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# Race, Gender, and Tokenism in Policing: An Empirical Elaboration

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## Abstract

According to tokenism theory, “tokens” (those who comprise less than 15% of a group’s total) are expected to experience a variety of hardships in the workplace, such as feelings of heightened visibility, isolation, and limited opportunities for advancement. In the policing literature, most previous studies have defined tokenism narrowly in terms of gender. The current research extends prior research by examining tokenism as a function of gender *and* race, with an examination of racial/ethnic subgroups. Particular attention is paid to Latino officers as this study represents the first known study of tokenism and Latino police officers. Quantitative analyses reveal that, for the most part, token police officers *do* experience the effects of tokenism as predicted by tokenism theory. Although all minorities experienced some level of tokenism, Black males and Black females experienced greater levels of tokenism than Latino officers, suggesting that race is a stronger predictor of tokenism than gender.

## Keywords

Tokenism, police, race, gender, Latino

## Introduction

Prior to the 1970s, policing was predominantly the professional domain of White males. Although significant progress has been made in the last 40 years in diversifying the police workforce, women and racial/ethnic minorities remain underrepresented in the policing profession, on average, representing less than 15% of officers in local police departments (Hickman & Reaves, 2006). As a consequence of their “outsider” status, women and minorities experience a variety of hardships on the job, such as discrimination, harassment, and greater levels of stress (Haarr & Morash, 1999; Martin, 1979, 1980, 1994, 1995; Morash & Haarr, 1995; Walker, 1985). To create a hospitable work environment for women and minorities, we must first understand their workplace experiences. Theoretically, Kanter’s (1977) tokenism theory provides a vehicle for doing so.

Kanter (1977) first espoused her theory of tokenism in the workplace more than 30 years ago, when she wrote about the experiences of women breaking into the male-dominated field of sales. Kanter argued that the women working in the Fortune 500 company she studied were “tokens”—those who numerically comprised less than 15% of a group’s total. Compared with those who constituted the majority in the workgroup (i.e., men), tokens experienced a variety of professional maladies. In particular, the women Kanter studied felt added performance pressures, felt isolated from the dominant group, and believed they were forced into roles consistent with their identity as a minority.

Since its publication in 1977, Kanter’s tokenism theory has been applied to a variety of contexts.<sup>1</sup> Although Kanter’s (1977) work has most often been applied to women working in “gender-inappropriate” occupations (e.g., academic faculty, auto workers, and firefighters), tokenism theory has also been applied to the study of men in female-dominated professions (e.g., nursing, teaching) and racial/ethnic minorities, although to a lesser degree. This research has demonstrated much support for tokenism theory. In sum, most tokenism research has demonstrated that gender or racial tokens feel more stress, isolation, and barriers to career mobility than nontokens.

Kanter’s (1977) theory has found much support in the policing literature in particular. This research has most often explored the experiences of female officers, who typically constitute less than 15% of a department’s sworn population. Most studies of female officers have demonstrated that they experience harassment, stereotyping, isolation, added performance pressures, and limited opportunities for promotion and advancement in police organizations (Archbold & Schulz, 2008; Belknap & Shelley, 1992; Gerber, 1996; Martin, 1990; Ott, 1989; Stichman, Hassell, & Archbold, 2010; Wertsch, 1998). To the extent that they have been studied, non-White officers also appear to experience a variety of professional hardships as a result of their token status in police organizations (Gustafson, 2008). As “double deviants,” minority females face a particularly hostile work environment (Martin, 1990).

Although there has been a significant amount of tokenism research in the policing literature, it is not without its shortcomings. Most importantly, the bulk of previous research has considered tokenism narrowly (in terms of gender only; Archbold & Schulz, 2008; Belknap & Shelley, 1992; Gerber, 1996; Martin, 1990; Ott, 1989; Stichman et al., 2010; Wertsch, 1998). When race has been considered, it has been treated as a dichotomous variable (i.e., White, non-White; Gustafson, 2008). There is good reason to believe that minority groups may differ in the extent to which they will experience the negative consequences of tokenism. Just as men and women differ, so too might the experiences of racial/ethnic minorities. In other words, Black and Latino officers’ experiences may not be uniform (see, for example, Hassell & Brandl, 2009).

In addition, much prior research on tokenism in policing has relied on small, biased, and/or unrepresentative samples (for exceptions, see Gustafson, 2008; Stichman et al., 2010). Another weakness of much prior research is that tokenism has been measured using single-item measures, which may not be as reliable as multiple-item scales. Few studies have used a comparison group (examining women in isolation), making it impossible to draw meaningful conclusions about the extent to which women in policing experience tokenism. Much previous research has also failed to compare the experiences of different tokens in an organization.

The current research extends prior research by examining tokenism as a function of gender *and* race, with an examination of racial/ethnic subgroups (i.e., Blacks, Latinos). Only two researchers (Gustafson, 2008; Martin, 1994, 1995) have considered tokenism as a function of both race and gender, but in neither case were Latino officers' experiences studied. Looking at the experiences of Latinos in policing is especially noteworthy as there is no social science tokenism research that has included Latinos. This study, based on a large and representative sample, uses multiple-item measures, multiple comparisons, and multivariate techniques in its analyses.

## Literature Review

### Kanter's Tokenism Theory

Thirty years ago, Kanter (1977) first put forth a theory of proportional representation to explain the experiences of women working in the male-dominated field of sales in a Fortune 500 company. Kanter's theory suggested that "tokens" existed in skewed work groups,<sup>2</sup> where those holding master statuses ("dominants") represent 85% to 99% of the group. As they are far outnumbered, tokens are assumed to possess very little power over the group or its culture (Jackson, Thoits, & Taylor, 1995).

According to Kanter (1977), there are three consequences of tokenism or membership in a skewed group. The first consequence is *visibility*. Token members stand out compared to dominant group members; they are different. As a result of their heightened visibility, tokens feel that their performance is under the constant scrutiny of the dominants. They feel added pressure to perform well as their actions reflect on all tokens. Tokens tend to react in one of two ways to these performance pressures. Some will overachieve, making an extra effort to have their performance evaluated in a positive light. Others will underachieve, hoping to fly "under the radar" or avoid calling attention to themselves (Kanter, 1977).

A second consequence is *polarization*, whereby the differences between the token and dominant group members are exaggerated and commonalities minimized. This results in boundary heightening between the two groups and the exclusion of tokens from both formal and informal communication networks (Yoder & Sinnett, 1985). Tokens may respond by remaining socially isolated from group members of the numerical majority or by presenting themselves as unique and different than most other tokens, hoping to be accepted by dominant group members.

Finally, the minority members of skewed groups may experience *assimilation*. Dominant group members are unsure how to treat tokens. This uncertainty is resolved by treating tokens in stereotypical ways, relegating them to organizational roles that are deemed fitting or appropriate for their gender (or race). As Jackson et al. (1995) described, "[d]ominants' stereotyped assumptions and mistaken attributions force tokens to play limited and caricatured roles in the organization" (p. 545). Ultimately, this results in role entrapment for the token.

When tokens experience greater visibility, are isolated formally and informally in an organization, and become entrapped in "appropriate" roles within the organization, they may also be expected to experience greater stress, discriminatory treatment, and limited opportunities for advancement in the organization (Kanter, 1977).

Kanter's (1977) groundbreaking work was on gendered organizations. In writing about tokens, she was addressing the experiences of females in the organization. Research on the experiences of female tokens has

shown overwhelming support for Kanter's theory, although only for women in "gender-inappropriate" occupations (e.g., firefighting, policing, the armed services; see Yoder, 1991 for a review). Kanter's theory has also been extended to the experiences of racial/ethnic minorities (i.e., Blacks). For example, one study revealed that Blacks who represented a numerical minority in the work setting experienced greater "token stress," which the researchers defined as a loss of Black identity, multiple demands of being Black, a sense of isolation, and having to show greater competence (Jackson et al., 1995).

Some tokenism studies have also considered the combination of race and gender. These studies indicate that as a result of their "doubly deviant" status, minority women experience more intense tokenism dynamics (Martin, 1994, 1995; Yoder, Aniakudo, & Berendsen, 1996; Yoder & Berendsen, 2001). This research has demonstrated the "omnirelevance" (West & Fenstermaker, 1995) of race, meaning that although both White and Black women experience tokenism, Black women experience greater disadvantage in the workplace.

## Theoretical Advances

Some 15 years after Kanter's original work, Yoder (1991) conducted a review of the extant research on tokenism theory. Yoder's piece highlighted some of the major theoretical developments in tokenism theory as well as some of the major criticisms of work in the area of tokenism.

One criticism levied against Kanter (1977) is that she may have been too fixated on numerical (or proportional) representation. Tokens—those who comprised less than 15% of the work group—experienced stress, pressure, and isolation in Kanter's study. These outcomes, argued Kanter, were the result of women being few in number. Instead, Yoder (1991) argued that Kanter confounded numeric skewedness with gender status, occupational inappropriateness, and intrusiveness. As Gustafson (2008) articulated, Kanter ignored the importance of the "social context" in which the women she studied were operating (p. 3).

One aspect of the "social context" that may influence the working conditions of women is the fact that they are women. Yoder (1991) argued that Kanter (1977) placed too much emphasis on the fact that women were a numerical minority and not enough on their status as women. In other words, the consequences she attributed to numerical skewedness (visibility, isolation, role entrapment) may have been the result of sexism rather than their few numbers. In American culture, gender is a master status, such that men are those predominantly in positions of power, prestige, and influence. Women workers are resisted by male workers because they threaten male dominance in the organization. As a consequence, when women are made visible in an organization, when they are isolated and treated in stereotypical fashion, it may be because they are threatening the current power structure, rather than simply because they are few in number.

This criticism has been supported in the tokenism research. In the research that has examined the experiences of male tokens, researchers have discovered that male tokens do not experience the same ramifications of being a numerical minority as female tokens (Williams, 1992; Yoder & Sinnett, 1985). Rather, male tokens experience benefits due to their numerical rarity; they are singled out for special treatment and assignments (Williams, 1992). Instead of encountering structural disadvantages and barriers, organizational doors are opened to them (Gustafson, 2008).

Another issue ignored by Kanter (1977) involves the type of occupation she examined. As mentioned previously, Kanter's original research focused on women in a "gender-inappropriate" occupation (i.e., women in sales). In the late 1970s, women in sales were "double deviants"; they were first deviant by pursuing a career and then deviant again by selecting a male-dominated field in which to ply their trade (Laws, 1975). In other words, not only were these women few in number but also were they violating occupational gender norms (Yoder, 1991). Occupations dominated by males tend to offer greater prestige and pay than those dominated by women

(Yoder, 1991). When women enter these occupations, the resistance they face may not be related to their numbers per se but the fact that they are threatening the earning power of men.

Again, this criticism is well founded in the tokenism research. Although most tokenism research has focused on women in gender-inappropriate occupations (e.g., sales, policing, firefighting), the research that exists on male tokens in gender-inappropriate fields (e.g., nursing, clerical work, social work) finds that they do not experience the same performance pressures, isolation, and barriers to advancement as do female tokens. On-the-job difficulties appear to be restricted to women who seek out gender-inappropriate occupations, not men who do likewise (Yoder, 1994; Yoder & Sinnett, 1985).

A final criticism of Yoder's (1991) has to do with Kanter's (1977) solution for the on-the-job difficulties experienced by token women: gender balancing. According to Kanter, gender balancing the workforce would eliminate the workplace problems experienced by women. As Kanter said, "Organizations with a better balance of people would be more tolerant of the differences among them" (p. 283).

Again, Yoder (1991) argues that this is too simplistic a solution. Rather, the tokenism research suggests that numeric balancing may actually exacerbate, rather than resolve, the experiences of women. In particular,

Kanter's saleswomen may have felt the negative effects not of their small numbers but of their *increasing* numbers . . . It is considered intrusive when members of lower-status groups start entering an occupation in greater numbers . . . (Yoder, 1991, p. 185; emphasis in original).

Yoder (1991) cites theory (Blalock, 1967) and research (Brown & Fuguitt, 1972; Frisbie & Neidert, 1977) on racial/ethnic minorities in support of this thesis. Blalock's (1967) intrusiveness theory, for instance, posits that the dominant group's harshest reaction to tokens is reserved for instances when the minority is small. Later researchers clarified that harassment and blocked opportunity may be worst when the minority experiences numeric surges (South, Bonjean, Markham, & Cordner, 1982). In these cases, dominants increase discriminatory and harassing behavior to preserve their control and perpetuate the status quo. Thus, ". . . when numbers of a low-status group increase substantially across the occupation, the reaction is stepped-up harassment, blocked mobility, and lower wages" (Yoder, 1991, p. 186).

## Applying Tokenism Theory to Policing

Kanter's (1977) tokenism theory has been tested across a wide variety of contexts. Several studies have examined the effects of tokenism in policing (Archbold & Schulz, 2008; Belknap & Shelley, 1992; Gustafson, 2008; Martin, 1990, 1994, 1995; Ott, 1989; Stichman et al., 2010; Wertsch, 1998). Policing is a unique occupation in that it is traditionally both male and White. As such, females and racial/ethnic minorities have represented "outsiders" to policing and have historically faced great difficulty finding acceptance in this profession (Haarr & Morash, 1999; Martin, 1979, 1980, 1994, 1995; Morash & Haarr, 1995; Walker, 1985). Females and minorities also represent "tokens" in most police organizations, comprising less than 15% of the organization's total population (Hickman & Reaves, 2006). To date, tokenism research in policing has almost exclusively focused on the experiences of females (Archbold & Schulz, 2008; Belknap & Shelley, 1992; Martin, 1990; Ott, 1989; Stichman et al., 2010; Wertsch, 1998), with just a few studies examining the experiences of racial/ethnic minorities (Gustafson, 2008; Martin, 1994, 1995).

Researchers have applied various aspects of Kanter's (1977) theory to females and racial/ethnic minorities in policing. Researchers have found support for the notion that female and minority officers experience the first aspect of tokenism: visibility. There are several possible consequences of visibility, including feeling the need to work twice as hard to prove one's competency, underachieving or overachieving, and expending extra effort to maintain satisfactory working relationships (Kanter, 1977). Belknap and Shelley (1992) found that nearly three in four of the female token officers reported that they felt they had to "prove" themselves to be accepted by male

officers (p. 60). All of the female officers interviewed in Wertsch's (1998) study reported feeling that they had to prove themselves to skeptical male officers. Two in three (69%) of the females in her study reported that they felt they had to work harder than their male counterparts, many of whom (53%) reported doing so to try to gain the acceptance of male officers (p. 40). Ott's (1989) study of female officers found they felt more visible than nontokens. In a study by Archbold and Schulz (2008), more than three quarters of the female token officers they interviewed testified that they felt they had to work harder than their male counterparts in an effort to prove their worth (p. 61). In Gustafson's (2008) study, tokens were defined as females, non-Whites, and non-White females. The tokens in his study were significantly more likely to believe they were more visible and more criticized for their mistakes than nontokens (White males).

The second aspect of tokenism cited by Kanter (1977) is contrast or polarization, whereby the differences between dominants and tokens are exaggerated, leading to the isolation of minority group members. Twenty-one percent of the female officers in Archbold and Schulz's (2008) study felt they were isolated from male officers solely on the basis of their sex (p. 63). Forty-two percent of the women in Ott's (1989) study felt that they were not accepted by the males in their unit (p. 49). A much higher percentage (69%) of the female officers in Wertsch's (1998) study reported feeling isolated by the male members of their department (p. 36). Exclusion by male officers took many forms, such as being the subject of rumors and gossip (63%), being left out of invitations to coffee or lunch (63%), and being excluded from activities after working hours (45%; p. 38). In Gustafson's (2008) study, an officer's sex (being female) was significantly related to the dependent measure "gender-related jokes are often made in my presence" (p. 6). Female officers in Stichman et al.'s (2010) study were significantly more likely than male officers to agree that they were underestimated due to their physical stature and to believe there was gender bias in their department.

Research has also supported Kanter's (1977) contention that token females experience assimilation, whereby they are relegated to stereotypical roles involving "women's work." Martin's (1990) study demonstrated that women would take assignments typically occupied by other women, where the ". . . work was viewed as 'sex appropriate' by peers" (p. 90) and not considered "real" police work. These positions were administrative, support staff, or community-oriented assignments characterized by lower status and pay (Martin, 1990). Martin referred to this as the "ghettoization" of women in that, by accepting these positions, they are excluded from preferred assignments with higher pay, status, and prestige. Wertsch's (1998) study also found support for the assimilation and role entrapment of female officers. In her study, this took the form of being assigned disproportionately to domestic violence and sexual assault calls compared with male officers. Another instance of role entrapment included assignments to specialty units or positions, such as the department's Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) unit or Neighborhood Resource Officer (NRO) position. Sixty-three percent of women agreed that they were placed in these units/positions intentionally to keep them away from patrol (p. 34). Although most women (64%) in Archbold and Schulz's (2008) study disagreed that there was a difference in the calls for service they received as compared with their male counterparts, those who did agree identified sexual assault calls and searches of female suspects as activities that considered to be the domain of female officers. Gustafson (2008) assessed role entrapment in terms of agreement with the statement "I feel that I am less likely to get chosen for certain assignments because of 'who I am' (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, physical characteristics)" (p. 5). In his study, gender was unrelated to this statement; however, for racial/ethnic minorities, there was a significant relationship between race and agreement with the statement.

## The Current Study

The studies outlined in the preceding section illustrate significant support for Kanter's (1977) theory of tokenism as applied to the experiences of females in policing and, to the extent that they have been studied, racial/ethnic minorities. However, previous research has been limited by various shortcomings. The current study improves

on some of these limitations. First, this study is based on a large sample and uses multivariate techniques in its analyses. Second, the size of the sample allows for the breakdown of officers by race and gender. Therefore, this study not only explores the experiences of White male and female and Black male and female police officers but also compares their experiences with those of Latino officers (male and female). This type of analysis is nonexistent in the literature. In our empirical elaboration of prior policing tokenism research, we address two primary research questions:

*Research Question 1:* Do token police officers experience the effects of tokenism as predicted by Kanter (1977)?

*Research Question 2:* How does the tokenism experienced by Latino officers compare with that of other tokens (i.e., White females, Black males, Black females)?

## Data and Method

### Research Site

The research site for this study was the Milwaukee Police Department (MPD). At the time of this study (2004), MPD employed 1,923 sworn police officers. Approximately, 16% of sworn officers were female, 67% were White, 21% were Black, and 10% were Latino. Milwaukee, Wisconsin has a population of approximately 600,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The greatest proportion (22%) of the workforce in Milwaukee is involved in industrial manufacturing. Fifty percent of the city's population is White, 37% is African American, and 12% is Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Overall, Milwaukee residents are younger and less well-off economically compared with national averages. Nearly 40% of the Milwaukee population is below the age of 24, and 21% of persons in Milwaukee live below the poverty level. The violent crime rate is slightly higher and the property crime rate is slightly lower than that of cities of comparable size.

### Data

In July and August of 2004, questionnaires were administered to all 1,388 police patrol officers employed by MPD during mandatory in-service training sessions. Prior to the administration of the survey, officers were shown a video that provided an overview of the study. The video informed officers as to the purpose of the study, assured them of the confidential and anonymous nature of the data, and provided instructions for completing the questionnaire. Of all the patrol officers ( $N = 1,388$ ) who attended the training, 1,191 officers completed the questionnaire (a response rate of 86.8%).

The 63-item questionnaire used in this study was a modified version of the one used by Morash and Haarr (1995). Most of the questions asked officers about their experiences in the department within the last year. The questions asked officers about a comprehensive array of workplace experiences that might be indicative of tokenism (e.g., isolation, on-the-job harassment, discrimination) and demographic information.

### Dependent Variables

The questionnaire used in this study asked respondents about an array of workplace experiences. All questions that related to tokenism were measured on a 4-point Likert-type scale where respondents were asked to *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *agree*, or *strongly agree* with statements. Several indexes were created to measure aspects of Kanter's (1977) tokenism theory (see Figure 1). All indexes were additive and standardized (i.e., values for each question were added and divided by the total number of questions in the index) and were measured on a scale of 1 to 4 (see Table 1).



Tokenism	Questionnaire Item
<i>Visibility</i> (2 items, $\alpha = .689$ )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Coworkers often commend me when I do good work”</li> <li>“Supervisors often commend me when I do good work”</li> </ul>
<i>Polarization</i> (7 items, $\alpha = .841$ )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“My coworkers have ridiculed me when I have asked questions about how to do my job”</li> <li>“My supervisors have ridiculed me when I have asked questions about how to do my job”</li> <li>“My supervisors joke about sex to the point that it bothers me”</li> <li>“My coworkers joke or make offensive remarks about my race or ethnic background”</li> <li>“My supervisors joke or make offensive remarks about my race or ethnic background”</li> <li>“Co-workers tend to forget I’m here; for example, they do not invite me to things, they do not introduce me, or they leave my name off lists”</li> <li>“My supervisors tend to forget I’m here; for example, they do not invite me to things, they do not introduce me, or they leave my name off lists”</li> </ul>
<i>Assimilation</i> (1 item)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“I have at least as much opportunity as my coworkers at about my rank for receiving preferred assignments”</li> </ul>
<i>Tokenism</i> (10 items, $\alpha = .734$ )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Visibility (reverse-coded) + Polarization + Assimilation (reverse-coded)</i></li> </ul>

**Figure 1.** Dependent variables

**Table 1.** Dependent Variables: Measures of Tokenism

Variable	N	M	SD	Range	Interpretation
Visibility	1,106	2.35	.68	1-4	1 = low visibility; 4 = high visibility
Polarization	1,082	1.73	.49	1-4	1 = low polarization; 4 = high polarization
Assimilation	1,107	2.56	.78	1-4	1 = low assimilation; 4 = high assimilation
Tokenism	1,070	1.93	.39	1-4	1 = low tokenism; 4 = high tokenism

First, a *visibility* index was created. This index was designed to tap into feelings of being under the scrutiny of others, being judged unfairly for performance, and experiences of dysfunctional performance pressures (Kanter, 1977). The visibility index was composed of two questions that asked the respondent whether they were recognized for their good work (by either coworkers or supervisors). The same questions were used by Stichman et al. (2010) to measure visibility, although they analyzed the questions as separate variables.<sup>3</sup> Given the coding scheme for this index, higher scores indicated that respondents did not perceive recognition from others for good performance.

Next, a *polarization* index was created to tap into respondents’ feelings of isolation in the department (Kanter, 1977). Polarized officers feel excluded from both formal and informal networks in the organization. This index captured respondents’ experiences of ridicule, offensive jokes or comments, and being left out by coworkers and supervisors. The individual questions that comprise the index are similar to those used by other researchers, although in previous research, the questions were treated as separate variables and were analyzed separately (Gustafson, 2008; Stichman et al., 2010). For this index, higher scores indicated that respondents perceived greater isolation in the department.

Third, *assimilation* was measured with a survey question about respondents' perceptions of opportunity for preferred assignments in the workplace. Higher scores were indicative of lesser perceived opportunity in the MPD. This measure is similar to that used in previous research (Gustafson, 2008; Stichman et al., 2010).

Finally, an overall *tokenism* index was created. This index was composed of the 10 individual survey items used to create the visibility, polarization, and assimilation scales (tallied and divided by 10). The items for visibility and assimilation were reverse-coded so that higher scores on the tokenism scale indicated greater perceptions of overall tokenism. This type of global measure of tokenism has not before been tested in the policing tokenism literature.

## Independent Variables

### Explanatory variables

The independent variables in this study were race/ethnicity and gender (see Table 2). These variables were examined in a number of ways. The race/ethnicity variable originally included values for White, Black, Latino, and "Other" (i.e., Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian, and other). For the purposes of our study, "Other" cases ( $N = 49$ ) were excluded. After removing these cases, we first looked at race as a dichotomous variable (where 1 = *White* and 0 = *minority*). Sixty-five percent of our sample was White. We then specified by minority race. Twelve percent of the police officers in this study were Latino, approximately one-quarter were Black, and nearly two-thirds were White. Gender was a dichotomous variable (where 0 = *male* and 1 = *female*). One in five respondents was female.

**Table 2.** Explanatory Variables: Race/Ethnicity and Gender

Variable	N	%
White/minority	1,113	
White	724	65.0
Minority	389	35.0
Race/ethnicity	1,113	
White	724	23.5
Black	261	11.5
Latino	128	65.0
Gender	1,092	
Male	874	80.0
Female	218	20.0
White/minority × Gender	1,092	
White male	563	51.6
White female	148	13.6
Minority male	311	28.5
Minority female	70	6.4
Race/ethnicity × Gender	1,092	
White male	563	51.6
Black male	198	18.1
Latino male	113	10.3
White female	148	13.6
Black female	56	5.1
Latina female	14	1.3

Two interaction terms were computed. The first interaction term was the dichotomous (White/minority) variable by gender. A little more than half (52%) of officers were White males, nearly one in three (29%) was a minority male, approximately 14% were White females, and 6% were minority females. The second interaction term (Race/ethnicity × Gender) was computed and the distribution was as follows: White males (52%), Black males (18%), Latino males (10%), White females (14%), Black females (5%), and Latino females (1%).

### Control variables

Control variables included age, education, and tenure (see Table 3), variables used in previous research on tokenism in policing (Gustafson, 2008; Stichman et al., 2010).

**Table 3.** Control Variables: Age, Education, and Tenure

Variable	N	%
Age	1,107	
30 or below	295	26.6
31-40	526	47.5
41-50	228	20.6
Above 50	58	5.2
Education	1,109	
High school	63	5.7
Some college	592	53.4
Completed college or more	454	40.9
Tenure (years)	1,102	
M	9.50	
SD	6.68	
Range	<1-32	

### Analytic Techniques

Several analyses were performed in the current study. Two sets (one set per interaction term) of analysis of variances (ANOVAs) were employed to assess differences in mean tokenism scores by different race/ethnicity and gender combinations. First, to be consistent with prior research, we looked at systematic differences between White males and White females, minority males, and minority females. Second, to look more specifically at the experiences of different racial subgroups, another set of ANOVAs was conducted. This set of ANOVAs assessed the difference between White males and White females, Black males, Black females, Latino males, and Latina females. The Bonferroni multiple comparison test was used to test post hoc differences between different race/ethnicity and gender groupings.

Next, eight ordinary least squares (OLS) regression equations were estimated to assess the effects of independent (race/ethnicity and gender combinations) and control (age, education, and tenure) variables on each of the dependent measures (visibility, polarization, assimilation, and overall tokenism). In the first four regression analyses, White males served as a comparison group and the race/ethnicity and gender groupings were as follows: White females, minority males, and minority females. In the last four regression analyses, White males served as a comparison group for White females, Black males, Black females, Latino males, and Latina females.

### Findings

As seen in Table 4, the *F* ratio for each of the measures of tokenism (i.e., visibility, polarization, assimilation, and overall tokenism) was significant. In addition, post hoc tests indicated differences between mean scores by

different race/ethnicity and gender groupings for each of the items (except the visibility measure). Specifically, White females, minority males, and minority females all felt significantly more isolated or polarized than did White males. Post hoc tests also indicated significant differences between the experiences of White males, minority males, and minority females in terms of their perceptions of assimilation. In this case, minority officers (of either gender) perceived less opportunity for preferred assignments in comparison with White males. Minority males' perceptions of opportunity were also significantly different than White females, with minority males perceiving fewer opportunities for preferred assignments than White females. The Bonferroni multiple comparison test performed for our measure of overall tokenism revealed that White females, minority males, and minority females significantly differed from White males. Minority females reported the highest levels of tokenism. These findings echo prior research (Gustafson, 2008) in demonstrating that race was more important than gender in determining the levels of tokenism experienced. Although gender was predictive of tokenism levels, minority females ("double deviants") experienced the greatest levels of tokenism.

**Table 4.** Means, Standard Deviations, One-Way Analysis of Variance, and Bonferroni Multiple Comparisons by Dependent Measures

	White males	White females	Minority males	Minority females	F ratio
Visibility	2.36 (.63)	2.41 (.65)	2.28 (.73)	2.51 (.81)	2.83*
Polarization	1.63 (.44)	1.76 <sup>a</sup> (.48)	1.84 <sup>b</sup> (.54)	1.92 <sup>c</sup> (.51)	16.71***
Assimilation	2.63 (.73)	2.65 (.75)	2.42 <sup>d,e</sup> (.85)	2.37 <sup>f</sup> (.75)	6.92***
Tokenism	1.88 (.35)	1.97 <sup>g</sup> (.39)	1.98 <sup>h</sup> (.41)	2.08 <sup>i</sup> (.42)	9.43***

Note: Standard deviations for each group mean are presented in parentheses.

- a. Significant difference (at .05 level) between White females and White males.
- b. Significant difference (at .001 level) between minority males and White males.
- c. Significant difference (at .001 level) between minority females and White males.
- d. Significant difference (at .001 level) between minority males and White males.
- e. Significant difference (at .05 level) between minority males and White females.
- f. Significant difference (at .05 level) between minority females and White males.
- g. Significant difference (at .05 level) between White females and White males.
- h. Significant difference (at .001 level) between minority males and White males.
- i. Significant difference (at .001 level) between minority females and White males.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

A second set of ANOVAs was performed to allow for a more specific examination of possible racial differences in mean tokenism scores (see Table 5), allowing us to go one step farther than previous research. *F* ratios for polarization, assimilation, and overall tokenism were again significant. With regard to polarization, the Bonferroni test indicated no significant differences between White males and White females and Latina females. However, Black males, Black females, and Latino males all differed significantly in their experiences of polarization in comparison with White males. Post hoc tests for assimilation revealed that Black males fared worse than both White males and White females. Finally, the Bonferroni test for overall tokenism revealed subgroup differences in mean scores. Here, Black males and Black females significantly differed from White males, experiencing more overall tokenism. It is with these findings that we know not only that there are gender and racial differences in tokenism levels but also that the levels of tokenism experienced differs by specific racial subgroup.

**Table 5.** Means, Standard Deviations, One-Way Analysis of Variance, and Bonferroni Multiple Comparisons by Dependent Measures

	White males	Black males	Latino males	White females	Black females	Latina females	F ratio
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Visibility	2.36 (.63)	2.24 (.74)	2.35 (.70)	2.41 (.65)	2.50 (.79)	2.54 (.93)	2.111
Polarization	1.63 (.44)	1.86 <sup>a</sup> (.54)	1.80 <sup>b</sup> (.55)	1.76 (.48)	1.91 <sup>c</sup> (.53)	1.97 (.44)	10.223***
Assimilation	2.63 (.73)	2.39 <sup>d,e</sup> (.83)	2.48 (.88)	2.65 (.75)	2.36 (.75)	2.42 (.85)	4.34***
Tokenism	1.87 (.35)	1.98 <sup>f</sup> (.43)	1.98 (.39)	1.97 (.39)	2.07 <sup>g</sup> (.43)	2.13 (.37)	5.697***

Note: Standard deviations for each group mean are presented in parentheses.

a. Significant difference (at .001 level) between Black males and White males.

b. Significant difference (at .01 level) between Latino males and White males.

c. Significant difference (at .001 level) between Black females and White males.

d. Significant difference (at .01 level) between Black males and White males.

e. Significant differences (at .05 level) between Black males and White females.

f. Significant difference (at .05 level) between Black males and White males.

g. Significant difference (at .01 level) between Black females and White males.

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

To examine the influence of race/ethnicity and gender on tokenism net of controls, eight OLS regression analyses were performed. Mirroring our ANOVA analyses, the first four regression analyses examined the simultaneous effects of race/ethnicity (White vs. minority), gender, and control variables on the outcomes of interest (visibility, polarization, assimilation, and overall tokenism). Table 6 presents the results of these regression analyses.<sup>4</sup> Although none of the variables significantly predicted visibility, there were significant findings with respect to polarization, assimilation, and overall tokenism. In particular, for polarization, White female, minority male, and minority female status were significant, with these groups more polarized than the comparison group (White males). Education also significantly predicted polarization, with more educated officers perceiving greater isolation in the department. For the assimilation regression, minority male and minority female status were significant. In this case, minority males and minority females perceived fewer opportunities than White males. Tenure was also significantly related to assimilation, with officers with greater time on the force experiencing fewer perceived opportunities. Finally, being a White female, minority male, or minority female was predictive of overall tokenism, as was education. White females, minority officers of both sexes, and more educated officers were more likely to feel the effects of tokenism in the organization. It is noteworthy that minority females *and* males fared poorly in comparison with White females; the relative size of the standardized coefficients suggests race is more important than gender in predicting overall tokenism.

**Table 6.** Ordinary Least Squares Regression Results, Tokenism by Minority × Gender

	Visibility			Polarization			Assimilation			Tokenism		
Variable	b	$\beta$	SE	b	$\beta$	SE	b	$\beta$	SE	b	$\beta$	SE
White female	.04	.02	.06	.12	.09	.05**	.03	.01	.07	.09	.08	.04*
Minority male	-.08	-.05	.05	.22	.21	.04***	-.23	-.13	.06***	.11	.13	.03***
Minority female	.13	.05	.09	.29	.15	.06***	-.26	-.08	.10**	.20	.13	.05***
Education	.02	.02	.04	.07	.08	.03**	-.02	-.02	.04	.05	.08	.02*
Age	.03	.03	.03	.01	.01	.03	-.03	-.03	.04	.01	.01	.02
Tenure	-.01	-.02	.01	.01	.02	.01	.01	.08	.01*	.01	.02	.01
R <sup>2</sup>		.01			.05			.02			.03	

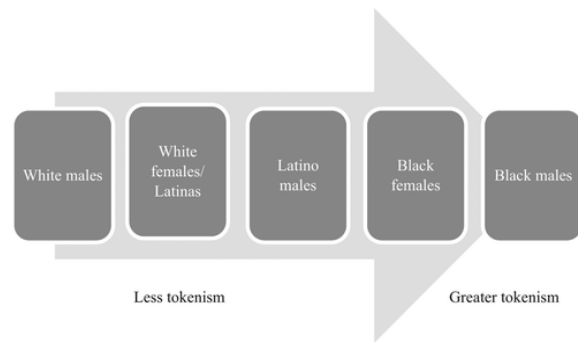
\*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001

Similar to our ANOVA analyses, four additional regression analyses were performed to examine the effects of race/ethnicity (White, Black, and Latino), gender, and control variables on each of our four measures of tokenism in greater depth (see Table 7).<sup>5</sup> In the visibility regression equation, Black males were significantly less likely than White males to report being commended for good work. In the polarization equation, all token statuses (being a White female, Black male, Latino male, Black female, and Latina female) and education increased feelings of isolation in the organization compared with White males. In the assimilation equation, being a Black male, Latino male, or Black female significantly predicted perceptions of opportunity in a negative fashion. More tenured officers were also significantly less likely to perceive opportunities. In our overall tokenism regression equation, all token statuses (being a White female, Black male, Black female, Latino male, and Latina female) significantly increased the likelihood of perceptions of tokenism, as did education. Again (similar to the regression results presented in Table 6), it appears that the level of tokenism experienced was more a function of race than gender (see Figure 2). White and Latina females experienced the least tokenism, followed by Latino males and Black females, with Black males experiencing the greatest levels of tokenism.

**Table 7.** Ordinary Least Squares Regression Results, Tokenism by Race/Ethnicity × Gender

Variable	Visibility			Polarization			Assimilation			Tokenism		
	b	$\beta$	SE	b	$\beta$	SE	b	$\beta$	SE	b	$\beta$	SE
White female	.04	.02	.06	.12	.09	.05**	.03	.01	.07	.09	.08	.04*
Black male	-.13	-.07	.06*	.24	.19	.04***	-.25	-.13	.07***	.11	.11	.03***
Latino male	.01	.01	.08	.19	.12	.05***	-.18	-.07	.08*	.12	.09	.04**
Black female	.11	.04	.10	.27	.12	.07***	-.27	-.08	.11*	.18	.10	.06***
Latina female	.18	.04	.18	.38	.09	.13**	-.19	-.03	.21	.28	.08	.10**
Education	.02	.02	.04	.07	.08	.03**	-.02	-.02	.04	.05	.08	.02*
Age	.03	.04	.03	.00	.00	.02	-.03	-.03	.04	.01	.01	.02
Tenure	-.01	-.02	.01	.01	.02	.01	.01	.08	.01*	.01	.02	.01
R <sup>2</sup>		.01			.05			.02			.02	

\*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001



**Figure 2.** Experiences of tokenism by gender and race



## Discussion

Several studies have examined the effects of tokenism in policing, which is a unique occupation in that it is traditionally both male and White. These studies, wherein researchers have applied various aspects of Kanter's (1977) theory of tokenism to female police officers (Archbold & Schulz, 2008; Belknap & Shelley, 1992; Martin, 1990, 1995; Ott, 1989, Stichman et al., 2010; Wertsch, 1998) and (to a lesser extent) racial/ethnic minorities (Gustafson, 2008; Martin, 1994, 1995), have revealed widespread support for the relationship between the token status of women and minorities and experiences of discrimination, harassment, and isolation. The current study represents a contribution to the literature by extending Kanter's tokenism theory to the experiences of racial minority police officers in the United States, with a particular emphasis on the experiences of Latino officers.

Our study addressed two research questions, namely, Research Question 1 and Research Question 2, mentioned earlier. Our results indicate that, for the most part, token police officers *do* experience the effects of tokenism as predicted by Kanter (1977). One exception was that not all of our measures of tokenism were significantly related to token status. In particular, visibility was rarely predicted in our analyses by gender or race. This is consistent with prior research (Gustafson, 2008; Stichman et al., 2010). However, polarization and assimilation were consistently and uniformly predicted by token status.

In reference to our second research question, our results revealed that there are differences in tokenism levels experienced by different gender/racial subgroups. Results indicate that Latino officers perceive greater feelings of polarization, reduced opportunity, and overall tokenism compared with White males. Latino officers were more likely than White male officers to have had inappropriate comments of a derogatory or racial nature made in their presence, to have felt personally discriminated against because of their race/ethnicity, and to have felt excluded from formal and informal networks at work. Latino officers were significantly less likely to believe that officers experienced full opportunity in the MPD.

These results indicate that Latinos may experience many of the difficulties experienced by females and Black officers in police departments today. However, our results also indicated that there are gender and racial subgroups that fare far worse than Latinos in the MPD. Although it is true that all minorities experienced some level of tokenism, Black males and Black females experienced the greatest levels of tokenism. This was true, even though Blacks (25%) accounted for a higher percentage of officers than Latinos (12%) in the MPD. The Latino officers in our study experienced less visibility, isolation, and assimilation than Black officers—whether male or female. This finding supports a racial threat thesis (Blalock, 1967; South et al., 1982; Yoder, 1991), which predicts that the harshest treatment of tokens is reserved for instances when the minority experiences numeric surges. It may be that White males in the MPD are threatened by the greater presence of Black officers and have stepped up discriminatory treatment to preserve their control and perpetuate the status quo. This finding also comports with a wealth of research that establishes a racial hierarchy, with Latinos faring better than Blacks in the workplace.

Perceptions of tokenism among groups of officers are certainly not desirable and may not be inevitable. To continue successful efforts at increasing the diversity of police organizations, it would be a reasonable and necessary goal for police managers to take steps to improve the experiences of tokens within the organization. For instance, for starters, police managers must understand and educate officers on the power and importance of words. In particular, as demonstrated in this study, vulgar/offensive language can separate, polarize, and isolate work groups in the organization. Language can be an expression of power and it can be divisive and reflect extreme disrespect. Education and proper supervision of officers in this regard may minimize the negative impact of language used at the workplace and reduce perceptions of polarization and tokenism.

Furthermore, it is important to remain vigilant about providing equal promotional opportunities to officers across racial, ethnic, and gender groups. This may not be easy or uncontroversial, given the traditions of police organizations. Of course, equal opportunity laws exist; the challenge may be to make those laws relevant and meaningful in individual promotional decisions. Close attention to fair hiring and promotional processes would likely have a significant impact on officers' perceptions of assimilation and associated tokenism.

Officers and supervisors must understand that positive and constructive feedback about job performance may assist in improving job performance and minimizing perceptions of polarization. Questions about how to go about accomplishing work tasks may not be a sign of incompetence but a desire to perform the task in the best manner possible. As a result, in the face of uncertainty, questions among officers should be encouraged. As seen in this study, ridicule as a result of questions will isolate and separate officers, especially if it is perceived that this treatment is as a result of officers' racial, ethnic, and gender status. Also, along these lines, the negative perceptions associated with tokenism may be further minimized by providing opportunities for officers to participate in decision making and to have meaningful input into policies and procedures of the department. Attention to each of these issues may provide a starting point for improving the workplace experiences of everyone in police organizations and creating well-functioning and diverse police departments.

One limitation of our study is that we cannot definitively assess the position of Latina female officers with regard to tokenism. Although it is clear that Latina females experience tokenism (see Table 7), Latina females did not differ significantly from White males in our ANOVA analyses. The fact that Latina females did not differ from White males may not be a function of true difference but is more likely attributable to their small sample size in this study ( $N = 14$ ). However, we cannot say so with certainty. Despite this limitation, our study improved on many of the limitations of current policing tokenism research. Much prior research on tokenism in policing has relied on small, biased, and/or unrepresentative samples (for exceptions, see Gustafson, 2008; Stichman et al., 2010). Another weakness of much prior research is that tokenism has been measured using single-item measures, which may not be as reliable as multiple-item scales. Few studies have used a comparison group and as a result have examined women in isolation, making it impossible to draw meaningful conclusions about the extent to which women in policing experience tokenism. Much previous research has also failed to compare the experiences of different tokens in an organization. This study, based on a large and representative sample, used multiple-item measures, multiple comparisons, and multivariate techniques in its analyses.

In addition to our methodological improvements, our study is also the first known study of Latinos and tokenism. This void in the literature is particularly problematic, given the demographic changes in the population and the need for law enforcement to keep pace with those changes. This study shows the importance of moving beyond the "non-White" label by which to study police officers and it highlights the importance of examining the interaction of specific racial groups and gender. However limited, we need information on the experiences of Latinos in policing. This study represents an important step forward in that regard.

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## Notes

1. Kanter's (1977) theory has been applied to various contexts, most often focusing on token women in "gender-inappropriate" occupations such as academic faculty (Yoder, Crumpton, & Zipp, 1989), auto workers (Gruber & Bjorn, 1982), coaches (Kane & Stangl, 1991), coal miners (Hammond & Mahoney, 1983), corporate executives (Lyness & Thompson, 2000), firefighters (Yoder & Berendsen, 2001), physicians

(Fløge & Merrill, 1986), scientists (Shachar, 2000), steel workers (Deaux & Ullman, 1983), union representatives (Izraeli, 1983), and Wall Street professionals (Roth, 2004). Researchers have also examined male tokens working in female-dominated occupations such as elementary school teachers (Cognard-Black, 2004), nurses (Fløge & Merrill, 1986; Heikes, 1991), and social, child care, and clerical workers (Kadushin, 1976; Schreiber, 1979; Seifert, 1973).

2. Kanter's (1977) theory suggested that work groups may be characterized as uniform, skewed, tilted, or balanced in their proportional representation. *Uniform* groups have no variation; they are completely homogenous (e.g., White males). In *skewed* groups, those holding master statuses ("dominants") represent 85% to 99% of the group. In skewed groups, minority group members are referred to as "tokens." Minorities experience greater levels of representation in *tilted* groups, where they comprise 16% to 35% of the total group. In *balanced* groups, minority group members comprise between 36% and 50% of the group.
3. In the Stichman et al. (2010) study, a low Cronbach's alpha precluded measuring the two items together. The Cronbach's alpha in this study was higher, presumably, because of our larger sample size.
4. The purpose of these analyses was to examine the differential effects of gender and race on our measures of tokenism, not to explain variation in tokenism. Thus, although the variance explained by each of the equations is quite low, this is of tertiary importance.
5. Again, our intent was not to explain variation in the dependent variables of interest but to assess the impact of racial and gender subgroupings on the dependent variables.

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