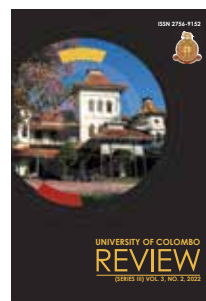


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Importance of studying the dominant's perspective on women workers in male-dominated workplaces: Revisiting Kanter's theory

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ABSTRACT

It is apparent from several economic, social, and corporate indicators that more women will be needed in the workplace in the near future. Women, however, face several challenges, particularly when it comes to working in a culture dominated by men. According to Kanter's theory of tokenism, these challenges include performance pressures, boundary heightening, and role entrapment. Scholars have made considerable attempts to examine these challenges in different work settings and cultures. Most previous studies have focused on the token perspective. Very few look at the perceptions of male co-workers, supervisors, and subordinates who work with women. Thus, Kanter's observations have not been viewed from the dominant perspective. Hence, the objective of this article is to make clear why it is essential to study the dominant perspective on women in order to contribute to this field's theoretical framework.

KEYWORDS:

Tokenism, Dominants' perspective, Challenges, Gender inequality, Workplace minority.

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Introduction

Previous scholars depict challenges faced by women in workplaces in general and those linked to male dominant workplaces (Bridges, et al., 2020; Yilmaz & Dalkilic, 2019; Downes, Trapp, & Nicol, 2017). Kanter's Tokenism theory is a framework which discuss on challenges faced by tokens. Kanter (1977) asserts that a person is seen as a "token" if their participation is restricted in the workplace as a result of their social group and their insufficient acceptance of the job or occupation. Although the concept of tokenism is designed to apply to any group in the minority, studies of women in non-traditional jobs have shown that the theory is particularly successful regarding the token women (Zimmer, 1988). Kanter (1977) identifies, these challenges to be caused by three perceptual tendencies (i.e. visibility, polarization and assimilation) in male-dominated workplaces. According to Kanter (1977), women receive more attention and visibility forcing them to perform better and this challenge is named as performance pressure. Various performance pressures include qualities and standards placed on women, such as public performance, the extension of repercussions, attention to their disparate attributes and fear of consequences (Kanter, 1977). Due to their prominent visibility, token women may feel as though they need to work more than their male co-workers or prove themselves to other group members (Yilmaz & Dalkilic, 2019). Furthermore, the theory highlights how men and women differ due to polarization. According to Kanter (1977), the presence of a woman in a male dominant workplace makes men more conscious of their similarities and dissimilarities. When there is polarization, men increase the boundaries of their groups and forbid women from joining them. Consequently, there is a sense of isolation for women. The idea of assimilation limits women to their roles assigned by notions about their social category. Kanter found that women at all levels are engaged in typically feminine workplace behaviours regularly. Nevertheless, because of women's experiences in male-dominant workplaces, women have not been sufficiently and positively affected by social advancements, economic transformations, and changing viewpoints.

Some studies test the three perceptual tendencies and mostly they have been done by studying women (e.g., Stichmen et. al, 2010; Steffens, Viladot, & Scheifele 2019). They show that as the dominant group, men place restrictions on token women and scholars have identified 'unacceptance' as a challenge that women workers face in male-dominant workplaces (Stichman, Hassell, & Archbold, 2010). Even though men are a part of the perceptual tendencies, there are limited studies that have focused on men's behaviour and perceptions relating to these.(Naoum, Harris, Rizzuto, & Egbu, 2019). This article discusses the challenges which have been researched relating to the three perceptual tendencies. Through this, the paper highlights the importance of studying the dominant perspective on women in order to contribute to this field's theoretical framework.

Women in corporates

The word 'women' has no single definition but multiple, depending on different aspects (Borisova & Sterkhova, 2012). If a woman had a career, she was less bound by traditional social definitions than if she didn't (Abigail & Winter, 1974). Society would argue

that a career results in a woman's increased freedom and that causes her to be recognized by men and society as having a legitimate claim to the systematic and autonomous use of time, space, and money, whereas a woman without a career is far more vulnerable to any specific or general traditional demand from men, other women, and children (Abigail & Winter, 1974).

Sri Lanka has an economically inactive population of 8.581 million, a majority of which are women (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2021). According to the 2014 Annual Labour Force Survey by the Department of Census and Statistics, 62.8% of economically inactive women in Sri Lanka are in that category due to their engagement in housework, whereas only 6.8% of men are economically inactive for this reason (International Labour Organization, 2016). The controversy is that two-thirds of the world's work is performed by women (Barber and Conable, as cited in Nigam, 2010). Despite this, they make up only a tenth of global income and control less than 1% of the global property (Nigam, 2010). Women are among the poorest people on the planet (Nigam, 2010). Owing to such debates and focus, women in corporates have been the subject of extensive research in recent decades, particularly in the Western world (Brammer, et al., 2019; Zimmer, 1988; Zinn, Goldsby, & Cooper, 2018; Morawska, Sutkowski, & Brzozowska, 2019).

Gender inequality

The concept of gender inequality is highlighted in many discussions about women in corporates. Gender and organisational issues are often portrayed as relating to the circumstances of women, frequently in comparison to males (Calas, Smircich, & Holvino, 2013). In general, within organisational hierarchies, opportunities differ according to demographic groups; whites and men tend to have more opportunities than non-whites and women (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Considering women's experiences in male-dominated workplaces, they have not been sufficiently impacted by economic revolutions, adjustments in views, and changes in the labour force composition of the modern world (Adikaram & Wijayawardena, 2015). Female professionals encounter career constraints and experiences that are gender-specific (Clerc & Kels, 2013).

Hiring, position allocation, promotion, compensation, and structuring are five important organisational practices that have emerged as being central to the replication of inequality in a variety of ways (Amis, Johanna, & Munir, 2020).

Despite gains in female involvement in the labour force, existing corporate practices still have an unequal impact on men's and women's employment chances (Miles, 2002). Theoretically, occupational segregation, dissimilarities in the quality of jobs available to women, and the quantity of those jobs are signs of constraints on the hiring of women in corporate organizations (International Labour Organization, 2016). It is well known that recruitment procedures can disseminate patterns of inequality. Studies show that male applicants receive comparatively much more interview invitations than female applicants (Amis, 2020). Not only that, employers screen female applicants more stringently than male applicants, which has the "knock-on" effect of occupational segregation and entry barriers (International Labour Organization, 2016).

Evaluating the other challenges, in several industry areas, women are underrepresented in senior positions in organisational structure compared to men (Downes, Trapp, & Nicol, 2017). Only 5% of women in manufacturing are employed in professional and technical occupations, and 2% hold administrative and managerial roles. The majority of women in manufacturing are classified as labourers, operators, and production employees (International Labour Organization, 2016). In general, in a majority of industries, male managers outnumber female managers by 80% in the workforce. Although women make up 41% of the workforce in the top private organizations, they only hold 19% of executive-level jobs and 12% of board seats. Less than 25% of senior management jobs and less than 5% of CEO positions are held by women. A lot of women still think that they will never hold high-ranking jobs in government (Downes, Trapp, & Nicol, 2017; Borisova & Sterkhova, 2012).

Compensation and wage inequality is another aspect of gender inequality. This has been frequently explained as a part of occupational segregation where women were restricted from developing jobs which pay higher salaries (World Economic Forum, 2021). According to the Global Wage Report (ILO, 2015), women earn 4 to 36% less on average than men do globally. The report also outlines the root causes of this disparity as including the undervaluation of women's labour, workplace factors, occupational segregation that directs women to low-value jobs, national wage setting mechanisms, the perception of women as economic dependents, and the likelihood that women work in unorganised jobs (International Labour Organization, 2016). This research highlights that gender inequality exists in terms of economic opportunities and it has an impact on women in corporates.

Introduction to Kanter's theory of Tokenism

This article is a discussion on the importance of men's perception of women through the lens of Kanter's theory. Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977) researched the experiences of women working in a large-scale industrial supply company and developed the theory of tokenism. Tokenism is an "artificial appearance" created by placing a small number of members of a minority group in positions of authority within the dominant group where the minority members are perceived as disadvantaged or distinct from the dominant group.

This theory predominantly deals with the proportions of different participants within a particular society. Proportions, or the relative quantities of socially and culturally diverse individuals in a group, are viewed as crucial in determining how interaction dynamics develop. Accordingly, four group varieties are distinguished based on diverse proportionate compositions. The first group type are 'uniform groups' where there is just one important social type. Though the group can differentiate itself, uniform groups are homogeneous in terms of a salient feature given as sex, race, or ethnicity.

The next category of 'titled groups' shifted away from the most extreme distributions and effects. With a ratio of 65:35, in this scenario, dominants are merely the majority with a slight difference relative to the minority. Kanter (1977) explains that minority members have the power to create alliances, influence group culture, and function as potential associates to each other within their group. They uplift themselves as unique from one another and at the same time distinct from the rest of the majority.

Thirdly, the ‘balanced group’ balances at a typological ratio from 60:40 to 50:50. This equilibrium is reflected in interaction and culture as well. Minority and majority are transformed into possible subgroups that could produce or not produce group-specific identifications. Regardless of the group type, outcomes for people in such a balanced peer group will depend on additional structural and individual elements, such as the creation of subgroups or differential responsibilities and talents.

The last type of group, the ‘skewed group’ and their characteristics, provide a pertinent foundation for this article. According to Kanter (1977), skewed groups include a significant majority of one type over another, resulting in a dominant group and a minority group. This minority group is called the token group, which is a small, perceived-to-be-different subgroup of the larger work group that makes up less than 15% of the total. The token group has their own identified characteristics and is grouped based on gender, race, religion, age, etc. They are frequently regarded as symbols but not apparently as individuals. They are mostly considered the representatives of their category.

According to Kanter (1977), three “perceptual tendencies” are most likely to be experienced by these tokens. The first is visibility, where tokens get higher attention and visibility which pressures them to perform better. The second tendency emphasizes the contrasts between dominants and tokens. This causes the feeling of isolation and polarization by tokens. Prevention is another behaviour of dominants, where they assign a foreign status to the minority workers and avoid sharing formal details and casual chats, isolate them from several areas, and minimize interactions. Kanter further reveals that men show their potency to women when they are the minority. Thirdly, assimilation traps these women in their roles by distorting their attributes to meet preconceived views about them. Kanter discovered that women at all levels were frequently seen as being involved in “typically female” workplace conduct, which was subsequently cited by other employees as “evidence” that women were not suited for positions usually filled by men.

These concepts are applied to all categories of women disregarding other characteristics and specifications. Kanter contended that minority members with limited options, showed lesser motivation and dedication when faced with the above negative perceptions (Amis, et al., 2020, and Steffens, Viladot, and Scheifele, 2019). Hence, they act in ways that support unfavourable perceptions of their potential value to the organization. According to the theory, as a group's token population grows, negative encounters become less common. This has been proven by research studies as well, regarding women in workplaces (Stichman, Hassell, & Archbold, 2010). The discussion developed so far demonstrates the current study's theoretical lens.

Theories in the discussions of gender inequality

There are various theories used by different scholars in their studies on women in corporates and gender inequality. Yilmaz & Dalkilic (2019) have identified a set of socio-psychological theories in relation to this subject.

One theory is Social Identity Theory which Tajfel (1982) has defined as the portion of an individual's self-perception deriving from the person's understanding of his

belongingness in a particular social group or groups and the emotional significance that the individual gives to it. Social identity theory develops the understanding of people to recognise the situations where they are the target of tokenism and what they may do to elevate or advance their status.

Secondly, Social Dominance Theory has been recognized as another supportive theoretical perspective for studies on women in corporates (Yilmaz & Dalkilic, 2019). This is highlighted in the findings of Sidanius and Pratto (1999). Accordingly, they depict that all human groups are hierarchically structured, and some groups have dominance above other groups. As per this theory, those who have a strong social dominance orientation have a partiality to think that men and women should perform dissimilar jobs in the workplace due to their inherent differences. In contrast, those with less social dominance orientation tend to have attitudes toward equality and adopt a democratic viewpoint regarding the roles of men and women in the workforce (Yilmaz, & Dalkilic, 2019).

Optimal Distinctiveness Theory is an approach which evaluates the need of an individual to act like others in society (Yilmaz & Dalkilic, 2019). Brewer (1991) argues that according to this theory, a person's social identity and behaviours are influenced by their need to be accepted by and to become like a particular group. These needs are the exact opposite of their need to stand out from others and are known as individuation.

After evaluating the above theories and Kanter's theory of tokenism, this article selected Kanter's theory to highlight the importance of studying men's perspective on women in order to contribute to this field's theoretical framework. Kanter studied how women were treated in the workplace, and how they responded to that treatment, and she established a causal relationship between numerical composition and women's experiences (Zimmer, 1988). Compared to the other theories, Kanter's theory of tokenism clearly define and categorise the challenges women face in male dominant workplaces. Hence the theory has perfectly constructed the background to study dominants and their perspectives.

Performance pressures faced by women in male dominant workplaces

The literature reveals that gender stereotypes and views around their tasks and what women should perform in the workplace and the capabilities of the gendered body are significant obstacles to women's involvement in male-dominated industries (Bridges, et al., 2020). From another perspective, due to the high visibility of women in workplaces, men assigned duties to women that required more physical effort, emotional pressure, and relational conflicts. As a result, women reported high work pressures, emotional tiredness, and poor coping mechanisms (Amis, Mair & Munir, 2017).

In terms of education, women are benchmarking against men, but when it comes to technical skills, they lag behind (Nigam, 2010).. Hence, they get higher attention from men at the workplace which pressures them to perform better despite the time given to learn (Nigam, 2010). Supplementary, it has frequently been reported that men's conversations, inquiries, rumours, and scrutiny focused on token women due to their higher visibility (Lewis & Simpson, 2012).

Women and other workers with limited possibilities due to various pressures, eventually have lower goals and commitment levels, and they act in ways that support unfavourable perceptions of their prospective contributions to the company.

Boundary heightening faced by women in male dominant workplaces

The second tendency highlights the differences between token women and dominant men which is named boundary heightening. The presence of a woman makes men more conscious of their similarities and differences. When there is polarization, men increase the boundaries of their groups and forbid the tokens from crossing them (Kanter, 1977). This appears as 'unacceptability' by men as the supervisors, peers, and other parties at the workplace which is one of the main psychosocial challenges faced by women (Brammer, Millington, & Pavelin, 2009).

Various scholars depict that differentiation and many other challenges still exist in the contemporary business world. Women's obstacles include gaining acceptance from the team's dominant members, overcoming role entrapment, and earning adequate recognition for their contributions (Naoum, Harris, Rizzuto, & Egbu, 2019). Another result of polarization, the "glass ceiling" refers to fabricated or unrevealed hurdles that prohibit talented women and members of underrepresented groups from moving up to top managerial positions based on corporate prejudice (Clay, 1998). The paucity of women in higher positions or leadership roles in corporates is not viewed as because of discrimination, but rather as a result of their "lack of commitment," "need for flexible work schedules", and "preferences" (Amis, 2020).

Role encapsulation faced by women in male dominant workplaces

Thirdly, the idea of assimilation confines tokens to their functions by changing their characteristics to conform to pre-existing notions about their social category. Kanter found that women at all levels engaged in "typically feminine" workplace roles regularly, which was then mentioned by other workers as proof that women were not suitable for jobs traditionally held by men (Kanter, 1977).

Traditionally, women's behaviour has been highly constrained, where they are only allowed to engage in household activities and are not expected to work for a living (Miles, 2002). These cultural expectations have framed workplaces in particular ways. Especially stereotypes related to family responsibilities, depict women as being less devoted to full-time, long hours, concentrated employment (Calas, Smircich, & Holvino, 2013).. Sexual harassment at workplaces are another aspect as it can lead to misperceptions in society about working women (Karunaratne, 2015). Particularly in masculine societies, the harassed woman is frequently seen as the "problem" or the reason for the harassment rather than the victim of the harassment (Bridges, et al., 2020).

Similarly, there are occupational and organizational filters that cause women to end up with a set of defined occupational categories and organizational sizes. Women are mostly hired in professions that require stereotypically 'feminine' skills such as organization and communication (Sudarshan, 2014).. Their career paths and self-descriptions imitate these

'feminine virtues' (Clerc & Kels, 2013). It means there are fewer opportunities for women to enter industries that showcase more masculine attributes.

Nevertheless, the above discussion demonstrates the theory does not discuss these perceptual tendencies and related challenges from the perspective of the dominant group.

Debates on Kanter's theory of Tokenism

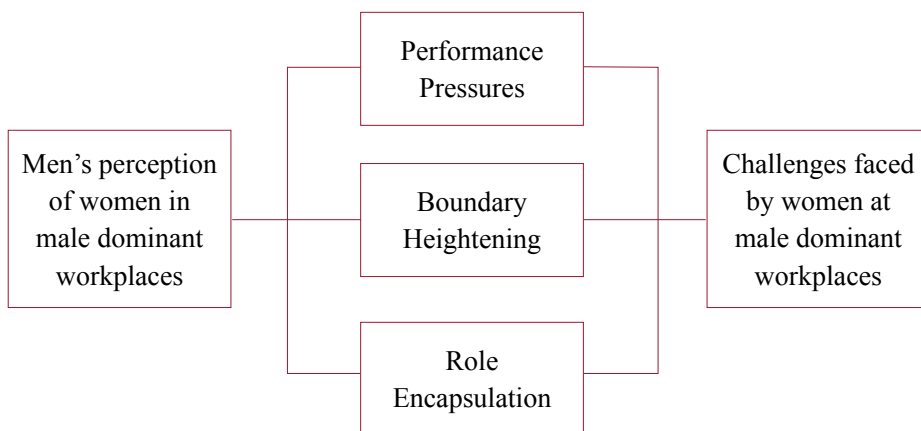
A primary objection to Kanter's theory is that it places such a heavy emphasis on numerical participation within a group that any potential problems brought on by individual traits like sex, ethnicity, age, etc. are minimised. Studies have suggested that social inferiority views, rather than a token's low numerical participation within an organization or group, might lead to poor treatment of tokens, particularly by women (Zimmer, 1988). Studies argued that tokenism is more complicated than a "numbers game" and that quantitative analyses might not be sufficient to accurately describe all of tokenism's facets (Stichman, Hassell, & Archbold, 2010).

Male-dominated work teams were established to be persistently imbued with stereotypical beliefs and sexist attitudes, whereas the dominating group has power over the tokens and the dominating group members are the ones who place restrictions on the tokens (Yilmaz, & Dalkilic, 2019). It was also obvious that these experiences, difficulties, and problems are much more complicated and nuanced than those Kanter mentioned (Holgersson & Romani, 2020). Hence, future studies must focus on these debatable areas of Kanter's theory.

Discussion and conceptual model

Even though men represent the dominant group, their perceptions regarding the above perceptual tendencies and related challenges have not been offered sufficient attention by previous scholars. Hence this article suggests the conceptual model below for empirical study.

Figure 1 – Conceptual model



Kanter (1977) highlights that tokens lack privacy since they are always watched over by the dominant group. Further, dominants heighten their boundaries over tokens. Finally,

by being condensed into stereotypes, tokens are assigned a different status by the dominant group. By these explanations, the theory itself provides an insight as to the involvement of the dominant group in perceptual tendencies. Previously, Holgersson and Romani (2020) have highlighted that sexist attitudes and stereotypical beliefs have a negative impact on many of the difficulties and issues faced by women in male-dominated workplaces. Hence, this conceptual framework suggests to contemplate backwards and to study the dominants' behaviour through their own perception.

This article is novel as a backward extension of the theory whereas past literature has leaned more towards consequences or the challenges attached to the theory. Configuration of men's perception will assist scholars to arrive at a complete picture on Kanter's theory of tokenism. Based on the proposed theoretical integration, future researchers can empirically study how men's perceptions support or oppose the perceptual tendencies discussed in Kanter's theory of tokenism. Findings of such studies will direct the theory towards reasons for dominants' behaviours which are involved in the three perceptual tendencies.

Conclusion

This article highlights the significance of researching the dominant's perspective on women in male dominant workplaces via the prism of Kanter's Theory. This is a value addition to the theoretical foundation of this field of study which opens a new view of Kanter's theory of Tokenism. Based on the proposed theoretical integration, future researchers can empirically study men's behaviour in support or in opposition to the perceptual tendencies discussed in Kanter's theory of tokenism.

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