THE UTAH STATE SENATE: EFFECTS OF TOKENISM AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE GENDER PARITY

During the 2002 legislative session, women held twenty-one percent of the Utah State Senate seats. This percentage fits within Kanter's (1977) definition of a skewed group and thus opens the Senate to examination using her framework of tokenism. To investigate tokenism in relation to the Senate, I conducted in-depth interviews with five of the six female senators. After analyzing the interview tapes and notes, I found evidence of tokenism, specifically role entrapment. With further examination of the evidence using Kanter, Sapiro's (1990) concept of gender consciousness and Yoder's (1991) criticism of tokenism, I concluded that there was strong evidence of tokenism in the Utah State Senate as well as varying degrees of gender consciousness.

Despite evidence in support of Kanter, I agree with Yoder's criticism that Kanter's proposed solution to the problems associated with tokenism is insufficient. Simply increasing the number of the token group, women in this case, will not address cultural bias. To adequately address the systemic and cultural sexism present, women and men must develop gender consciousness, recognize the inherent inequalities in the current political system, and collectively pursue the recruitment and development of women within political party structures and within electoral politics. Gender parity will only be reached in the Utah State Legislature when the barriers associated with tokenism are addressed and the development of gender consciousness occurs.