

Women in Male-Dominated Careers: Interactions Between Early Career Experiences of Tokenism and Future Career Trajectories

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Abstract

While the number of women in the workforce continues to increase, research suggests their mere presence does not necessarily equate to influence within organizations. Research also highlights a culture of psychological gender inequity which permeates many organizations. My research aims to build on this foundation of gender inequity research by linking early career "token" status to future career decision making. To do so, I developed a survey targeting young professionals (5-10 years out of college), which assessed gender inequity measures (tokenism, "bro" culture, acceptance, inclusion, etc.) in connection to future career trajectory decisions (planned pivots, gender consideration of new organizations, industry switches, etc.). The objective of my research is to identify linkages between these two areas that may increase our understanding of potential best practices for further developing inclusive organizational culture.

Through my research, I found that women in male-dominated fields were more likely to consider gender balance of their new teams when changing jobs, compared with women in more balanced gender environments and males in male-dominated fields. Furthermore, I found that gender makeup predicts gender balance preferences through the experience of tokenism.

Topic Importance and Background

I wanted to give an overview of my personal interest in this topic as well as to give an overview of the findings of preexisting literature.

Workforce leadership gaps by gender still exist despite plenty of efforts to reduce that gap.

- I sought to figure out where those gaps began to emerge (i.e. where the pool of women eventually eligible for leadership roles might begin to shrink).
- I was intrigued on a personal level and on behalf of all women seeking to enter male-dominated workforces.

Prior research suggests four main reasons for the lack of women leaders in the workforce.

- Lack of female participation in the career pipeline.
- Gender discrimination in evaluative measures from non-stereotypical behaviors and attitudes.
- Motherhood and familial obligations and expectations may influence choices.
- Women lack the necessary social networks to scale organizational ladders.

Female token experiences negatively affect evaluations and internal perceptions and behaviors.

Hypotheses

I developed two hypotheses to inform my research which considered possible links between gender makeup in a first job and gender balance preferences in new jobs.

H1: Gender makeup predicts gender balance preferences

H2: Gender makeup predicts gender balance preferences through the experience of tokenism

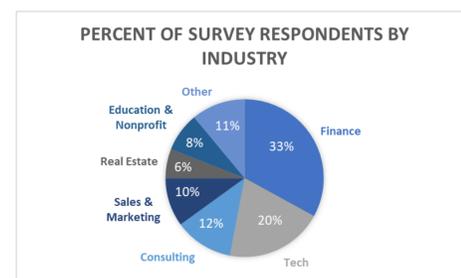
Methodology

I chose to take multiple steps to carry out my methodology by first conducting interviews and then developing and disseminating a survey which led to the creation of the variable framework found below.

I conducted a few pilot interviews of Kenan-Flagler MBA students to assess the importance of the topics of my research.

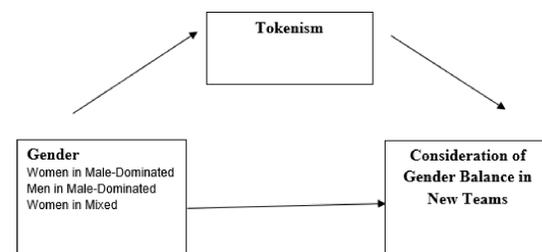
I developed a survey to capture a broad variety of people's thoughts on the issue.

This chart showcases the percent of survey respondents by industry.



I disseminated the survey through existing networks as well as through my contacts and was overall amazed by the number of responses I received encouraging my research.

Variable framework:



Data Analysis

To complete my data analysis, I conducted a basic assessment of descriptive statistics of variables and then a one-way ANOVA which led to a mediation analysis to assess each variable independently.

- Assessed Descriptive Variables
 - Condition 1: Women in male dominated environments
 - Condition 2: Women in mixed environments
 - Condition 3: Men in male dominated environments
- Conducted a One-Way ANOVA
 - n = 62, p < .01 when comparing Condition 1 and Condition 3
 - n = 62, p = not significant when comparing Condition 1 and Condition 2
- Conducted mediation analysis to assess independent variables
 - Found support for hypothesis 2 when comparing Condition 1 to both 2 and 3

Results

I found three key results from this research which I wanted to highlight.

1) Women in male dominated environments saw themselves more as tokens than the other two groups

2) Women in male dominated environments were more likely to consider gender balance of new teams compared with the other two groups

3) Differences between the two groups of females only occurred when women in male dominated environments characterized themselves as tokens

Conclusion

I had a few key thoughts to share upon the conclusion of this project.

A strong need for positive, forward thinking mindsets for those across all stages of the career pipeline exists.

Research has provided an important foundation of knowledge which organizations can now use to implement effective programs and support their employees.

Change and acceptance of both successes and failures in the push for gender equity must be industry-wide.

Recommendations

I created a sample framework which I hope can serve as a guide for firms and organizations especially as they move forward with decision making in this space.

Steps for Organizational Success	Sample Application
1. Identify	Create enhanced mentorship/sponsorship programs between people with similar paths and/or common interests across all levels of a firm.
2. Illuminate	Create a best practices guide to set standards for performance - make it clear these are firm wide expectations and make inclusion a factor in performance.
3. Institute	As a barometer to assess program efficacy, disseminate pre and post assessments to see if individuals/employees are receiving and retaining the desired information.
4. Illustrate	Set higher level standards at an industry-wide level of treatment of all employees, including tokens, to contribute to elevated firm culture overall.

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