**Autobiography for Each Author**

**First Author: Carliss Miller** is a doctoral candidate studying international management  in the Jindal School of Management at the University of Texas at Dallas. She earned a BA from the University of Texas at Arlington, and a MBA from the University of Florida concentrating in Human Resource Management. Her research interests include diversity, leader-follower relationships, and intragroup relations.

**Second Author: Orlando Richard** is an Associate Professor of Management and the Jindal School of Management Diversity and Inclusion Coordinator at the University of Texas at Dallas. He earned his Ph.D. in Human Resource Management and Organizational Behavior from the University of Kentucky and completed a post doctorate in Human Resources Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Sloan School of Management.  His research is answer driven and addresses for the most part the acquisition, development, and integration of a diverse human capital pool.

**Third Author: İlhami Yücel** is an Associate Professor in the Management and Organization department at the University of Erzincan –Turkey. He earned his Ph.D. in Management from Atatürk University in Turkey and completed a post doctorate in Organizations, Strategy and International Management in the Jindal School of Management at the University of Texas at Dallas. His research interests include diversity, organizational commitment, and leadership.

**Fourth Author: María Triana** is an Associate Professor in the Management and Human Resources department at the University of Wisconsin - Madison. Her research interests include workplace discrimination and diversity, organizational justice, and human resources selection. She earned her Ph.D. in Management from Texas A&M University.

**WHEN MEN ARE IN THE MINORITY: THE DIFFERENTIAL EFFECTS OF LEADER-FOLLOWER GENDER IN PINK COLLAR SETTINGS**

**ABSTRACT**

In female-dominated occupations and organizations, we examined the gender differences among employees in gender-similar dyads with respect to affective attitudes toward the organization. Using an integrative theoretical framework, we examined whether those attitudes were moderated by their manager's gender status and their perception of the organization's discrimination practices against women. In this survey-based field study, we found that in pink collar settings, women managed by women had more positive attitudes toward the organization than men managed by men, and this was more prominent when the discriminatory environment was fair for women. Consistent with the Crabs in the Barrel Syndrome notion, when the organization has discriminatory hiring and promotion practices that disadvantage women, we found that organizational commitment is lower for women than men in gender-similar dyads.

***Keywords:*** pink collar setting, gender similarity, male tokens, leader-follower relationships, gender discrimination, women in management, Crabs in the Barrel Syndrome, Glass Escalator

**WHEN MEN ARE IN THE MINORITY: THE DIFFERENTIAL EFFECTS OF LEADER-FOLLOWER GENDER IN PINK COLLAR SETTINGS**

The global trends of women in management are changing, with more women claiming a larger share of managerial positions, although at a slow and uneven rate from country to country (Wirth, 2004). Using data from the International Labour Organization, Wirth (2004) found that the share of managerial positions for women ranged between 20 – 40% in 48 out of 63 sampled countries, and that men were still in the majority for upper levels of management with women holding mostly lower level management positions, even in more “feminized” occupations (e.g. nursing, teaching). However, the report also indicates evidence that once women attain upper level management positions, the attitudes towards them do not show much difference compared to male managers. With this growing trend of women in managerial positions and men in female-dominated professions, and the pervasive nature of a manager’s gender as a status cue, it is important to understand the contextual complexity of employee attitudes towards gender similarity or dissimilarity with their managers, particularly in the under-researched context of pink collar (female-dominated) settings (Simmons, Watkins, & Umphress, 2015).

In pink collar settings, we ask do men and women have different attitudes towards the organization depending on whether they have a male or female manager. To answer this research question, we contrast males with male managers to females with female managers. Furthermore, we explore how employee attitudes (i.e. affective organizational commitment) when working under a similar-gender manager are further influenced by perceived discrimination against women. We argue that in environments low in discrimination against women, equitable standards for hiring and promotion would exist and women would maintain their high status in the organization, but in a highly discriminatory environment showing hiring and promotion preference towards men, we infer that men may be in positions of power and influence at the top levels of the organization. These conditions create a dynamic for a *glass escalator effect* for men where they have an advantaged status in a female-dominated organization (Williams, 1992), and a *crabs in the barrel effect* for women where they may prefer reporting to men.

Our research makes the following contributions: first, we employ relational demography (Tsui & O’Reilly, 1989) to bring light to the effects of gender similarity between employees and their managers, and the differential status levels of males and females in a given organizational context; these effects are examined through the lens of status characteristics theory. Second, we integrate social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986)—identifying the boundary conditions for when the positive outcomes of demographic similarity hold, and the conditions in which they do not. Third, we contribute to the discrimination literature (Goldman, Gutek, Stein, & Lewis, 2006), more specifically, addressing the questions of whether there is a *glass escalator effect* for men in pink collar settings. According to the glass escalator concept (Williams, 1992), there are positive outcomes for men when they perceive they have an advantage in a female-dominated setting. Fourth, based on the literature on gender and sex differences in management (Joshi et al., 2015), we take a structural perspective to discuss sex-based discrimination and gender differences in the workplace, and subsequently link gender differences to organizational structure and the organization’s environment (Ely & Padavic, 2007). Finally, this study tests the nature of the Crabs in the Barrel Syndrome for women and men in pink collar settings, thus advancing the conceptual efforts in understanding the effects of “being in the minority” in the workplace.

**THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT**

Gender is often a discriminating factor in the workplace amongst employees and employers. Over the last two decades, women have been slowly breaking the glass ceiling and are moving into leadership positions (Johnston & Lee, 2012). But women still face discrimination and obstacles in advancing up the hierarchical ladder (Johnston & Lee, 2012). Female occupations are those identified by society as requiring female skills and attributes, such as nurturing, emotion, empathy, and caring (Williams, 1989, p. 131). Occupations such as nursing, elementary education, library science, and social work fall into this category (Hochschild, 1979). Interestingly, according to role congruity theory women in predominately female jobs should be judged more positively than men in these same occupations. However, there was no significant difference found between female nurses and male nurses. This could be explained by the glass escalator effect (Williams, 1992), which argues that men who work in predominately female occupations move forward and advance faster than their female colleagues. Male nurses, therefore, may benefit from a glass escalator, while female firefighters may hit a glass ceiling.

Eagly and Karau (2002) not only provided explanations for discrimination of female leaders, and how and why females hit the glass ceiling, but these authors also use role congruity to make predictions about the emergence of female leaders. According to role congruity theory “achieving leadership is more difficult for women than men, because of the common perception that women have less leadership ability and (often) the preference that women will not exhibit this ability and instead engage in communal, supportive behavior” (p.581). It is this sort of limited access to prestigious jobs and leadership positions that gives creditability to the existence of the glass ceiling.

While fitting in explaining women’s continued limited mobility in predominantly-male occupations, Kanter’s (1977) conclusions are arguably less connected to the experiences of men in feminized occupations. Subsequent research demonstrates that where marginalization results in suppressed opportunities for women, an alternative pattern tends to emerge for male tokens. While men are certainly tokens at the occupational level in a number of female-dominated jobs, men are also overrepresented in *management positions* in such work (Grimm & Stern, 1974; Williams, 1995), often surpassing their female counterparts. Zimmer also examined studies involving male tokens (e.g., Kadushin, 1976; Benokraitis & Feagin, 1995s). The results of these studies led Zimmer to the following conclusion: “These examples of men’s experiences as tokens suggest that being ‘few’ in a highly skewed work group has very different consequences for men and women…When males are the tokens, the disadvantages of being the few are minimal and, under some circumstances, turn into advantages.” (p. 70-71). Yoder (1994) also recognized the potential moderating effects of subordinate gender status as a possible source of tokenism, such that women are often subjected to the negative effects of tokenism processes more so than males, regardless of numeric representation (Yoder, 1991; Laws, 1975).

**Crabs in the Barrel Syndrome**

We adopt the Crabs in the Barrel Syndrome as a conceptual metaphor to explore the effects of gender similarity. *The Crab in the Barrel Syndrome represents* ***the mentality and behaviors of socially identical individuals whose group status may be lower in a given environment,*** *who engage in social undermining or competitive positioning**with a peer, supervisor, or subordinate, with intent of self or group preservation. CBS is a competitive and conflictual social interaction that violates group norms for respect, helping, and support.* As discussed in Miller (2015), when employees show preference for reporting to demographically dissimilar managers, this could be evidence of CBS. This reporting preference could be based on the unexpected conflictual nature of the relationship when reporting to a demographically similar manager, or because the employee may assume the manager has access to more influential networks within the organization. Another term informing gender discrimination among females is the Queen Bee Syndrome, which suggests some women who rise to the top of their professions attribute their success to their unique ability, and deny the role of discrimination in the failure of other women to succeed (Staines, Tavris, & Jayaratne, 1974). Cooper (1997) summarized the effect of the Queen Bee Syndrome as “women are threatened by other women, ultimately for the attention of men; thus, they evaluate other women negatively and attempt to subvert their success” (p. 486).

The Crabs in the Barrel Syndrome (CBS) was introduced as a conceptual metaphor to explain the potential for negative outcomes associated with socially referent others in peer and hierarchical dyads (Miller 2014, 2015). The CBS concept employs an integrative framework of social identity theory and social comparison theory, and status characteristics theory given the salience of social identification and status-based considerations that can predict subordinate deference (Joshi & Knight, 2015) and the preference for female or male leaders (Ellemers, Rink, Derks, & Ryan, 2012; Elsesser & Lever, 2011).

The central argument of CBS is that the positive benefits of demographic similarity will only hold for those whose demographic or status-based characteristic is in the proportional majority of the respective organization. Previous scholars have suggested that if the presence of women is better represented in an organization, particularly at the senior levels, then negative outcomes associated with female leader-follower dyads, such as the queen bee effect (Ellemers et al. 2012) or women not perceiving female leaders as supportive (Ely, 1994), should subside. Such has been the case for females in male-dominated organizations where more negative outcomes were associated with demographic similarity for females, and demographic dissimilarity conferred more positive outcomes and leader preference when the manager was a man, or had higher status in the organization (Duguid, 2011; Ely, 1994).

To best capture the employees’ attitude towards the organization, we adopt affective organizational commitment for our analysis. Affective organizational commitment has been described as an attitudinal construct that that imbues the emotional bonds an employee has with an organization (Petersen & Dietz, 2008). As quoted in Petersen and Dietz (2008: 1288): “Affective commitment refers to the employee’s emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization” (Meyer & Allen, 1991: 67). It is also suggested that through organizational commitment, employees are more likely to exert extra effort in accomplishing job-related goals (Meyer & Allen, 1991), and recent research has established that affective commitment is a strong predictor of employee task performance and extra role performance (Loi, Lai, & Lamb, 2012).

The CBS concept predicts that, all things being equal, when the environment is favorable for women (i.e. equitable promotion and hiring opportunities) such as can be expected in a pink collar setting, then women reporting to women should yield positive outcomes because of the positive identification associated with being female, such as increased organizational commitment and better performance outcomes. We assume that status values associated with demographic characteristics, such as gender, can be based on proportional representation in the organization. Therefore, in a pink collar setting, CBS predicts that since men are in the minority, they are more likely to experience CBS based on their minority status. Thus, when reporting to a man, men will experience less organizational commitment because the environment is not favorable for them. And since women have a higher status in this context, we predict that men reporting to women will have higher OC as well as women reporting women.

*Hypothesis 1: In a pink collar setting, female employees with female managers will have higher organizational commitment than male employees with male managers.*

In a qualitative study on the Crabs in the Barrel Syndrome (Miller, 2016), we learn that CBS can exist for women, even in female-dominated organizations, when men are the key influencers and decision makers. When the “good old boys” network is in play, biased hiring and promotion decisions can favor men, thus creating the “glass escalator” effect. The “glass escalator” concept was introduced by Williams (1992) to suggest that men receive advantages in female-dominated professions (e.g. nursing, teaching, librarianship, and social work) and are assumed to be more suitable than women for leadership positions. Similarly, Goldberg and colleagues (2004) found that men in female-dominated jobs earned considerably higher salaries than women.

In environments where discrimination against women is high, men have an advantage in being considered for hiring and promotions more so over women, therefore even though they are a numerical minority, their sex would garner them a preferred status given the preferential treatment, which would increase their commitment to the organization. If the pervasiveness of discrimination against women is high in a given environment, then women in leadership positions are less likely to offer support to junior women, thus leading female employees reporting to a woman less likely to be committed to the organization. Conversely, in environments where discrimination against women is low, women will benefit from being in a community of women, and will likely be more committed to the organization than men reporting to men. We hypothesize that in a pink collar setting, there will be a three-way interaction among dyad gender (dis)similarity, manager’s gender, and perceived discrimination against women, such that:

*Hypothesis 2a: In environments where discrimination against women is low, female employees with a female manager will have higher organizational commitment than male employees with a male manager.*

*Hypothesis 2b: In environments where discrimination against**women is high, male employees with male managers will have higher organizational commitment than female employees with female managers*

**METHODS**

**Sample and Procedures**

We adopted a field study approach and collected data from employed graduate business students at a U.S. university. Students were invited to participate on a voluntary basis and were incentivized with extra credit for survey completion. The survey completion was confidential, and was administered through the Survey Monkey software. All working students present in class completed the employee survey, which resulted in a 100% participation rate. Seventy students started the survey, however only sixty-eight complete surveys resulted. The survey included questions about their organization’s gender-based discriminatory practices, communication frequency with their immediate supervisor, and demographic information about the employee and their immediate supervisor.

Our goal for sampling was to create a sampling frame that had variance on the immediate manager’s sex. The graduate business students primarily worked in predominantly male settings and had mostly male supervisors, therefore we contracted with Qualtrics, an online survey software provider offering survey panel management, to identify participants to meet additional inclusion criteria for the study. Qualtrics maintains a national panel with over 250,000 individuals who have registered to take surveys.

The inclusion criteria required participants to be employed adults working for a supervisor, and working in a pink-collar setting. Pre-screening questions used to identify participants who met the inclusion criteria were: “Are you at least 18 years of age?”, “Are you currently employed?”, “Do you work in a position where you report to a supervisor?”, and the following questions helped the researchers to determine whether the respondent worked in a pink-collar setting: “Do you work in an organization where the majority of employees are women? or Do you work in one of the following occupations: babysitter/day care worker, counselor, counter attendant, dental assistant/medical assistant, dental hygienist, flight attendant, food preparation worker, hotel housekeeper, library assistant, librarian, maid/domestic worker, massage therapist, nurse, preschool teacher, receptionist/secretary/administrative assistant, retail worker, social worker, waiter/waitress/host/hostess”. These occupations were taken from the list of pink-collar jobs compiled by news sources in the U.S. (Francis, 2014; Sardi, 2012).

We worked with Qualtrics to randomly select people from their panel, which resulted in 522 people who were willing and eligible to participate in our study. Of these, 279 provided complete responses, for a total sample size (students and Qualtrics panel) of 347 employees. Participants were 59% female. On average, they were 43 years old (*SD* = 15.55), had a company tenure of 8.36 years (*SD* = 7.26), and 21.39 years of work experience (*SD* = 14.84). Most participants (55.5%) had a female supervisor and estimated that, on average, their supervisors were 47 years old (*SD* = 11.39), had 13 years of company tenure (*SD* = 9.08), and 23.23 years of total work experience (*SD* = 11.44). Most participants worked in sex-similar hierarchical dyads (65%) and worked with their supervisors an average of 4.7 years. Participants worked in many industries: retail trade (22%), health care (16%), education (9%), food services (5%), other services (4%), finance and insurance (4%), professional, scientific, and technical services (5%), transportation and warehousing (2%), information (4%), manufacturing (2%), construction (1%), wholesale trade (1%), and others (15%).

**Dependent Variable**

***Employee organizational commitment*.**  To measure employee attitudes toward the organization, we used the six-item affective organizational commitment scale developed by Meyer et al. (1993). The items were measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). The items were: (1) I feel “emotionally” attached to my company, (2) My company has a great deal of personal meaning for me, (3) I feel a strong sense of belonging to my company, (4) I really feel as if my company problems are my own, (5) I would be happy to spend the rest of my career with my company, and (6) I feel like “part of the family” at my company. The Cronbach alpha for this measure was .94.

**Independent Variable and Moderator Variables**

***Gender similarity****.* Gender similarity was obtained through dichotomous difference scores on the sex variable (Tsui & O’Reilly, 1989), with 0 indicating that the employee and manager were different genders (e.g., male employee, female manager or vice versa) and 1 indicating that they were the same gender (e.g., both female). To capture gender dissimilarity, the variable was reverse coded such that 0 indicated employee and manager were the same gender, and 1 indicated they were different.

***Manager’s gender.*** Manager’s gender is considered a status characteristic and was measured as a dummy variable where 0 = female manager and 1 = male manager to account for the effects of social status within the organization.

***Gender discrimination****.* To measure discrimination against women, employees responded to a two-item scale developed by Gutek, Cohen, and Tsui (1996). Items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*. Items were: (1) Men are promoted faster than women in my primary work organization, and (2) My primary work organization prefers to hire men. Cronbach alpha for this measure was .82.

**Control Variables**

We include demographic variables such as employee race and manager race in the models (Jehn, Rispens, & Thatcher, 2010; Stewart & Garcia-Prieto, 2008). Including race as a control is important so as not to confound with gender. To capture the employees’ experiences with their managers we controlled for dyadic tenure by asking the employee the number of years they had worked with their immediate manager. We also controlled for the employee and manager’s experience with the company by capturing the number of years both were employed with their company.

Additional control variables included were: sample (Qualtrics panel or student sample), industry, employee salary, and manager and employee’s highest level of education. We also measured face-to-face communication frequency between the employee and their manager by asking participants to report the “average number of minutes you spend personally communicating face-to-face with your supervisor per week.”

**RESULTS**

We ran a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in AMOS 23.0 to establish the discriminant validity of the scales and assess the fit of our theorized two-factor model involving employee-rated scales (employee affective commitment to the organization and gender discrimination). All items have significant loading on intended factors and results indicated the model provided a good fit to the data (χ2 = 42.40; χ2/*df* = 2.36; comparative fit index (CFI) = .99; Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = .98; standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .03; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .06). According to Kline (2005), a model has a satisfactory fit if (a) the chi-squared/degrees of freedom ratio is below 3, (b) the CFI and TLI are above .90, and (c) the SRMR and RMSEA are near .05. Our two-factor model meets all three criteria. Also, a two-factor model showed a significantly better fit than a one-factor solution (χ2 difference (*df* = 1) = 137.52, *p* < .0001, χ2/*df* = 14.16, CFI = .89, TLI = .83, SRMR = .12, RMSEA = .20).

Table 1 contains means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations for the study. Our theoretical model (see Figure 1) implies a moderated-moderation (Hayes, 2013), or three-way interaction, in which the relationship between gender similarity and organizational commitment is moderated by manager’s gender status and by gender discrimination against women. We estimated our models using moderated hierarchical linear regression, supplementing our analysis with the Process macro in SPSS 22 by Hayes (2012) to test our hypotheses. We ran several sets of models to test our hypothesized effects.

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Insert Table 1 & Figure 1 about here

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All hypotheses were presented in the context of a pink collar setting. Hypothesis 1 expected there would be an interaction effect of gender similarity and manager’s gender status predicting the employee’s organizational commitment. Model 3 of Table 2 shows that the relationship between gender similarity and employee organizational commitment is negatively moderated by the manager’s gender status, *β* = -.847, *p* < .05.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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Specifically, Hypothesis 1 predicted females in gender-similar dyads will have higher organizational commitment than males in gender-similar dyads. We examined the conditional effects of the interaction, as reported in Table 3. Table 3 shows that females in gender-similar dyads show a positive relationship to affective organizational commitment, but this relationship is not significant. Conversely, males with a male manager report a significant and negative relationship to affective organizational commitment (*p* < .01; LLCI -1.298, ULCI -.192), thus Hypothesis 1 is partially supported.

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Insert Table 3 about here

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Hypothesis 2 predicted and found support for a three-way interaction among dyad gender similarity, manager’s gender status, and gender discrimination in predicting affective organizational commitment (*β* = .717, *p* < .01), as shown in Model 4 of Table 2. The conditional effect in Table 3 shows that in environments with low female discrimination, gender similarity for female employee-manager dyads is more positively related to affective organizational commitment than gender similarity for male dyads, and this relationship is statistically significant (*p* < .05; LLCI .020, ULCI 1.462). In fact, the effect for men in gender-similar dyads is negative and significant (*p* < .01; LLCI -2.147, ULCI -.463), thus supporting Hypothesis 2a.

Hypothesis 2b predicted that in environments where discrimination against females was high, male dyads would have more positive organizational commitment than female dyads. The conditional effects in Table 3 shows males with male managers have slightly less affective organizational commitment than females with female managers, but the significance is marginal (*p* <.10). Therefore, there is weak support for Hypothesis 2b.

**DISCUSSION**

Using a field study approach, our study examined the outcomes of gender similarity, male tokenism and the status considerations of a manager’s gender in the context of gender discrimination. In pink collar settings, we asked if men and women have different attitudes towards the organization depending on whether they have a male or female manager, and we found that it depends on whether the discriminatory environment creates some type of advantage or disadvantage for men. Our results show a *crabs in the barrel effect* for male tokens, such that when reporting to male managers, men are less committed to the organization. When gender discrimination against women was low, we found that female dyad similarity more positively predicted affective commitment than male token dyad similarity. However, although not hypothesized, the results in Table 3 show a more positive effect on affective organizational commitment when women report to male managers—a potential crabs in the barrel effect where women show preference for male managers when the discriminatory environment does not entice them to do so. Although only marginally supported, in environments where discrimination against females was high, male token dyads showed slightly more positive organizational commitment (or less negative) than female dyads, a slight indication of a *glass escalator effect*. In this condition, both men and women showed more positive organizational commitment when reporting to gender dissimilar managers.

When comparing outcomes associated with women reporting to men compared to women reporting to men, the trend in the data suggests that women may prefer having a male boss. We noticed this result when examining gender dissimilarity without the gender discrimination variable, and also when discrimination against women was both high and low. The male employee experience in gender similar and dissimilar dyads was negatively related to organizational commitment when discrimination against women was low. This trend in the data suggests that in this sample, the advantages bestowed upon men in pink collar settings are likely coming from women in leadership.

**Limitations and Future Research**

We use single source data so future research should capture objective performance data, or supervisor performance ratings to better determine how gender differences between managers and subordinates influence not only organizational commitment but also employee performance. We also suggest explore new contextual factors such that future research should consider the macrocontext—the status-based organizational and societal influences that supersedes positional power (Ibarra, 1995) to better understand that status characteristics that would predict when sex similarity and sex similarity between leader-follower dyads would lead to more positive outcomes from the employee’s perspective. Lastly, we recommend integrating behavioral processes in future research as our study focused exclusively on organizational commitment, and thus we made inferences on the behaviors that would cause dyad similarity and dissimilarity to influence organizational commitment without measure the processes themselves. Future research should consider a serial mediation approach to examine how “crabs in the barrel”-related behaviors (e.g. social undermining, incivility, conflict, low supervisor support) or leadership styles and behaviors links demographic similarity to organizational commitment.

**Conclusion**

According to tokenism theory, a token is a person who is part of a group that makes up 15% or less of an organization (Kanter, 1977). Kanter argues that being a token in the workplace would produce inequalities regardless of whether men or women were in the minority—but as women were more likely workplace tokens, the sexism they experienced was likely due to their positions in organizational structure, but are men likely to experience gender-based discrimination on pink collar settings? Our research demonstrates that when hiring and promotion opportunities are suppressed for women in female-dominated organizations, the attitudes towards the organization are not positive for men or women. While men are certainly tokens at the occupational level in a number of female-dominated jobs, it may be female leaders, more so than male leaders, granting men a ride on the glass elevator.

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**Figure 1**

**Conceptual Model**

Employee - Manager Gender (Dis)similarity

Manager's Gender Status

(Female/Male)

Organizational Commitment (Affective)

Gender Discrimination (Female)