part-time academic workers (Hepburn *et al.*, 1997) to another group of workers, university faculty.

As predicted, we also found that abstainers were less involved in the election in that they were less interested in the election than voters, they perceived themselves as being less knowledgeable of the election than voters, and they held weaker feelings of responsibility to vote than voters. Therefore, in sum, compared to voters, abstainers hold weaker attitudes about work and unions, and generally indicate less involvement in the election.

Such findings are consistent with an explanation that those with stronger opinions about unions simply will desire a greater involvement in the election, perhaps gather more information about it, and be more likely to vote. Alternatively, it is also consistent with the idea that gathering information may result in stronger opinions, and subsequent voting. It is possible that both processes occur.

Nonetheless, interpretations of the findings must be made with caution for two reasons—namely the small sample of abstainers, and the fact that the data were collected after the faculty voted. First, small

samples raise issues of statistical power and generalizability. Statistical power concerns usually manifest in a lack of significant findings, however, due to the large effect sizes, we found significant differences. Further, any distributional concerns related to the small sample of abstainers were not an issue, as we replicated our results using the Kruskal Wallis test, the equivalent non-parametric test. With respect to generalizability, we note that the size of the abstainer group and the voting patterns closely paralleled the situation in the population.

Second, we could not conduct a pre-vote survey due to political and legal concerns expressed by both university administration and union organizers, and our data were collected after the faculty had voted. Although questionnaires were distributed the day after the election and before the election results were released, abstainers may have rationalized their voting behaviour retrospectively in self-reporting their attitudes. Davy and Shipper (1993) found that job satisfaction and union instrumentality changed as a result of voting behaviour, perhaps as individuals justified their choice.

We have conducted a study using similar variables with undergraduates engaged in a student government election wherein we determined that prior to the actual vote undergraduates who ultimately abstained from voting expressed less interest and knowledge in the election, believed less in the instrumentality of their votes, and reported less feelings of responsibility to vote than those who voted (Hepburn and Barling, 1999 – unpublished manuscript). Despite the difference in the election context these findings help to alleviate some concerns.

## Study 2

We next turned our attention to whether or not our findings could inform union organizers and employers alike on how to increase voting. We conducted a second study in which we experimentally manipulated the utility analysis, voting instrumentality, and an aspect of general involvement in the election – responsibility to vote – in order to determine their impact on the likelihood of voting.

We delivered our manipulations in the form of a letter because letters and leaflets are a common and effective method of providing information during representation elections (Getman *et al.*, 1976; Walker and Lawler, 1986). Our participants were graduate student research and teaching assistants who, at the time this study was conducted, were informally discussing whether or not to begin the process of unionization.

We took a simple approach to manipulating both voting instrumentality and feelings of responsibility to vote. Based on the results from Study 1, voting instrumentality was manipulated by emphasizing the importance of every vote in a representation election. We provided students with information on how each and every vote could make a difference to the election outcome, by pointing out that in their jurisdiction no minimum turnout is required and that, typically, the margin of victory in representation elections is narrow. Feelings of responsibility to vote were manipulated by indicating that all members of the potential bargaining unit had a responsibility to peers and future students to vote.

It was a greater challenge to create a manipulation that would influence the utility analysis. In Study 1 we examined the utility analysis by measuring work and union attitudes, and established that individuals with more extreme attitudes were more likely to vote. Essentially, in representation campaigns union organizers and employers attempt to ‘sell’ their benefits to the potential bargaining unit, i.e., they attempt to influence employee opinion. As there is less research conducted on the union campaign, we took this opportunity to investigate strategies used by the union; we created our manipulation of the utility analysis by taking a pro-union stance and attempting to ‘sell’ the benefits of unionization.

Our participants represented a group of workers that unions are now attempting to secure as members, namely young part-time workers. As they likely will be entering professions that unions also are interested in representing, they provided an excellent group in which to study what issues should be addressed by unions during representation campaigns. Union organizers invariably raise awareness about job security, wages and fringe benefits (Barling *et al.*, 1992; Lynn and Brister, 1989). However, recent union efforts to gain membership in the growing service oriented industries have focussed on themes that go beyond those of traditional bread-and-butter issues, emphasizing respect, fairness, and greater participation in decision making (Crain, 1994; Green and Tilly, 1987). As part of her study on union organizing, Bronfenbrenner (1997) found that emphasizing at least one issue related to dignity, justice, discrimination, fairness, or input into service quality predicted union election victories: With all else held constant, the likelihood of a union victory rose by 15 per cent if the union emphasized such issues. Therefore, we created two parts for this manipulation: one involved the presentation of information on the *traditional* bread-and-butter issues and a second focused on *emerging* issues related to fairness and participation. This would allow us to investigate the relative importance of the two types of issues to the decision to vote.

In addition to the decision to vote we included two other outcome measures: union attitudes and interest in the election. Due to the more complex nature of the utility analysis manipulation, measuring union attitudes was necessary due to the need to determine if the campaign issues did as we intended and affected the utility analysis. As well, its inclusion allowed us to examine if our other manipulations, designed to affect the decision to vote, also would influence attitudes. Further, we expected that our graduate student participants would have had little personal experience with unions, and be relatively uninformed about them (Green and Tilly, 1987). As issues related to fairness and participation are only recently 'emerging', and young workers may be affected by popular cultures' often negative view of unions (see Gallagher, 1999 for a discussion), it is likely that unions that focus on issues beyond the dollar figures and benefits would be a surprise. As unions believe these issues are of importance to the increasing number of service-oriented occupational groups, and hope to win favour by raising such issues, we propose that addressing emerging issues will increase overall interest in the election. Therefore, we included a measure of an indicator of general involvement – interest in the election – a variable that was found to predict abstaining from voting in Study 1. As well, this would provide the opportunity to discover if our manipulation of one aspect of involvement in the election – feelings of responsibility to vote – would affect another involvement indicator – interest in the election.

In sum, our main purpose was to create three manipulations that would each positively influence voting: emphasize responsibility to vote; indicate the power of an individual vote, and have the union address issues of specific importance to the potential bargaining unit. Beyond this, we predicted a positive influence of campaign issues, especially emerging issues, on both union attitudes and interest in the election. Whether or not our manipulations interact with one another in their effects on the outcome variables needs to be determined. Our use of experimental vignette manipulations made it essential that the reliability of the vignettes be assessed (Mahoney, 1978). Consequently, we first conducted a reliability check of the experimental manipulation before embarking on Study 2.

### *Manipulation check*

We used a 2 (presence versus absence of traditional issues)  $\times$  2 (presence versus absence of emerging issues)  $\times$  2 (high versus low emphasis on voting instrumentality)  $\times$  2 (high versus low emphasis on responsibility to vote) completely crossed, between-subjects design. The resulting 16 possible combinations took the form of a letter and all levels of the manipulations appear in Appendix A.

Participants were 184 undergraduates; 25 per cent of whom were male. Their ages ranged from 18 to 50 years ( $M = 20.73$ ,  $SD = 2.87$ ). Each participant responded to one vignette. After reading the vignette participants were required to use a checklist to indicate which issues were presented in the letter and to indicate the degree to which they believed the vignette emphasized responsibility to vote and voting instrumentality.

Following Perdue and Summers (1986), we assessed both convergent (e.g., respondents reading the high responsibility condition rated the degree to which responsibility was emphasized as high) and divergent validity (e.g., respondents reading the high responsibility condition would not mistake it for any other manipulation, for example, they did not rate the degree to which voting instrumentality was emphasized as high). Each manipulation check indicator (i.e., number of traditional issues present, number of emerging issues present, responsibility to vote, voting instrumentality) was analysed with the full factorial ANOVA model.<sup>3</sup> Convergent validity was achieved. In each of the four analyses the main effect for the associated manipulation was significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). The indicators of divergent validity were also favourable. Significant relationships outside the predicted main effects may indicate a lack of divergent validity: in the four analyses only three of the remaining possible 56 relationships emerged significant. We examined these relationships and judged the manipulations to be acceptable.

## Method

### Participants

Full-time graduate students at a Canadian university participated in the main experiment ( $N = 271$ , a response rate of 20 per cent); 56 per cent were men, and 44 per cent were women. At the time of the study 52 per cent of students indicated that they were both research and teaching assistants, 35 per cent indicated that they were teaching assistants, 6 per cent of participants indicated that they were research assistants, and 7 per cent indicated that they currently did not hold either position. Forty-nine per cent were enrolled in Masters programmes; the remainder were in PhD programmes.

### Setting

At the time the data were collected, graduate students at the university were engaged in informal meetings to evaluate the merits of unionization. No formal steps toward an election had been taken. These individuals were asked whether or not they would vote *if* an election was held. The use of this hypothetical election approach is common in union representation election research (e.g., Deshpande and Fiorito, 1989; Hindman and Smith, 1993; Langford, 1994; Youngblood *et al.*, 1984), and our participants' concurrent interest in unionization adds considerably to the ecological validity of Study 2.<sup>4</sup>

### Materials

*Vignette.* Appendix A contains a copy of all manipulations presented in the vignette.

*Dependent measures.* Reliabilities appear in Table 5. Four items were generated to measure individuals' *intent to vote*, (e.g., 'I intend to vote in the representation election'). Students responded to these and all other items using a 7-point response format (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Four items similar to those in Study 2 were used to address *interest in the election* (e.g., 'I care about the outcome of the representation election'). *Attitudes toward unions* in an academic context

<sup>3</sup>Full results of the manipulation check can be obtained from the first author.

<sup>4</sup>Twelve months after the questionnaires were distributed, a vote was held. Thirty-one per cent of the potential bargaining unit abstained from voting. Of those students who voted, 41 per cent voted in favour of representation and 59 per cent voted against representation.

were addressed using three items similar to those in Study 1 (e.g., 'Collective bargaining for graduate student TAs is consistent with my professional values.'). These items were adapted from Zalesny (1985).

### Procedure

Full-time graduate students received a copy of our study materials through campus mail. Each student received their own copy of a letter requesting their participation, a vignette, and our questionnaire. The hypothetical nature of the representation election was indicated in the letter and both the letter of request and the instructions on the questionnaire asked students to read the vignette prior to completing the questionnaire. The vignettes were distributed randomly within departments. Respondents returned the questionnaires via campus mail. Random loss of subjects left 16 unbalanced cells ( $n$ 's ranged from 10 to 22).

### Analysis

We conducted a series of  $2$  (presence versus absence of traditional issues)  $\times 2$  (presence versus absence of emerging issues)  $\times 2$  (high versus low emphasis on voting instrumentality)  $\times 2$  (high versus low emphasis on responsibility to vote) factorial ANOVAs. Factorial MANOVAs were inappropriate due to the small number of participants per cell.

### Results

Table 3 contains the intercorrelations of each dependent measure, and Table 4 contains means and standard deviations of the dependent measures within each cell.

Due to the nature of the manipulation we could not avoid differences in the length of the vignettes. Accordingly, we first assessed whether the length of the individual vignettes (as indicated by the number of words) was associated with any of the dependent measures. No significant correlations emerged. All  $F$ -ratios are contained in Table 5.

### Intent to vote

The three-way interaction between traditional issues, emerging issues, and responsibility to vote was significant (see Figure 1). Analysis of the simple effects show that the interaction between emerging issues and responsibility to vote was significant when traditional issues were also presented,  $F(1, 253) = 7.37$ ,  $MSE = 1.60$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , but not significant when traditional issues were absent,  $F(1, 253) = 0.16$ ,  $MSE = 1.60$ ,  $ns$ . Emphasizing responsibility increased the intent to vote if both traditional issues and emerging issues were present, but emphasizing responsibility had no effect on voting intent when only one type of issue, or when no issues, were presented.

Table 3. Intercorrelations of the main experiment measures

Measures	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Intent to Vote	6.01	1.29	(0.86)			
2. Interest in election	5.30	1.26	0.72*	(0.87)		
3. Union attitudes	4.46	1.87	0.17†	0.28†	(0.94)	
4. Word length‡	249.67	65.09	0.06	0.05	-0.02	-

Note. Cronbach's alpha appears in parentheses on diagonal.

\* $p < 0.01$ ; † $p < 0.001$ .

‡Manipulations varied in length.

Table 4. Means and standard deviations of dependent measures as a function of traditional issues, emerging issues, voting instrumentality, and responsibility

Measure	Traditional issues						No traditional issues					
	Emerging issues			No emerging issues			Emerging issues			No emerging issues		
	High instrum		Low instrum		High instrum		High instrum		Low instrum		High instrum	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
<i>High responsibility</i>												
Intent to vote	6.54	0.70	6.37	0.79	5.51	1.62	6.33	1.05	5.93	1.06	6.27	1.15
Interest	5.95	0.94	5.61	0.84	5.08	1.43	5.82	1.07	5.39	1.28	5.17	1.40
Union attitude	5.09	1.61	4.87	1.62	4.85	1.54	4.69	1.89	4.52	1.89	3.83	1.92
<i>Low responsibility</i>												
Intent to vote	5.47	1.51	5.43	1.67	5.75	1.47	6.19	0.80	6.16	1.35	5.84	1.23
Interest	4.54	1.39	5.02	1.31	5.08	1.36	5.30	0.89	5.59	1.05	5.25	1.20
Union attitude	3.22	1.54	4.35	1.47	4.58	1.93	4.08	2.08	4.17	1.95	4.90	2.15

Note. Instrum = instrumentality.

Table 5. Analyses of variance for each dependent measure

Source	Intent to vote			Interest in election			Union attitudes		
	df	MS	F	p*	df	MS	F	df	p
Traditional issues (trad)	1	0.17	0.11		1	0.01	0.01	1	0.06
Emerging issues (emerging)	1	2.09	1.30		1	0.54	0.35	1	11.00
Instrumentality of vote (instrum)	1	0.16	0.10		1	1.74	1.12	1	7.77
Responsibility (resp)	1	6.63	4.14	0.043	1	7.12	4.57	1	9.08
Trad × emerging	1	1.95	1.22		1	1.11	0.71	1	3.93
Trad × instrum	1	6.27	3.92	0.049	1	0.77	0.49	1	5.28
Trad × resp	1	1.56	0.98		1	5.58	3.59	1	12.12
Emerging × instrum	1	1.15	0.72		1	0.09	0.06	1	0.19
Emerging × resp	1	2.99	1.86		1	5.89	3.78	1	17.87
Instrum × resp	1	0.47	0.29		1	2.26	1.45	1	0.85
Trad × emerging × instrum	1	3.47	2.17		1	1.68	1.08	1	7.17
Trad × emerging × resp	1	6.13	3.83	0.052	1	0.28	0.18	1	1.54
Trad × instrum × resp	1	1.50	0.93		1	0.81	0.52	1	1.19
Emerging × instrum × resp	1	0.56	0.35		1	4.25	2.73	1	8.27
Trad × emerging × instrum × resp	1	0.06	0.03		1	0.38	0.24	1	0.23
Error	253	1.60			254	1.56		252	3.39

Note. \* exact *p*-values are displayed for all effects significant at  $p < 0.10$ .

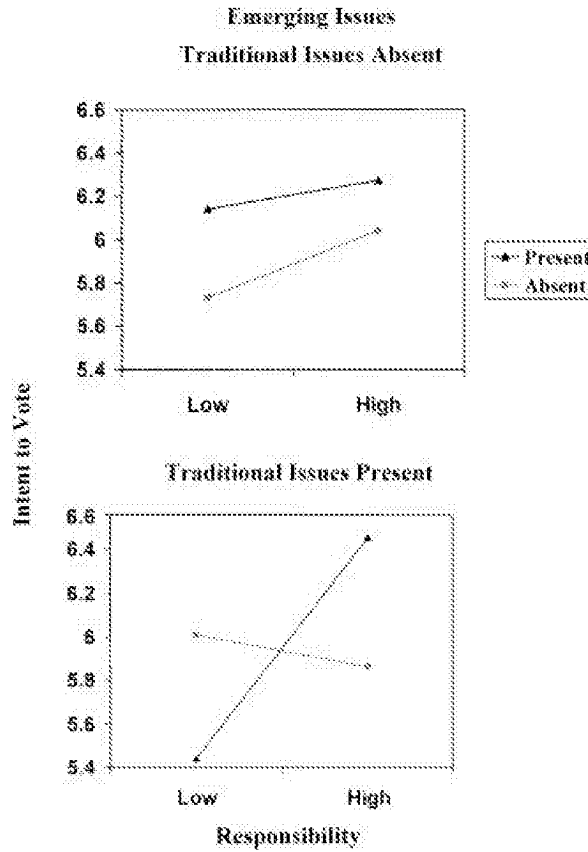


Figure 1. Mean intent to vote as a function of emerging issues, responsibility to vote, and traditional issues

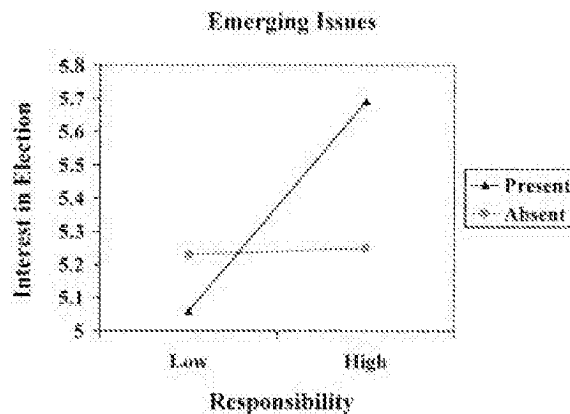


Figure 2. Mean interest in the election as a function of emerging issues and responsibility to vote

A significant two-way interaction also emerged between voting instrumentality and traditional issues. We analysed the simple main effects, i.e., effect of instrumentality in the presence or absence of traditional issues, but found neither to be significant,  $F(1, 253) = 1.05$ ,  $MSE = 1.60$ , *n.s.*,  $F(1, 253) = 1.91$ ,  $MSE = 1.60$ , *n.s.*, suggesting that this interaction could be artifactual.

### Interest in the election and union attitudes

A significant two-way interaction was yielded between emerging issues and responsibility to vote with respect to interest in the election and union attitudes (see Figure 2 for an example). We analysed the simple effects of these interactions. When emerging issues were presented, emphasizing the responsibility to vote significantly and positively influenced interest in the election,  $F(1, 254) = 8.61$ ,  $MSE = 1.56$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , and union attitudes,  $F(1, 252) = 7.48$ ,  $MSE = 3.39$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . In contrast, when emerging issues were not mentioned, felt responsibility to vote had no effect on interest in the election,  $F(1, 254) = 0.05$ ,  $MSE = 1.56$ , *n.s.*, or union attitudes  $F(1, 252) = 0.11$ ,  $MSE = 3.39$ , *n.s.*

The interaction between traditional issues and responsibility to vote also was statistically significant with respect to interest in the election and union attitudes. The simple effects were similar to the ones above. Emphasizing responsibility in the presence of traditional issues increased interest in the election,  $F(1, 254) = 7.46$ ,  $MSE = 1.56$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , and positively affected union attitudes,  $F(1, 252) = 6.12$ ,  $MSE = 3.39$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . However, in the absence of traditional issues, emphasizing responsibility had no effect on interest,  $F(1, 254) = 0.02$ ,  $MSE = 1.56$ , *n.s.*, or union attitudes  $F(1, 252) = 0.01$ ,  $MSE = 3.39$ , *n.s.*

### Discussion

Our second study was designed to assess whether the information gathered from prior research (e.g., Hepburn *et al.*, 1997) and Study 1 could be used to influence voting behaviour in union representation elections. The results of this study suggest that the findings may well have practical utility.

Our manipulations were designed so that each would be likely to raise the likelihood of voting; we emphasized responsibility to vote, voting instrumentality, and which issues the union had addressed that were thought to be important for the potential bargaining unit; we made no hypotheses regarding the potential interaction effects. In fact, the manipulations did interact in their effects on graduate students' intent to vote in the election. The intention to vote was positively affected by emphasizing responsibility in the presence of both types of issues. If neither traditional nor emerging issues were presented, there was no increase in voting intent.

We also investigated the impact of our manipulations on a measure of general involvement, interest in the election, as well as union attitudes because we expected our manipulation of union campaign issues to positively influence these variables. However, our manipulations interacted once again revealing that emphasizing responsibility to vote increased interest in the election and union attitudes when some form of issue was presented, either traditional or emerging issues, but not in their absence. In both cases the effect for emerging issues was stronger than the effect for traditional issues. In our study, providing evidence about the instrumentality of each students vote had no effect on any outcome variable.

We suggest that emphasizing responsibility was effective only in the presence of issues because the issues provided evidence of common ground for graduate students, regardless of departmental differences. In the presence of shared concerns and efforts to emphasize graduate students' mutual responsibilities we created more interest in the election and voting, as well as making unionization or collective bargaining more appealing. Despite the stronger effects for emerging issues (because traditional issues did play a role in influencing voting behaviour, interest, and union attitudes), ignoring the

traditional issues of salary and dental benefits in favour of emerging issues would be ill advised. However, we believe that the findings related to emerging issues are related to the nature of the sample – graduate students would be relatively unfamiliar with unionization, and likely would have had little personal exposure to unions. As such, informing students of the potential effectiveness of unions, especially with respect to emerging issues such as fairness and participation in decision making, may be critical in raising interest and intent to vote, as well as for the development of positive union attitudes, especially as such issues are the focus of recent Canadian faculty collective agreements (Wagar and Chisholm, 1995).

The fact that our results show our manipulations influence union attitudes seem to counter suggestions that work (Arvey *et al.*, 1989; Staw and Ross, 1985) and union attitudes (Getman *et al.*, 1976) are relatively stable. However, as we suggest that our graduate students were relatively naive about unions, we believe these findings add to the literature on the influences of the development of union attitudes rather than their stability. Our findings also add to Voos' (1983) earlier notion that union victories are related to the amount of resources expended. The change in behaviour required to ensure that people actually vote would require a major effort on the part of the union. Graduate students' intent to vote was only increased if they were made aware of their responsibility to vote, and the issues being considered were related to both emerging issues of work-related unfairness and bread-and-butter issues.

Emphasizing voting instrumentality had no effect on students' intent to vote despite its importance in Study 1. However, we would suggest that this construct merits further investigation because it is possible that our manipulation did not affect voting instrumentality beliefs. In our manipulation checks we determined that our three manipulations addressed what they were designed to address. We know that our manipulations successfully emphasized voting instrumentality, responsibility to vote, and specific campaign issues. However, we do not know that the manipulations affected individuals' actual beliefs in voting instrumentality or responsibility to vote. We had made this assumption. As such, we still need to determine if voting instrumentality beliefs can be manipulated by providing information on the importance of individual votes. Perhaps beliefs about voting instrumentality in political elections generalize to all voting behaviour and are difficult to overcome.

Several methodological issues related to Study 2 need to be considered. First, the response rate was rather low (20 per cent). Paradoxically, the ecological validity inherent in this study may have minimized the response rate. Some anti-union students expressed concern about a possible political agenda and declined participation. While it is possible that pro- and anti-union students' participation was affected equally, future research should address this issue. Second, we conducted this study within a 'hypothetical' election context. Our participants were not engaged in an actual unionization campaign. However, they were discussing unionizing. Thus, although the ecological validity makes it likely that the findings will generalize to part-time academic workers engaged in an actual unionization campaign, this remains to be tested. Third, the findings from Study 2 pertain directly to graduate students employed on a part-time basis. While our prior findings show that the predictors of abstaining generalize between part-time and full-time academic employees (e.g., Study 1 and Hepburn *et al.*, 1997), future research should assess whether these findings generalize to full-time employees. Further, we suggested that addressing emerging issues was effective because they appealed to the needs of our group of participants; however, the importance of addressing these issues for other employee groups such as traditionally unionized groups (e.g., blue-collar workers) remains to be assessed. Fourth, the nature of our manipulations made it impossible to keep the length of all the vignettes equal. Although we assessed statistically whether the length of each vignette was associated with the outcomes, and it was not, future researchers could attempt to construct neutral 'filler' material to make the vignette lengths equal. Fifth, it is possible, despite our requests, that respondents did not read the vignettes prior to completing the questionnaires. Future researchers may wish to replicate our findings in a laboratory

setting where greater controls are available. We chose to access students via campus mail believing that the ease of responding would increase the number of participants.

Two remaining methodological issues were common to both studies. The first is our exclusive reliance on self-report. The use of self-report data is often a concern (Spector, 1994), but several factors justify its use in our research. Research on voting in political elections has identified 'misreporters' or 'false voters', individuals who indicate that they did vote when in fact they did not (Granberg and Holmberg, 1991; Hill and Hurley, 1984; Presser and Traugott, 1992). However, while this possibility does exist in our research, it may have been minimized by our decision to include only 'true' abstainers. We provided the opportunity for individuals to explain their voting behaviour. Moreover, the presence of such individuals may bias any findings conservatively, minimizing the extent to which this process would be problematic. As well, in Study 1, the sample's voting behaviour closely paralleled that of the entire faculty in the actual election, enhancing the validity of our findings. In any event, representation elections are invariably conducted as secret ballots, and for this reason, it is doubtful whether objective data or archival records could be useful in such studies.

The final methodological issue concerns our election contexts. In each study we address a common election situation: a single union seeks to represent the potential bargaining unit. Further, in each case the decision to unionize was determined by those who turned out to vote. If more than 50 per cent of voters voted in favour of unionization, certification would be granted. However, it is possible for two or more unions to compete to represent the same bargaining unit. As well, in some jurisdictions (e.g., several Canadian provinces) certification is granted only if more than 50 per cent of the entire potential bargaining unit votes in favour of representation, i.e., the certification decision is made based on the majority of *eligible* voters, not *actual* voters. These different situations should be considered in future research of abstaining because, unlike our studies, the abstainers group may contain a number of anti-union employees.

When the certification decision is based on the majority of eligible voters, abstentions count as a vote against the union. Therefore, with respect to the election outcome, abstaining will accomplish the same task as turning out to vote against the union. Future research must recognize that in these cases a proportion of the abstainers' group are likely to be anti-union. It will be critical to determine if attitudes or beliefs can be used to differentiate several clusters of abstainers. We suspect that there would be a cluster of anti-union, job satisfied abstainers, and a cluster of abstainers with less extreme attitudes. Questions about why individuals would turn out to vote against the union should be asked. Do these individuals have strong feelings of responsibility to vote?

Abstainers in multi-union elections may also hold anti-union sentiments. We found only three studies that investigated behaviour at the individual level and they each provided some support for this suggestion. Two early studies addressed differences between non-union member employees and employee members of two competing unions, one union being acknowledged as less militant than the other. As both membership options involved some level of acceptance of collective bargaining it was not surprising that the non-members were more job satisfied, and less in favour of unionization than the members of either union (Martin, 1978; Walker and Lawler, 1979). The third study, examining actual voting behaviour in a multi-union election setting, found that those who abstained were like those who voted for a raiding union in that they did not support the incumbent union (Smith *et al.*, 1997). However, they were also like the incumbent union in that they did not believe in the instrumentality of the raiding union or support the raiding union. These findings could indicate a general anti-union sentiment held by the non-voters, but unfortunately, a measure of general union attitudes was not included in this study. Also unfortunate, the small number of voters indicating the 'no union' option were collapsed into the abstainer category after analyses including them as a category of their own were deemed 'unimpressive'.

In sum, these findings do suggest that abstainers in elections with more stringent rules or that involve multi-unions are likely to include a group of anti-union employees. Further, in the case of multi-union

elections, a study conducted at the election level alludes to the fact that voting instrumentality plays a role in the decision of whether or not to vote. Dworkin and Fain (1989) found that turnout was less in multi-union elections than in single union elections and that the number of voters turning out to vote against representation was reduced as the number of competing unions increase. They suggest that these findings indicate that anti-union employees are discouraged, believe that casting a ballot will not be worth the effort, and, therefore, choose not to vote. Thus, abstainers would include not only a group of anti-union employees, but anti-union employees with low voting instrumentality beliefs, providing another reason to not abandon this construct.

Several points related to the design of Study 2 can be used to direct future research of this nature. First, we used a letter or leaflet method of distribution, because it is frequently used in election campaigns (Getman *et al.*, 1976; Walker and Lawler, 1986), and was appropriate in this situation. However, written communications may not be the most effective way of raising familiarity with the campaign; Getman *et al.* (1976) found that union meetings were more effective, and our results may underestimate the potential effects of addressing issues to increase valence. A second issue relates to Getman *et al.*'s (1976) notion of selective attention, i.e., employer supporters screen out union information during a campaign, focusing only on the employers' perspective. Campaign effects may be strongest on undecided voters (Summers *et al.*, 1986). Thus, we believe all of our suggested strategies should be tested again in a group of undecided individuals. Third, we only focused on the union effort in a representation election. Lawler (1990) suggests that the actions of employers and unions interact during a campaign, and that employer tactics are influential. We believe future research should focus on the impact of both union and employer strategies on the utility analysis. This is important because employers often have an advantage over the union in disseminating information because of their control over the workplace.

## Conclusions

This research addressed a critical question invariably ignored by previous researchers, abstaining from voting in union representation elections. Two major conclusions can be derived from this research. First, individuals who choose to abstain from voting in union representation elections differ from those who vote. Their views of work and unionization are not as strong as those who vote and they do not believe their vote has as strong an influence on the election outcome. Abstainers also are less involved with the election (e.g., less interest, less perceived knowledge, feel little responsibility to vote). Second, these findings can be used to develop campaign strategies that affect the development of union attitudes as well as increase potential union members' intention to vote in the election and their interest in the election. Thus, this research presents a first step toward an understanding of the reasons for abstaining in representation elections, and ways in which voting behaviours can be affected during the course of a representation campaign.

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## Appendix A

### *Vignette manipulation*<sup>\*</sup>

Dear Fellow Graduate Student:

More than 40 per cent of the graduate student teaching and research assistants on campus signed certification cards indicating their support for a union representation election. The election will be held on April 29th and April 30th. It is this election that will determine if we form a union.

Traditional issues:

*Our annual pay of \$6000 is low for (name of province)<sup>†</sup> – tutors at (university name) can make twice as much as we do and have a dental plan. Tutors in one department work harder for less pay than those in a second department. We have no job security. Although some departments cannot fill their positions, other departments have students who want work, often need work, and have to go without it. As well, will the recent unionization of the faculty have a negative impact on our future teaching and research opportunities?*

Emerging issues:

*Concerns about fairness are often countered with 'you are lucky to have any teaching or research assignment'. We provide skilled services and should be treated with respect – individuals using the current grievance system frequently give up due to time and emotional exhaustion. We should be recognized for our abilities. We should have input into our teaching and research positions. As well, we need to explicitly address issues of discrimination (e.g., sexual harassment), and health and safety issues (e.g., office phones for students working late nights).*

I believe a union can help us address student concerns and protect student interests. Graduate students at other universities have unionized. Students at (list of universities) have unionized in recent years and the (university name) has been unionized for more than 20 years.

Voting instrumentality:

*All votes are important. Unions win or lose by small margins. In a recent (name of province) university graduate student representation election only 47 per cent of the students voted and the union won by only four votes! No minimum voter turnout is required. Every vote matters, yours could easily be the deciding one.*

Responsibility to vote:

*Please participate in this election. We have a responsibility to each other and to future graduate students to participate in an election affecting the future of our workplace. Anyone not voicing an opinion now should not complain in the future!*

Sincerely,

Chris Duncan

Graduate Student

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*Notes.*<sup>\*</sup> All text in italic represents high levels of a manipulation. Anything in regular text appeared in all versions of the manipulation. For both instrumentality to vote and responsibility the first sentence represents a low level of the manipulation. Issues were either present or absent. The variable titles are present for illustrative purposes only, they did not appear in actual manipulations. <sup>†</sup>Names of provinces and universities have been omitted to protect confidentiality.