Youth-Adult Differences in the Demand for Unionization: Are American, British, and Canadian Workers All That Different?*

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We examine demand for union membership amongst young and adult workers in Britain, Canada, and the United States. Using a model of representation advanced by Farber (1983, 2001) and Riddell (1993), we find that a majority of the union density differential between young and adult workers in all three countries is due to supply-side constraints rather than a lower desire for unionization by the young. This finding lends credence to two conjectures: first, tastes for collective representation do not differ substantially among workers (either by nationality or by age) and second, union representation can be fruitfully modeled as an experience-good. The experience-good properties of union membership explain the persistence of union density differentials (in this case between youth and adults) in the face of equal levels of desired representation.

I. Introduction

> *"Tastes neither change capriciously nor differ importantly between people. On this interpretation . . . the economist continues to search for differences in [constraints] to explain differences or changes in behavior"* Stigler and Becker (1977).

An important feature of many labor relations systems is the observed union density differential between adults and youth. Though it appears in a number of countries, it is especially striking in the Anglo-Saxon world. In particular, unionization rates for youths (those aged 15–24) are approximately one-third those of adult workers (those aged 25–65) in Canada and the United States, and one-half that of adults in Britain (Table 1). An important question is whether these differentials are reflective of a lower demand on the part of the young for collective action through unionization (i.e., a consequence of differing tastes) or the result of managerial opposition and ineffective recruitment drives (i.e., a consequence of differing constraints relative to older work-

Table 1

Percentage of Union Members in the Labor Force by Age Group: 1990–2000

	Canada, %		
Age Group	1990	1995	2000
1. All Employees	35.6	31.1	30.4
2. Adult (25+)	39.5	37.2	35.5
3. Youth (16–24)	17.5	10.7	12.6
4. Adult-Youth Gap (2–3)	22.0	26.5	22.9

	United States, %		
Age Group	1990	1995	2000
1. All Employees	15.8	14.1	13.5
2. Adult (25+)	19.0	16.8	15.9
3. Youth (16–24)	5.8	5.2	5.0
4. Adult-Youth Gap (2–3)	13.2	11.6	10.9

	Britain, %		
Age Group	1990	1995	2000
1. All Employees	43.0	36.0	33.0
2. Adult (25+)	48.0	43.0	37.0
3. Youth (16–24)	36.0	27.0	19.0
4. Adult-Youth Gap (2–3)	12.0	16.0	18.0

Sources: Information on union density rates for Canada was obtained from the *Labour Force Survey*, Statistics Canada and *Perspectives on Labour and Income*, Statistics Canada. Canadian data for 1995 contain the latest figures, which were for 1997. Information on union density rates for the U.S. was obtained from *Bureau of Labor Statistics*. Information on union density for Britain was obtained from the *British Social Attitudes* survey, various annual waves. British data for 2000 contain the latest figures available which were for 1998.

ers)? If the latter, utilizing youth in targeted membership campaigns can be an important rank-and-file organizing strategy for unions (Bronfenbrenner, 1997), or resistance strategy for employers.

Two pivotal assumptions are employed in order to distinguish between the "tastes" versus "constraints" based explanations above. First, we assume — in the spirit of neoclassical economic theory — that employees of all ages have the same underlying preferences (Stigler and Becker, 1977), but that the relative costs of acquiring membership differ between young and old workers. This similar-taste view of consumer theory implies that the total demand for union representation should be similar across all age groups. The divergence in effective demand (or the probability of being unionized) between the young and old can therefore be explained by either greater levels of frustrated demand for unionization amongst the young (under-representation) or greater levels of dissatisfaction amongst older unionized workers (over-representation). Put simply, if employees have the same underlying preferences, but large differentials exist in the likelihood of being unionized, one group of workers "isn't getting what it wants."

Second, we propose that it is frustrated demand amongst the young (under-representation rather than over-representation) that is the most likely cause of persistent union density differentials between the two groups. We base this assertion on a second assumption concerning the nature of unionization, which we argue can be fruitfully modeled as an experience-good. The experiential properties of unionization imply that some degree of prior knowledge and experience is required in order to gain representation. Workers with more labor market experience, all else equal, should therefore have an easier time acquiring union membership than those lacking such experience. Given that age and experience are strongly correlated, it is not surprising to find a large discrepancy in union density rates between youths and adults.

Three testable propositions emerge from the experiential model of unionization. First, since joining a union requires some degree of prior knowledge and experience, it should be more costly for employees lacking such qualities (the young) to gain workplace representation. This will be reflected in greater levels of frustrated demand for unionization amongst the young. The second proposition asserts that if informational impediments and opposition to union organizing impose greater membership costs for youth, a majority of the density differential can be ascribed to supply-side constraints and not to differences in demand. Our third and final proposition maintains that if tastes are indeed similar amongst workers, then estimating an equilibrium or potential union density rate — given data on actual union density and voting intentions of union and nonunion workers by age group — should yield a probability of being unionized that is statistically similar for both older and younger workers. These propositions are tested using data from Britain, Canada, and United States.

Section II outlines Farber and Krueger's (1993) queuing model of union representation and applies it to adult-youth union density differentials. Section III extends the model to incorporate the concept of experience-goods. Section IV describes adult-youth union density differentials in Britain, Canada, and the United States throughout the 1990s. Section V outlines our empirical model and derives the specific propositions to be tested. Section VI contains the empirical results, and Section VII concludes.

II. *Queuing Model Applied to Adult-Youth Union Membership Differences*

A useful framework for analyzing union density differentials and testing propositions regarding the effects of preferences and constraints in determining union membership is the queuing model of union representation, also known as the supply-and-demand framework of collective representation (Farber, 1982; Farber and Krueger, 1993; Riddell, 1993). In this model some workers may prefer unionization, but for various reasons, they are not able to fulfill that demand. The reasons for remaining nonunion, in spite of a willingness to be unionized, are multifaceted but are ultimately reducible to the fact that workplaces are costly to organize. However, once organized, they are likely to remain that way far into the future. This produces two sets of union membership costs and probabilities: (1) the cost and probability of entering a unionized environment and (2) the cost and probability of organizing a nonunion workplace.

Following Farber (2001), we denote the cost of organizing an unorganized workplace by C_n and the cost of taking a job in an already unionized establishment by C_e so that $C_n > C_e$. A worker will desire a unionized job when the perceived benefits V of unionization outweigh the costs $V_i > C_e$. However, workers will be willing to invest in organizing activity only when $V_i > C_n$. Since the actions of management influence whether a workplace will be easy or difficult to organize, the observable stock of union jobs is a function of more than just desired membership on the part of workers, since there will be workers who desire unionization but for whom the high cost of gaining workplace representation discourages their organizing. Formally, for these workers $C_e < V_i < C_n$, implying that there will be an excess supply of workers desiring a union job, resulting in frustrated demand for unionization and an implicit queue.

We extend the logic above by arguing that the cost of acquiring union membership is higher for young workers (denoted by superscript y) than for older workers (denoted by superscript o). This is partially due to the traditional reasons cited in the literature (e.g., unions tend to favor older workers and thus pour fewer resources into organizing the young) but more importantly because of the nature of union representation itself. If modeled from a consumer theory perspective — like any other product or service would be — union representation has properties of what in standard industrial economics is known as an "experience-good." The experiential properties of union membership serve to raise the costs of organizing a union C_n^y and of entering a unionized environment C_e^y for young workers as compared to older workers. Thus, two workers (one older and one younger) with equal expected benefits of unionization, $V_i^o = V_i^y$, may nevertheless display differing union status probabilities, $\Pr(U_i^o = 1) > \Pr(U_i^y = 1)$, simply because $C_n^y > C_n^o$ or $C_e^y > C_e^o$. Reasons why young workers find it more difficult to organize or be hired into a unionized environment are expanded upon in the next section, where we define more precisely experience-goods and their properties.

III. *Extending the Queuing Model: Union Membership As an Experience Good*

Diamond and Freeman (2001) have recently identified the "incumbency effect" as a major determinant of whether workers develop favorable or unfavorable attitudes towards unions. The authors hypothesize that workers tend to "like the workplaces that they have" rather than "select the workplace that they prefer," so long as their existing workplace meets a minimum level of acceptability in terms of working conditions and pay. The idea is that if an employee is exposed early-on to a unionized (nonunion) workplace that satisfies some positive threshold of acceptability, then that worker will be more likely to favor unionization (nonunionization) throughout their life-course than an otherwise similar worker lacking such exposure.

Another way of accounting for the Diamond and Freeman (2001) finding is to view union representation (or lack of representation) as an experience-good, i.e., a product or service whose characteristics and utility can only be fully assessed after "purchase." A key feature of experience goods is that consumers are more likely to "learn to like what they buy" than they are to "buy what they like" when purchasing such goods (Greer, 1992). That is, rather than forming an assessment of product qual-

ity after a rational process of sampling and search, consumers are more apt to stick with their first choice irrespective of prior rankings or objective information concerning a better quality good elsewhere. Unionization is similar in both these respects since the incumbency effect is broadly consistent with the post-purchase satisfaction results found in the consumer behavior literature and because many of the benefits of unionization — apart from the wage premium — are hard to observe *ex ante* (e.g., provision of "voice," protection from unjust dismissal, etc.).

Three implications relating to (1) informational asymmetries; (2) uncertainty and risk; and (3) attribution errors follow from the experience-good model of union membership. They are pertinent to our understanding of youth-adult union density differentials since each can help account for union density differentials between different groups of workers at the regional, occupational, and industry-wide level (Gomez and Gunderson, 2004). In our case, the three experiential properties affect age-based differentials in union membership by either lowering the perceived value of unionization (V) or by raising the costs of becoming a union member (C_e) or (C_n) for young workers.

Informational Asymmetries. According to information theory, greater promotional outlays should accompany the sale of experience-goods when compared to equivalently priced search-goods. Intuitively this makes sense since this is where product information should garner its highest returns. In one of the earliest tests of experience-good theory, advertising outlays did not conform to the expectations of the model. Porter (1974), for example, found that low-priced, frequently purchased "search-goods" received more than twice the advertising outlays than did experience-goods. This apparent anomaly can be reconciled with experience-good theory when one notes that consumers are more likely to be informed about the quality of an experience-good through word-of-mouth referrals than through paid advertising (Kotler, 2000).

Though a formal model of why word-of-mouth referrals are the preferred way to disseminate information about experience-goods is still largely unexplored, the implication for union membership is fairly straightforward. Since the value and quality of union representation can only be judged after "purchase" or through informal contacts, the needed social interactions and experience to make these evaluations are lacking for young workers. As such, though many young workers may have a positive desire for union representation, that desire may not be sufficiently large to outweigh a lack of information concerning the effects of union membership or be able to overcome the hurdles of an organizing drive imposed by managerial opposition (Gomez et al., 2002). Informational asymmetries, all else equal, generate higher costs of unionizing for young workers. Such costs would lower a young person's probability of acquiring union membership but not necessarily affect their latent demand for union representation.

Uncertainty and Risk. There is greater uncertainty associated with the purchase of experience-goods than equivalently priced search-goods since one cannot discern quality before purchase. Uncertainty here is to be distinguished from "risk." Risk perceptions deal with tolerances for mean-variance tradeoffs, whereas uncertainty refers to the absence of knowledge surrounding the expected value of a "project" (in this case

the payoff gained from unionization) and the volatility associated with those expectations. The degree of perceived uncertainty attached to the "purchase" of union membership may be a function of a worker's age. As exposure to union and nonunion environments increases with age, older workers are better able to select workplaces that fit their tolerance for risk and insurance and to gauge the effects of unionization if required to vote for representation. Thus, two workers with the same risk preferences may differ in their union status simply due to the uncertainty of the payoffs (and hence the greater costs) of joining or voting for a union.

   Attribution Error. As discussed above, studies of consumer behavior demonstrate that most individuals do not learn to buy what they like after random sampling, but instead learn to like what they buy without trial-and-error purchasing. This is especially true of experience-goods which often display higher than expected levels of "post-purchase" satisfaction (Greer, 1992). Such behavior is often termed "attribution error" because people rationalize their behavior after undertaking it, rather than engaging in a rational pre-purchase survey of options. This can occur even when consumers carefully weigh their choices before purchase. For example, if Bob thinks brands X, Y, and Z are equally attractive before purchase, his positive judgment of experience good Y, if selected, will rise after purchase merely because of its selection.

   Applying this logic to the persistence of low union density enclaves provides one potential explanation for historical or path dependent labor market processes. From the incumbency effect we know that being "born" into a nonunion workplace makes the chances of remaining nonunion much higher. This nonunion status can remain even if workers display a positive desire for representation, since the organization of a union is not costless, and workers often conform to the social custom of nonunionization (Booth, 1985). As most young workers today are employed in sites with little or no union presence (Figure 1), it is likely that a combination of incumbency or attribution error effects are at work. This could explain why high levels of frustrated demand for unionization amongst the young can co-exist with little or no successful organizing activity.

IV. Unions and Young Workers in the 1990s: Britain, Canada, and the United States

Union Density by Age Group. Table 1 highlights a steady decline in union density for adults (row 2) in the 1990s in Canada, the United States, and Britain, with the largest decline in absolute percentage point terms occurring in Britain. In all three countries, youths also experienced a decline in union density (row 3) and adults were more likely to be unionized than were youth, leading to a positive adult-youth density gap (row 4).

   As illustrated in Figure 2, in the United States the decline in unionization was greater for adults than for youths, so that the adult-youth differential declined throughout the 1990s. In Britain, the decline was greater for youths than for adults so the adult-youth differential increased. In Canada, the decline for youths was particularly large from 1990 to 1995 so that the adult-youth differential rose over that period, with the opposite pattern from 1995 to 2000.

Figure 1

Youth Employed in Establishments with a Recognized Union in Britain (percentage)
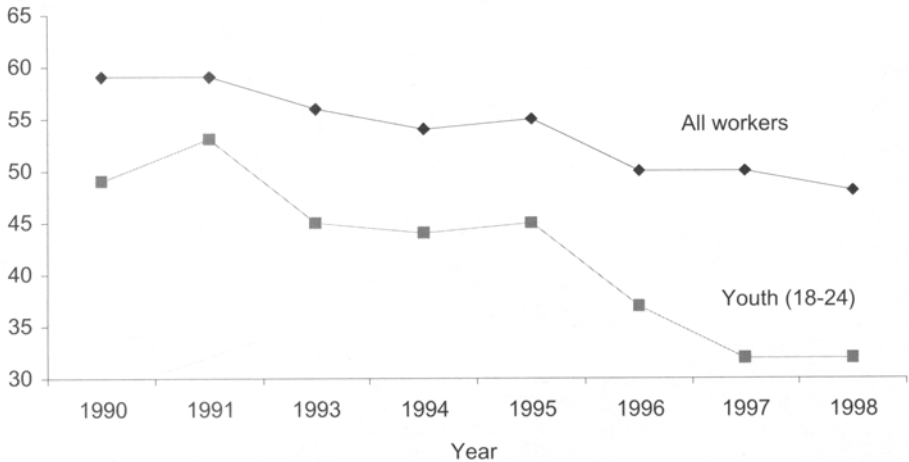
Data on Desired Union Membership. Our analysis of preferences for unioniza-tion in Canada and the United States utilizes the Lipset and Meltz (1997) survey of Canadian and American worker attitudes toward work, social policy, and unions. The Angus Reid Group, one of Canada's leading public opinion survey firms, administered the survey through telephone calls — averaging 20–26 minutes per respondent — in June and early July 1996. Both union and nonunion respondents were asked "All things considered, if you had a choice, would you personally prefer to belong to/remain in a labor union or not?" In Canada, youths were more interested in belonging to a union than were adults (57 versus 48 percent) while in the United States youths had a lower preference for unionization than did adults (47 versus 53 percent).

For Britain, we used two measures from the 1998 British Social Attitudes Sur-vey. For the first measure, employees in nonunionized (unionized) workplaces were asked: "Do you think that your workplace would be a better or worse place to work in if there was a (no) trade union/staff association, or would it make no difference?" Responses were coded along an ordinal scale from "a lot better" to "a lot worse." When employees say the presence of a union makes, or would make, the workplace "a lot better" or "a little better" to work in, this is treated as reflecting a positive desire for unionization.

The second measure of desire for unionization in BSA 1998 is a question asked of employees in workplaces without a union or staff association recognized by the employer. It asks: "If there were a trade union at your workplace, how likely or unlikely

Figure 2

Adult-Youth Union Density Differentials in the 1990s
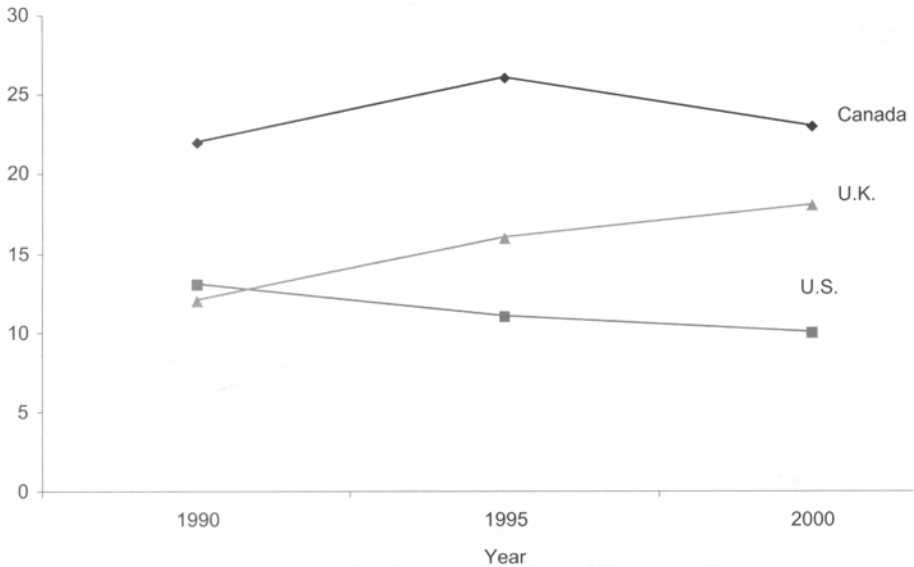
do you think you would be to join it?" Answers range from "very likely" to "not at all likely." Respondents with "very" and "somewhat" likely were coded as having a positive desire for unionization.

V. *The Empirical Model*

The queuing model of Section II depicted a fairly realistic portrait of union membership, where the potential or "total" demand for union jobs is defined by the fraction of workers who if unionized would remain so if a vote were held, or if nonunion, would vote for unionization at their workplace. The supply of union jobs relative to demand is measured in this model by the fraction of workers who are union members compared to those demanding union representation. If there were no queues for union jobs, the fraction would be one. To the extent that there are nonunion workers who prefer union representation, this fraction will be less than one. The fraction of individuals in the nonunion sector $U_i=0$ who would vote for unionisation at their workplace $D_i=1$ therefore constitutes a measure of "frustrated demand" (or an inverse measure of relative supply).

These two components can be more formally specified. Following Farber and Krueger (1993), the probability that a worker is unionized is given by

$$\Pr(U_i = 1) = \Pr(D_i = 1) - \Pr(D_i = 1, U_i = 0). \tag{1}$$

The first term on the right-hand side is the desire for unionization among union and nonunion workers and therefore represents the total demand for union representation. The second term represents frustrated demand from nonunion workers who would prefer unionization. The probability that a worker is unionized, therefore, is equal to the probability that the worker desires union representation minus the probability that the worker desires representation but is not working in a unionized job.

The supply-demand framework can be used to evaluate competing explanations for the difference in unionization rates among different groups or categories of workers. For adult-youth differences in the probability of being unionized, an equation analogous to (1) can be specified as:

$$\Pr(U_j^o=1) - \Pr(U_j^y=1) = [\Pr(D_j^o=1) - \Pr(D_j^y=1)] - [\Pr(D=1,U=0)_j^o - \Pr(D=1,U=0)_j^y], \tag{2}$$

where the subscript j refers to the country, and the superscripts o and y refer to older and younger workers, respectively. The term in the first bracket measures the difference in total demand for unionization between older and younger workers. The term in the second bracket measures differences in frustrated demand for (relative supply of) unionization.

Given a higher rate of unionization amongst older workers and our assumption of similar preferences for union representation:

Proposition 1: Relatively more young than older nonunion workers would prefer to be unionized but are not currently unionized.

Given our assumption of greater informational barriers, fewer union organizing activities and greater constraints on young workers desiring representation (all of these being supply-side constraints that should lead to greater frustrated demand for youths):

Proposition 2: In the decomposition of the adult-youth union density differential (left-hand side of equation 2), a majority of that difference should be ascribed to the fact that youths face more supply-side constraints, which lead to greater levels of frustrated demand (the second bracketed term on right-hand side of equations 1 and 2).

Evidence of substantial supply-side constraints for young workers implies a hypothetical or potential level of union density (probability that a worker desires and receives union representation) that would be more or less equal across both age groups in all three countries. As a consequence our third proposition is:

Proposition 3: Constructing an equilibrium rate of unionization — given data on actual union density and voting intentions of union and nonunion workers combined with similar preferences and greater frustrated demand for unionization amongst younger workers — should yield a potential probability of being unionized that is statistically similar across age groups and countries.

Such a proposition can be tested by constructing a hypothetical union density rate:

$$\Pr(U_i^* =1) = [\Pr(U_i =1)\cdot\Pr(D=1|U=1)] + [\Pr(U=0)\cdot\Pr(D=1|U=0)], \tag{3}$$

where U^* is potential union demand equal to the proportion of existing union members who would prefer to remain unionized (the first multiplicative term in brackets) plus the proportion of nonunion workers who would vote to become unionized (the second multiplicative term in brackets).

VI. *Results*

Is Frustrated Demand for Unionization Higher amongst Young Workers? In accounting for the union density gap, we immediately see that there is greater frustrated demand for unionization on the part of youth compared to adults in all three countries (Table 2, Row 5). Table 2, Row 6 also indicates that by far the greatest difference between young and adult workers is the greater supply of unionization for adult workers. That is, in all three countries an older worker who desires union representation has a far greater chance (138 percent higher in Britain and Canada, and 121 percent higher in the United States) of being unionized than does a younger worker who desires the same representation.

This may occur since young workers are employed disproportionately in "young" workplaces or in private services, where unionization is very low. British data from the BSA (the only data set with a consistent question going back to 1983) indicate that in the early 1990s, roughly 50 percent of youths were employed in unionized establishments. By 1998 that figure had fallen to 32 percent, a drop of nearly 20 percentage points in less than a decade (Figure 1). Given the high levels of frustrated demand for unionization amongst youth, this indicates a shortfall in the supply of union jobs for young workers rather than an equilibrium response to lower demand. The fall in the supply of union jobs is therefore more likely the result of a systematic policy by employers to forestall the union option for young workers, leading to a shortfall in knowledge of where to find union jobs and how to organize unions in new workplaces.

Is the Youth-Adult Union Density Differential a Supply-Side Phenomenon? To assess the relative importance of demand and supply factors, the gap in union density between adults and youths can be decomposed using equation (2) for all three countries. That gap was 23, 11, and 19 percentage points, respectively, in Canada, the United States, and Britain (Table 2 column 3 row 1 of each panel). Our estimate of frustrated demand (the probability that a worker demands union representation but is not employed in a union job, i.e., $Pr(D=1,U=0)$) equals 23, 6, and 18 percentage points, respectively, in Canada, the United States and, Britain (Table 2 column 3 row 5). Thus the proportion of the overall union density between adults and youths that is accounted for by frustrated demand (supply constraints) is 100 percent (23/23) in Canada, 55 percent (6/11) in the United States, and 94 percent (18/19) in Britain. Clearly, supply-side constraints that lead to frustrated demand account for virtually all of the adult-youth union density difference in Canada and Britain, and over half of the difference in the United States.

Are Equilibrium Union Density Rates the Same for Both Adults and Youth? Potential equilibrium levels of union density — as indicated by the probability that a worker

Table 2

Relative Supply and Demand for Unionization by Age Group and Country: 1996

	Canada		
	Youth	Adult	Adult-Youth Gap
1. $U=1$	.13	.36	.23
2. $U^*=1$	.57	.48	-.09
3. $D=1 \mid U=1$	.73	.67	-.06
4. $D=1 \mid U=0$	.50	.32	-.18
5. $D=1, U=0$	.44	.21	-.23
6. $U=1 \mid D=1$	.27	.63	.36

	United States		
	Youth	Adult	Adult-Youth Gap
1. $U=1$	.05	.16	.11
2. $U^*=1$	.47	.53	.06
3. $D=1 \mid U=1$	.67	.73	.06
4. $D=1 \mid U=0$	.42	.40	-.02
5. $D=1, U=0$	.39	.33	-.06
6. $U=1 \mid D=1$	.23	.51	.28

	Britain		
	Youth	Adult	Adult-Youth Gap
1. $U=1$	.16	.35	.19
2. $U^*=1$	.50	.46	-.04
3. $D=1 \mid U=1$	.50	.62	.12
4. $D=1 \mid U=0$	.51	.37	-.14
5. $D=1, U=0$	.42	.24	-.18
6. $U=1 \mid D=1$	.26	.62	.36

Sources: Information for Canada and the United States was obtained from the 1996 Lipset-Meltz Angus Reid Survey of union members. Information on union density for Britain was obtained from the British Social Attitudes survey, 1998. Both are discussed in the text.

Pr $(U=1)$: The probability that a worker is a union member.

Pr$(U^*=1)$: Hypothetical level of union density or the probability that a worker desires and receives union representation. This is the sum of the probability that a worker is a union member and desires to retain union membership plus the probability that worker desires union representation but is not employed on a union job (union membership plus frustrated demand). Formally, this is Pr $(D=1 \mid U=1)*$Pr$(U=1)$ + Pr $(D=1, U=0)$.

Pr $(D=1 \mid U=1)$: The probability that a union worker demands union representation.

Pr $(D=1 \mid U=0)$: The probability that a nonunion worker demands union representation.

Pr$(D=1,U=0)$: The probability that a worker demands union representation but is not employed on a union job (frustrated demand). Computed as Pr $(D=1 \mid U=0)*$Pr$(U=0)$.

Pr $(U=1 \mid D=1)$: The probability of being unionized conditional on the desire to be unionized. This represents the ease of obtaining a union job given that a worker desires a union job. Riddell (1993) interprets this as a measure of relative supply.

desires and receives union representation, i.e., P($U^*=1$) — are given in Table 2 row 2. Potential unionization rates are strikingly similar at around 50 percent for both youths and adults across all three countries. Youths have a slightly higher potential (total) propensity to unionize than do adults in Britain and Canada, with the reverse for the

United States. These results suggest that, while union organizers may have a harder time overcoming managerial resistance to collective bargaining than in the past, there remains a strong latent desire for representation amongst workers. The demand remains latent rather than realized because under statutory recognition, unions must convince a majority of workers in each workplace of the need for representation and this desire has to be matched by employees with a willingness to put time and effort into organizing and voting for unions.

VII. *Conclusions*

This paper presents the experience-good model of union membership in combination with an assumption borrowed from an often cited but controversial paper, in which consumer preferences were treated, "as stable over time and similar among people" (Stigler and Becker, 1977: 76). Based on this interpretation and the queuing model of union membership, we were able to answer the question of why the union density rate for young workers is less than half that of older workers. The model implied three testable propositions, all of which were confirmed by the empirical analysis:

> • There is greater frustrated demand (under-representation due to supply constraints) for unionization amongst young workers compared to older workers in Britain, Canada, and the United States.
>
> • Virtually all of the gap in union density between youths and adults in Canada and Britain, and slightly over half of the gap in the United States, could be accounted for by unsatisfied demand for unionization (supply-side constraints). That is, an older worker desiring union representation had a far greater chance (two and a half times more likely in Britain and Canada and twice as likely in the United States) of being unionized than a younger worker desiring union representation.
>
> • Potential levels of union density U^*, at around 50 percent for both youths and adults, are higher than presently observed in all three countries.

These results suggest that workers have broadly similar preferences for unionization across age groups and borders, conforming to the "naïve" model of consumer choice. In all three countries close to half of the working age population desires representation. Of those, approximately 60 percent of adults and 26 percent of youths are represented in Canada and Britain, while in the United States 51 percent of adults and 23 percent of youths who desire representation are represented. We interpret these results as suggesting that factors intrinsically related to the costs and benefits of union membership pose greater obstacles to the gaining of union membership for young workers than for similar older workers. Conceptualizing union membership as an experience-good sheds light on some of these issues, and especially in understanding why preferences for unionization are not being realized for young workers.

NOTE

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