

## **Token Majority: The Work Attitudes of Male Flight Attendants**

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*This study examined the work experiences of men, a traditional workplace majority, as minority members of a female-dominated occupation. We used tokenism and social categorization theories to propose and test a set of hypotheses that link token status (a less than 15% minority) with male flight attendants' work attitudes through intervening psychological and job factors. Survey data from a sample of 236 male and female flight attendants supported a model in which a negative relationship between token status and the work attitudes of job satisfaction and organizational attachment was mediated by low self-esteem, increased role ambiguity, and poor job fit. The uncovering of these previously unmeasured intervening variables strengthens theoretical connections between demography and work outcomes and suggests leverage points for improving the work attitudes of individuals in the minority.*

The movement of women into male-dominated occupations has been well researched over the past several decades (e.g., Cox & Harquail, 1991; Dipboye, 1987; Henning & Jardim, 1977; Johnson, 1992; Morrison & VonGlinow, 1990; Morrison, White, Van Velsor, & the Center for Creative Leadership, 1987; Phillips & Imhoff, 1997; Stroh, Brett, & Reilly, 1992). This stream of research can be traced back to Kanter's seminal theory of tokenism (Kanter, 1977), a demographic composition theory stating that individuals become "tokens" when they are such a small minority that they are seen as symbols of their particular category rather than as individuals. Although often research

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on underrepresentation has been done with women, more recently men in the minority have become a subject of interest as the number of men entering and succeeding in female-dominated occupations has risen (e.g., Williams, 1995). In pursuing this newer line of research some have questioned how the experiences of a minority of men working with a female majority would compare to those of a minority group of women working with a male majority.

Research with men has shown that they do experience many of the same negative personal and occupational pressures associated with being a token that women experience. For example, Gans' (1987) study of a group of male nurses concluded that male tokens experienced both formal (e.g., restriction from labor/delivery room specialties) and informal (e.g., exclusion from conversations between female colleagues) discrimination. The research on men in the minority has added to that on women and racial/ethnic minorities. However, most of these studies have been small and qualitative in nature pointing toward a need for quantitative research to complement the qualitative data. Many of these studies also relied solely on numerical proportions to explain their effects without examining possible intervening variables. A further limitation in this area of research is a focus on performance or occupational advancement as outcomes to the exclusion of other relevant dependent variables.

In this paper we first briefly review the organizational demography literature with particular emphasis on tokenism, Kanter's theory of demographic composition (Kanter, 1977). Next, we make connections between the theory of tokenism and the broader research on social categorization. Last, given recent requests for more comprehensive theoretically and empirically driven research on organizational demography (Lawrence, 1997), we propose and test several potential intervening psychological and occupational factors that may mediate the relationship between token status and work attitudes.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Tokenism and Organizational Demography**

Following Mittman (1992) we define organizational demography as the pattern or distribution of demographic characteristics such as sex, race, age, and tenure composition across an organization or an organizational subunit such as a department, work group, or occupation. Early research in this area linked general demographic characteristics such as sex, age, race, tenure, and education with organizational outcomes like performance (Waldman & Avolio, 1986), hiring and promotion (McIntire, Moberg, & Posner, 1980),

and attrition (Mobley, Horner, & Hollingsworth, 1978). Pfeffer (1983) outlined an argument for taking demography research a step further by concentrating on the compositional effects of demography on organizations and their subunits. This more recent research has uncovered several important relationships like that found between age or tenure heterogeneity and turnover in both top-management teams (Wagner, Pfeffer, & O'Reilly, 1984) and in academic departments (McCain, O'Reilly, & Pfeffer, 1983). Other researchers have found that as heterogeneity increases, the majority group becomes less attached to the organization and less satisfied (e.g., Wharton & Baron, 1987, 1991).

This compositional approach to demography measures the variance in demography within the group and relates this property to other group-level outcomes. Kanter's theory of tokenism (Kanter, 1977) is in the tradition of compositional demography research. Tokenism represents a theory of group interaction and is based on numerical proportions within a group (Kanter, 1977). These proportions are then used to explain the workplace experiences of the numerical minority or "tokens" including occupational achievement. According to Kanter (1977), one significant determinant of achievement for minority group members is the ratio of minority to majority group members in one's work environment, where minority group members are less likely to be high performers than are majority group members.

Using a continuum to describe group composition, Kanter (1977) identified at one extreme virtually uniform groups where all members share similar demographic characteristics (e.g., a top management team consisting of all White, middle-aged men). At the other extreme are balanced groups composed of a variety of "social types." In between uniform and balanced groups are groups of skewed proportions. When the imbalance reflects a large preponderance of one group over another, such as a ratio of 85:15, the minority group members are called tokens, because at this ratio they are typically treated as symbols of their particular category rather than as individuals (Kanter, 1977). Kanter (1977) has linked the proportional representation of a minority group with three perceptual conditions that adversely affect work performance.

First, individuals in the minority are highly *visible* relative to the numerical majority. Heightened visibility generates disproportionate performance pressure creating performance demands that are managed by either overachieving to meet these demands, or underachieving to allay dominants' resentment and fears about competition (Spangler, Gordon, & Pipkin, 1978). Second, the numerical majority tends to create *contrast* or an exaggeration of differences between themselves and the numerical minority. This contrast leads to the formation of boundaries between the two groups and results in feelings of isolation for numerically rare individuals, especially from informal

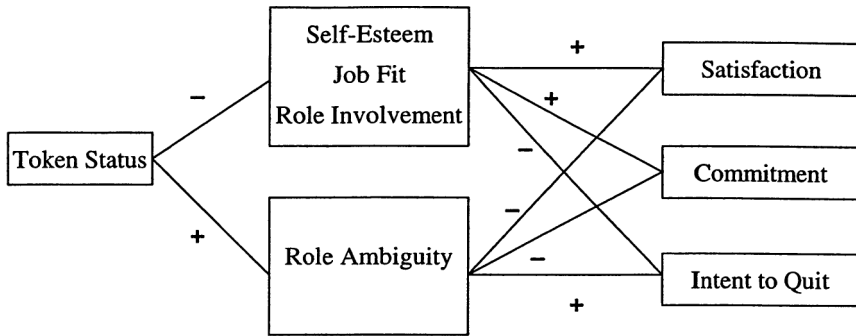
interaction with the majority. Third, the characteristics of individuals in the minority are *assimilated* to fit existing beliefs or stereotypes about the group they represent. Rather than challenging their peers' expectations, individuals in the minority often find it easier to conform to limiting traditional stereotypes (Spangler, Gordon, & Pipkin, 1978).

### **Tokenism and Social Categorization**

Social categorization provides a basis for explaining how and why people separate into recognizable token and majority groups (Tajfel, 1978, 1981, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986; Turner et al., 1987). This set of theories describe the processes by which a collection of individuals comes to define themselves as a social group and the effect that group membership has on their behavior (Turner, 1985). Social categorization, like the visibility aspect of tokenism, recognizes that a significant factor in determining the salience of a particular group categorization is the proportion of group members in the social context. Taylor (1981) has noted that the salience of social group membership grows as the number of one's group members in the setting dwindles. This suggests that the mere presence of alternate groups determines what is salient whereas relative numbers influence the level of salience.

The categorization process involves a cognitive emphasis on the similarity between individuals within a group complemented by a psychological exaggeration of differences between groups (Tajfel & Wilkes, 1963, Turner, 1985). This phenomenon is akin to Kanter's idea of contrast (Kanter, 1977). The exaggeration of differences between categories occurs only along dimensions that are believed to be correlated with the categorization (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Turner, 1985). As in tokenism this effectively stereotypes members of the out-group. For instance, if a woman believes aggressiveness to be a stereotypical quality of maleness, she will accentuate the presence of this quality in men while downplaying the same characteristic in other women. These tendencies are most pronounced when the perceiver is part of the category concerned (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Turner, 1985). Thus, categorization divides the larger world into smaller more comprehensible units allowing the perceiver to identify and focus on relevant aspects of the context.

This social comparison between groups provides a means for evaluation of in-group aptitudes, beliefs, and experiences versus those of out-groups. Thus, once categorization has occurred one's self-image or social identity is based on group membership and the positive differentiation between one's own preferred in-group and other less attractive out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Within an organizational context there are a number of social groups



**Fig. 1.** Model of the Relationship Between Token Status and Work Attitudes.

that may be used for categorization and employees often group themselves by occupation (Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992). Individuals can identify with an occupational group and derive self-identity from it without interacting with every member of the group. In such cases identification is with a psychological group or a "collection of people who share the same social identification or define themselves in terms of the same social category membership" (Turner, 1984: 530). Individuals usually choose to retain their membership in the psychological group for as long as the social identity derived from it is positive (Fig. 1).

### **Work Attitudes of Organizational Attachment and Job Satisfaction as Consequences of Token Status**

Organizational attachment can be defined as one's psychological and behavioral engagement with a social group or unit of which one is a part (Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992). If membership in a social category or group does not provide a satisfying social identity members will attempt to leave it, either psychologically or physically (Turner et al., 1987). When a particular social category is unsatisfying and thus unattractive as a psychological group, then attachment to the group in terms of commitment or intent to remain will be reduced (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982; Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainous, 1988). In addition, isolation and stereotyping arising from the tokenism dynamics of contrast and assimilation may undermine feelings of commitment.

In one study of the determinants of organizational commitment, Hrebiniak and Alutto (1972) found that men working in predominantly female groups had low levels of organizational commitment, whereas women in the same sample had high organizational commitment. Assuming that sex is a salient and meaningful social category from which individuals can derive

a social identity, then these men found their mostly female coworkers to be a less satisfying psychological group than did the women. This reasoning is supported by a second study (Aranya, Kushnir, & Valency, 1986) that found that when the situation was reversed and the sample consisted of women working in a male dominated profession the women were less committed than the men. Apparently the women in this second sample found their mostly male coworkers a less satisfying psychological group than the women in the first sample who worked primarily with other women. In addition to psychological commitment, intent to quit is considered to be an indication of a lack of behavioral commitment (Mottaz, 1989). If an individual finds membership in a social unit to be unsatisfactory, he or she will most likely desire to sever membership. For example, the same study that found that men working in predominantly female groups had low organizational commitment also found that those same men were more interested in changing employers (Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972).

The pressures created by heightened visibility, contrast, and assimilation, may make their coworkers an unattractive psychological group for token individuals. These negative feelings, in turn, could result in poorer work attitudes like decreased organizational attachment and job satisfaction. For example, Wharton and Baron (1987) found that men working primarily with women had lower job satisfaction. The preceding discussion suggests the following hypotheses:

*H1:* Token male flight attendants will perceive themselves as less attached to the organization (as measured by psychological commitment and intent to quit) than the majority group of female flight attendants.

*H2:* Token male flight attendants will perceive themselves as less satisfied with their job than the majority group of female flight attendants.

### **Psychological and Job Factors as Mediators of the Relationship Between Token Status and Work Attitudes**

Although Kanter's theory of demographic composition (Kanter, 1977) has stood its ground theoretically and empirically, it does not specify the process by which demographic composition affects performance or other outcome variables like work attitudes. Lawrence (1997) has argued that the failure to adequately specify and test theoretical constructs which explain how demographic indicators affect organizational outcomes creates a "black box" of unclear and untested theories that greatly decrease the theoretical power of demographic models. The need to test mediating mechanisms has been echoed by Riordan (forthcoming). Attending to that criticism, in this

research we propose that token status has its impact as a consequence of several psychological and job factors which serve as mediators of the relationship between token status and work attitudes. In this section we identify four variables that help to further explain why token males might find membership in a predominantly female group of flight attendants unsatisfying as a psychological group and a basis for a positive social identity, ultimately leading to lower job satisfaction and less attachment to the organization.

The tendency for majority groups to construct sharp boundaries between themselves and individuals in the minority is emphasized by both tokenism and social categorization. The contrast that majorities draw between themselves and tokens serves to isolate the tokens. This undermines the tokens' ability to develop a positive social identity and therefore positive self-esteem. Research by Segal (1962), for example, concluded that social isolation contributed to the low self-esteem experienced by token male nurses. He also found that the token men in his sample felt that it was not respectable to be a man in a career dominated by women, further contributing to their low self-esteem.

Social isolation also tends to exclude individuals in the minority from situations in which important job-relevant information and learning about job-related tasks and procedures are shared among the majority (Heikes, 1991; Kanter, 1977). This type of social quarantine may thwart the attempts of the underrepresented to actively participate in their work roles and prohibit them from feeling like they "fit" in their job. As noted by social categorization, people tend to evaluate themselves and their competencies in comparison to others. When tokens compare themselves to the majority reference group, the differences between them may adversely affect individual perceptions of fit with the job (Williams, 1995). Isolation from the majority should also negatively affect not only a male token's perceptions of how suitably he fits in his job, but his involvement in his role as flight attendant as well. Lack of support from coworkers may also make it difficult to obtain resources needed to do the job, thus requiring extra effort to perform well and making it harder to become fully engaged with the work role.

Similarly, being forced to act in accordance with others' stereotypic expectations rather than performing tasks appropriate for the job should also prohibit male tokens from being actively involved in their jobs. For example, a male flight attendant who, because of stereotypes about male strength, is constantly being asked to lift overhead luggage when the true purpose of the job is to ensure the safety and comfort of passengers should feel less fully engaged with all aspects of his job than his female counterparts. Furthermore, assimilation into stereotyped roles can also create role ambiguity. For token male flight attendants, assimilation into stereotypically male roles may produce ambiguity about what is expected of them when

performing a job that is stereotypically associated with women. For example, Segal (1962) observed that token male nurses perceived an inconsistency to being a man in a job requiring traditionally feminine characteristics (e.g., nurturing, patience).

The pressures of tokenism can cause individuals in the minority to feel marginalized as a result of coworkers' treatment toward and expectations of them. These individuals may experience low self-esteem as well as feelings that they do not "fit" with everyone else, be confused about what is expected of them and find themselves obstructed from fully engaging in their work role. Therefore, the psychological and job-related pressures of low self-esteem, role ambiguity, lack of job fit, and reduced role involvement should ultimately render the majority group of female flight attendants an unsatisfying basis for positive social identity leading token male flight attendants to have more negative work attitudes. The preceding discussion suggests the following hypotheses:

*H3:* The psychological and job factors of self-esteem, role ambiguity, role involvement, and job fit will mediate the relationship between token status and organizational attachment (as measured by organizational commitment and intent to quit).

*H4:* The psychological and job factors of self-esteem, role ambiguity, role involvement, and job fit will mediate the relationship between token status and job satisfaction.

## METHOD

### Sample

This study was conducted with flight attendants at a major U.S. airline. Because male flight attendants at this company constituted about 13% of all flight attendants, we "over sampled" for men by selecting every male flight attendant on the list provided and selecting every third female flight attendant. The initial sample consisted of 850 flight attendants. This sample included 238 male and 612 female flight attendants. Completed surveys were received from 272 respondents, for a response rate of 32%. However, 36 of these surveys were eliminated from the final sample because those respondents held job titles other than flight attendant. This left a final sample of 236, 34% percent ( $n = 80$ ) of whom were men and 21% ( $n = 49$ ) of whom were non-White. This racial minority group included 18 African Americans, 10 Latino, 7 Asians, 4 Native Americans, and 10 who chose the category other.



Respondents' average age was 36 years, their average tenure as flight attendants with the company was 11.16 years, and 47% of respondents held a college or higher degree. About half (52.5%) of respondents were married, including 18 same-sex domestic partnerships. There were no significant differences between male and female flight attendants in age (36.3 vs. 36,  $t = .35$ , *ns*) or tenure (10.7 vs. 11.4,  $t = -.78$ , *ns*). A significant difference did exist with regard to education, with male flight attendants more likely than females to hold college degrees (48.3 vs. 29.2%,  $t = 2.00$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Information regarding the comparability of respondents to nonrespondents was not available.

## Procedure

We mailed each individual in the initial sample a survey that inquired about basic demographic information, psychological and job factors, and work attitudes. A cover letter advised respondents of the voluntary nature of the study, assured them of the confidentiality of all responses, and thanked them for participating. The research itself was described as studying how men and women think and feel about various aspects of their job. To ensure respondent confidentiality, survey distribution and collection were managed from a university address, using self-addressed stamped envelopes.

## Measures

### *Dependent Variable*

*Work Attitudes.* Work attitudes were measured by the following three constructs: *Satisfaction* – This measure consisted of seven of the eight items ( $\alpha = .76$ ) developed by Kunin (1955). These items were rated on scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a great deal*). Questions in this scale asked about satisfaction with such things as supervision, opportunity for promotion, and the nature of the work. *Commitment* – This variable was measured on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) using the 10 items ( $\alpha = .90$ ) measuring attitudinal commitment (Angle & Perry, 1981) of the original 15-item scale developed by Porter et al. (1974). Sample items included the following: “I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization” and “For me this is the best of all organizations for which to work.” *Intent to quit* – This measure consisted of three items ( $\alpha = .79$ ) rated on scales from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) and is listed in the appendix.

### *Independent Variables*

#### *Psychological Factors*

*Self-esteem* – This factor was measured using a 5-item Likert-type scale ( $\alpha = .76$ ) anchored at 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 5 (*strongly agree*). This measure contains 5 of the original 10 items developed by Rosenberg (1962). Sample items include: “I am able to do things as well as most other people” and “On the whole I am satisfied with myself.” *Role ambiguity* – This factor was measured using a 5-item scale ( $\alpha = .63$ ) anchored at 1 (almost never) and 5 (almost always). The role ambiguity scale originated as a subscale of a larger 20-item job stress scale developed by Frone, Russell, and Cooper (1995). Sample items asked how often respondents felt “unsure about what people expect” or “certain how much or how little authority” they had.

#### *Job Factors*

*Job fit* – This factor was measured using a 14-item scale ( $\alpha = .86$ ). The job fit scale was based on a 29-item measure developed by Schreiber (1979) and is listed in the appendix. *Role involvement* – This factor was measured using an 5-item scale ( $\alpha = .84$ ) adapted from Frone, Russell, and Cooper (1995). Sample items included the following: “I am very much personally involved with my job” and “My job is a very important part of my life.” Both role involvement and job fit were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 5 (*strongly agree*).

### *Control Variables*

Several additional variables were controlled for in the analyses to rule out alternative explanations. For all analyses, age, education, and professional tenure were controlled for because workers with more experience and education may be rewarded with more challenging work, greater autonomy, and higher levels of compensation making them more satisfied with their work and more strongly attached to the organization than are the inexperienced and less well educated (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). In addition, long tenure in one job implies an investment in the organization that individuals may be reluctant to give up. Finally, older workers who have not updated their skills may be hesitant to leave the organization and reenter the job market.

## **RESULTS**

Table I presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables. The correlations among the independent and the control

**Table I.** Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations Among Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	z <sub>1</sub>	z <sub>2</sub>	z <sub>3</sub>	x <sub>1</sub>	x <sub>2</sub>	x <sub>3</sub>	x <sub>4</sub>	x <sub>5</sub>	y <sub>1</sub>	y <sub>2</sub>	y <sub>3</sub>
Control													
z <sub>1</sub> Age	36.10	7.47	1.00										
z <sub>2</sub> Education	3.57	.91	.01	1.00									
z <sub>3</sub> Prof. tenure	11.16	6.74	.76**	-.06	1.00								
Independent													
x <sub>1</sub> Sex	.63	.48	-.02	-.13*	.05	1.00							
x <sub>2</sub> Self-esteem	4.32	.58	.03	.00	.00	.24**	1.00						
x <sub>3</sub> Role ambiguity	1.62	.46	-.07	.02	.00	-.19**	-.23**	1.00					
x <sub>4</sub> Job fit	4.34	.42	.26**	-.04	.16*	.18**	.47**	-.33*	1.00				
x <sub>5</sub> Role involvement	3.16	.77	.06	-.15*	.00	.06	.18**	-.01	.26**	1.00			
Dependent													
y <sub>1</sub> Satisfaction	3.39	.62	.28**	-.11	.19**	.16*	.29**	-.21**	.48**	.36**	1.00		
y <sub>2</sub> Commitment	3.40	.71	.14*	-.16*	.02	.16*	.23**	-.24**	.39**	.46**	.59**	1.00	
y <sub>3</sub> Intent to quit	2.08	.96	-.24**	.05	-.17**	-.13	-.29**	.11	-.43**	-.29**	-.47**	-.35**	1.00

\*  $p \leq .05$ . \*\*  $p \leq .01$ .

**Table II.** Hierarchical Regression Predicting the Effect of Sex on Occupational Outcomes

	Satisfaction	Commitment	Intent to quit
Control			
Age	.03**	.03**	-.04**
Education	-.07	-.12*	.04
Prof. tenure	-.01	-.03**	.01
Independent			
Sex	.22**	.25**	-.27*
Adjusted $R^2$	.11	.08	.06
Overall model $F(df)$	7.51** (4,215)	5.94** (4,216)	4.46** (4,215)
$R^2$ change (from controls)	.03**	.03**	.02*

Note. Sex is coded 0 for men and 1 for women.

†  $p \leq .10$ . \*  $p \leq .05$ . \*\*  $p \leq .01$ .

variables do not indicate a problem with multicollinearity. The three dependent variables are reasonably independent with the correlation between commitment and satisfaction ( $r = .59$ ) being the largest.

The hierarchical regression analyses used to test hypotheses 1 and 2 are summarized in Table II. These hypotheses proposed that male flight attendants would perceive themselves as less satisfied with their job, and less attached to the organization as evidenced by lower levels of commitment and greater intent to quit than the female majority. The regression results show a significant connection in the predicted direction between sex and both satisfaction and the attachment variables. As expected, the results show that male flight attendants perceive themselves as less satisfied with their jobs, less committed to the organization, and more likely to quit.

To test the mediating effect of self-esteem, role ambiguity, job fit, and role involvement on the relationship between sex and job satisfaction and organizational attachment predicted by Hypotheses 3 and 4, we followed Baron and Kenny's recommendations (Baron & Kenny, 1986). They argued that mediation is demonstrated if three conditions are fulfilled: (1) the independent variable and the proposed mediators must each be significantly related to the dependent variables when considered separately; (2) the independent variable must be significantly related to the proposed mediators; (3) the relationship between the independent and dependent variables should be weaker or nonsignificant when the proposed mediators are in the regression equation than when they are excluded.

The first condition was met by all of the study variables with the exception of role ambiguity. The correlation matrix in Table I showed that role ambiguity was not significantly related to intent to quit thus eliminating it as a possible mediator for that variable. To test the second condition self-esteem, role ambiguity, job fit, and role involvement were each separately regressed on sex and the control variables. The analyses presented in Table III show

**Table III.** Hierarchical Regression Predicting the Impact of Sex on Psychological and Job-Related Factors

	Self-esteem	Role ambiguity	Job fit	Role involvement
<b>Control</b>				
Age	.01	-.01 <sup>†</sup>	.02**	.02 <sup>†</sup>
Education	.02	.00	-.01	-.13*
Prof. tenure	-.01	.01	-.01	-.02
<b>Independent</b>				
Sex	.32**	-.21**	.18**	.13
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.06	.04	.11	.02
Overall model <i>F</i>	4.30**	3.42**	7.64**	2.27 <sup>†</sup>
( <i>df</i> )	(4,220)	(4,219)	(4,222)	(4,220)
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> change (from controls)	.07**	.05**	.04**	.01

Note. Sex is coded 0 for men and 1 for women.

<sup>†</sup>*p* ≤ .10. \**p* ≤ .05. \*\**p* ≤ .01.

that all of the proposed mediators met the second condition with the exception of role involvement. To test the mediational models with the remaining variables, several regressions were performed for each dependent variable, first separately with each of the potential mediating variables and finally with all of the mediators together.

Table IV shows the mediating analyses for satisfaction. When job satisfaction was regressed on sex and each of the proposed mediators (self-esteem, role ambiguity, job fit) in turn, each mediator was significantly related to job satisfaction while the coefficient for sex decreased and became less significant than when sex alone was regressed on satisfaction. Then all

**Table IV.** Hierarchical Regression Examining the Mediating Effects of Psychological and Job-Related Factors on the Relationship Between Sex and Job Satisfaction

	Self-esteem	Role ambiguity	Job fit	Role involvement	Sex
<b>Control</b>					
Age	.03**	.03**	.03**	.02*	.02*
Education	-.08 <sup>†</sup>	-.08 <sup>†</sup>	-.06	-.06	-.06
Prof. tenure	-.01	.00	-.01	.00	.00
<b>Independent</b>					
Sex	.21**	.13	.18*	.11	.08
<b>Mediator</b>					
Self-esteem		.26**			.09
Role ambiguity			-.21*		-.07
Job fit				.61**	.52**
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.11	.16	.12	.25	.24
Overall model <i>F</i>	7.46**	9.15**	6.94**	15.55**	10.79**
( <i>df</i> )	(4,213)	(5,212)	(5,211)	(5,214)	(7,207)
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> change		.05**	.02*	.14**	.15**

Note. Sex is coded 0 for men and 1 for women.

<sup>†</sup>*p* ≤ .10. \**p* ≤ .05. \*\**p* ≤ .01.

**Table V.** Hierarchical Regression Examining the Mediating Effects of Psychological and Job-Related Factors on the Relationship Between Sex and Organizational Commitment

Control					
Age	.03**	.03**	.03**	.02*	.02*
Education	-.12*	-.13*	-.12*	-.11*	-.11*
Prof. tenure	-.03*	-.02*	-.02*	-.02*	-.02*
Independent					
Sex	.25**	.17 <sup>†</sup>	.21*	.16 <sup>†</sup>	.13
Mediator					
Self-esteem		.24**			.09
Role ambiguity			-.26**		-.13
Job fit				.56**	.47**
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.08	.11	.11	.17	.18
Overall model <i>F</i>	5.83**	6.53**	6.18**	10.22**	7.66**
( <i>df</i> )	(4,214)	(5,213)	(5,212)	(5,215)	(7,208)
R <sup>2</sup> change		.03**	.03**	.09**	.10**

Note. Sex is coded 0 for men and 1 for women.

<sup>†</sup> $p \leq .10$ . \* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $p \leq .01$ .

three mediators were regressed together with sex on job satisfaction. In this final analysis, only job fit was significantly related to job satisfaction. These results indicate that separately self-esteem, role ambiguity, and job fit mediate the relationship between sex and job satisfaction. However, when all three variables are in the equation together, only job fit is a full mediator explaining a unique amount of variance.

Table V shows the mediating analyses for organizational commitment. When self-esteem, role ambiguity, and job fit were each separately regressed with sex on commitment each of these proposed mediators was significantly related to commitment whereas the coefficient for sex decreased and became less significant than when sex alone was regressed on commitment. Finally, all three proposed mediators were regressed together with sex on commitment. The results show that separately self-esteem, role ambiguity, and job fit each mediate the relationship between sex and commitment, whereas when all the variables are in the equation together only job fit is a full mediator that explains a unique amount of variance. As in the previous analysis these results show the importance of self-esteem, role ambiguity, and job fit in predicting work attitudes but gives the primary role to job fit.

The mediating analyses for intent to quit are presented in Table VI. They show that when self-esteem and job fit are separately regressed with sex on intent to quit, each of these variables is significantly related to intent to quit, whereas the coefficient for sex decreases and becomes less significant than when sex by itself is regressed on intent to quit. However, when self-esteem and job fit are entered into the equation together only job fit is shown to be a full mediator of the relationship between sex and intent to quit. Here again,

**Table VI.** Hierarchical Regression Examining the Mediating Effects of Psychological and Job-Related Factors on the Relationship Between Sex and Intent to Quit

Control				
Age	-.04**	-.03**	-.02	-.02
Education	.04	.05	.03	.04
Prof. tenure	.01	.00	.00	.00
Independent				
Sex	-.26*	-.11	-.11	-.06
Mediator				
Self-esteem		-.43**		-.20 <sup>†</sup>
Job fit			-.89**	-.76**
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.06	.12	.19	.19
Overall model <i>F</i> ( <i>df</i> )	4.27** (4,213)	6.75** (5,212)	11.24** (5,214)	9.63** (6,211)
R <sup>2</sup> change		.06**	.13**	.14**

Note. Sex is coded 0 for men and 1 for women.

<sup>†</sup>*p* ≤ .10. \**p* ≤ .05. \*\**p* ≤ .01.

self-esteem is important but job fit appears to play the most critical role in predicting work attitudes.

## DISCUSSION

In this paper, we sought to contribute to the literature on demography in several different ways. First, we sought to further extend research on males in the minority by examining other outcome variables besides career advancement, which has been the focus of much of the research in this area. Our second goal was to begin to open the “black box” of organizational demography referred to by Lawrence (1997) by hypothesizing and testing a set of intervening processes that might explain how numerical rarity affects outcomes like work attitudes. Third, we were concerned with complimenting and extending the previous qualitative studies of men as minorities through the use of rigorous quantitative research methods.

The changing character of the American workforce makes this research timely as well as theoretically important. Powerful economic and social forces have increased the number of women among employed persons in the United States. However, the labor force has not been fully integrated, creating many work situations in which a woman may be the only, or one of the few, representatives of her group. The experiences of those who work in such demographically skewed situations have given rise to at least one prominent theory of demographic composition—tokenism (Kanter, 1977). Since the time that token theory was first elaborated, another shift has occurred in the U.S. workplace; now men may find themselves working in situations in which women are the predominant group. Such is the case with the flight

attendant occupation, which despite the entrance of the first men in the late 1960s is still mainly identified with women and whose ranks consist of more than 80% women (Carey, 1996).

As we have mentioned, much of the demography research has concentrated on the career-related consequences of numerical rarity or being a token. This study demonstrated that in addition to career outcomes, work attitudes such as satisfaction and organizational attachment are also meaningful consequences of token status. Specifically, we predicted that male tokens would be less satisfied with their job than the female majority and would be less attached to the organization as measured by psychological commitment and intent to quit. These hypotheses were fully supported and thus are consistent with the findings of other demography studies showing that when traditional majority group members hold minority status their inclination to feel emotionally attached to the organization decreases (i.e., Chattopadhyay, 1999; Tsui et al., 1992).

Perhaps even more theoretically important and interesting are our findings regarding the strong influence of numerical representation on work attitudes. Specifically, we found that the negative relationship between token status and satisfaction and organizational attachment was fully accounted for by the variables of self-esteem, role ambiguity, and job fit with job fit playing the most prominent role. The success of self-esteem, role ambiguity, and job fit as mediators of the relationship between token status and work attitudes supports the frameworks of tokenism and social categorization. The findings of this study support the idea that numerically rare male flight attendants perceive themselves to be different from the majority group of female flight attendants and that this perception of group difference significantly affects their attitudes about work through lowered self-esteem, increased role ambiguity, and poor job fit.

It appears that male tokens in this sample did not find their predominantly female coworkers a satisfying group on which to base a positive social identity and thus positive self-esteem. Recall, for example, similar findings by Segal (1962) who reported that token male nurses experienced lowered self-esteem in comparison to the majority of female nurses. Further, because the nature of the work done by flight attendants is perceived to be highly feminine (Nielsen, 1982; Carey, 1996) male flight attendants were unsure of their role and did not perceive a good fit between themselves and their job. Job fit provided the most explanatory power of any of the mediating variables. A poor job fit occurs when the perceived attributes of a target individual (in this case male) are not congruent with the perceived requirements (in this case female) for the job (Heilman, 1983). The strong association of the flight attendant occupation with women both historically and numerically obviously presents a real problem for men



working in this profession. The findings presented here indicate that being a man doing “women’s work” has significantly detrimental effects on men’s satisfaction and organizational attachment. Accordingly, other researchers have also found that men often perceive working in a profession dominated by women to be an inappropriate masculine behavior (e.g., Segal, 1962; Williams, 1989).

In addition to the theoretical relevance of these findings, our results are also practically important. Because there is a well-established relationship between organizational attachment (e.g., intent to quit) and actual turnover (Kraut, 1975; O’Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991), having the 13% of employees represented by male flight attendants at this airline indicate limited attachment may be quite costly to the organization. Given the significant difference between men and women on the job factor of job fit, it was somewhat surprising to find that token males and majority females did not differ in their perceptions of their role involvement. The role involvement measure employed in this study asks generally about how important a part of life one’s job is. Most people spend a majority of their day at work and this may be more so for flight attendants who have to travel extensively. Because of this and other factors like investment in training (which flight attendants pay for themselves) the job can form as large a part of the lives of male flight attendants as it does for female flight attendants despite the difficulties associated with it.

### **Limitations**

Although important research, this study has several limitations. Although this work had as a goal to begin opening the “black box” referred to by Lawrence (1997) this approach could be taken even further by actually measuring variables such as an individuals’ degree of identification with various groups and the perceptual tendencies (visibility, contrast, assimilation) that Kanter (1977) associated with token status. Also, as previously mentioned, we were unable to obtain nonresponse data so that the representativeness of our sample compared to the entire population of flight attendants at the airline under study is unknown. In addition, because this study was cross-sectional, it is not possible to state conclusive causal relationships among the variables. Future research in this area should focus on examining these relationships over time or in a more controlled setting. However, using a survey methodology and introducing intervening psychological and job factors does provide a nice complement to previous research on tokens and allows us to better clarify underlying processes that explain the connection between token status and work attitudes.

## Implications

Despite the above limitations, this research has several important implications. The findings presented here strongly suggest that the structural theory of tokenism has its effect by influencing previously unmeasured subjective psychological and job-related factors. Building on this research, subsequent studies should continue to give more attention to the mechanisms that connect demography and organizational outcomes. The uncovering of these mediating effects suggest leverage points that can be addressed to improve the work life of individuals in the minority and their relationship to the organization. For example, with sex-typed jobs, organizations should try to decouple the requirements of the job from sex stereotypes about job holders. This would go a long way toward removing the automatic lack of fit for tokens in sex-typed jobs that proved so detrimental for male flight attendants in this study. Actively recruiting to equalize the representation of the sexes within the job would further the goal of removing sex-typing as well as reducing sex as a salient grouping dimension. In the meantime, training that educates individuals about the divisive group dynamics that can arise from tokenism and social categorization can bring these tendencies into conscious awareness and perhaps help both minority and majority members manage their reactions to the other group.

## APPENDIX

**Intent to Quit** [answered on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*)]

1. I frequently think about changing to a new line of work.
2. I hope to continue working as a flight attendant for at least 1–3 years. (reverse coded)
3. It is likely that I will make an effort to find a job other than flight attendant in the next 1–3 years.

**Job Fit** [answered on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*)]

1. This job may not be the right one for me. (reverse coded)
2. I feel like I fit in well with others on this job.
3. I have the right kind of abilities to do well in this job.
4. I have the right kind of personality to do well in this job.
5. I have the right physical appearance to do well in this job.
6. I do not feel accepted by my peers. (reverse coded)
7. I do not feel accepted by my supervisors. (reverse coded)
8. I am perceived as competent in my job.
9. The pilots that I have worked for think highly of me.

10. Pilots do not treat me with respect. (reverse coded)
11. Other flight attendants that I work with think highly of me.
12. Passengers think highly of me.
13. Other flight attendants are disrespectful toward me. (reverse coded)
14. There is a good “match” between me and the requirements of this job.

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