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# Tokenism and Women in the Workplace: The Limits of Gender-Neutral Theory

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## Abstract

The concept of “tokenism” has been used widely to explain many of the difficulties women face as they enter traditionally male occupations.

Tokenism explains women's occupational experiences and their behavioral responses to those experiences in terms of their numerical proportion, suggesting that barriers to women's full occupational equality can be lowered by the hiring of more women in organizations that are highly-skewed male. This paper suggests that the tokenism hypothesis has not been subjected to rigorous testing and that the research that does exist should lead us to question the adequacy of the concept. This paper concludes that a gender-neutral theory such as tokenism is of limited value in explaining the experiences of either men or women in a society where gender remains important. Further, the focus on tokenism may hinder women's progress to the extent that it turns our attention away from an analysis of the effects of sexism in the workplace and the society as a whole.

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