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THE BENEFITS OF PSYCHOPATHY IN OVERCOMING SOCIETAL GENDER ROLE EXPECTATIONS

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Principal Topic

Drawing on role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) we investigate whether an individual's gender moderates the relationship between their level of psychopathic tendencies and their entrepreneurial intentions. Characteristics typical of entrepreneurs are usually defined in agentic terms, which are ascribed more strongly to men, while women are traditionally ascribed communal characteristics. The characteristics associated with entrepreneurship roles have traditionally been associated more with men than women causing entrepreneurship to be viewed as more congruent with the masculine gender role (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Societal pressure to conform to prescribed gender roles is strong, but personality characteristics, such as psychopathy, can influence the extent to which an individual adheres to these prescribed roles. Psychopathy manifests in both clinical and subclinical forms. Those with subclinical psychopathic tendencies can function in society (Babiak & Hare, 2006). Many of the traits associated with psychopathy are viewed as negative but researchers have suggested there might be a positive aspect to psychopathy (Person, 1986, & Chiaburu, Muñoz, & Gardner, 2013) and extant research finds that psychopathy has a positive relationship with entrepreneurial intentions (Akhtar, Ahmetoglu, & Chamorro-Premuzik, 2013). We build on this literature and apply role theory to hypothesize a positive relationship between psychopathy and entrepreneurial intentions which is moderated by gender such that the relationship will be stronger for women than for men.

Methods

We tested our hypothesis using data collected from 175 students (46/8% female) from a U.S. business school. Using measures of psychopathy (Levenson, Kiehl, & Fitzpatrick, 1995) and entrepreneurial intentions (Thompson, 2009), and controlling for a range of individual level we analyzed the data using hierarchical linear regression analyses with entrepreneurial intentions as our dependent variable.

Results and Implications

Our hypothesis is supported and our findings have several implications. First, subclinical psychopathic tendencies can have a positive impact on women's ability to reject traditional gender roles and to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors. Second, entrepreneurship is likely a career choice for women who shatter biased stereotypes and unwelcome societal role prescriptions. Finally, we contribute to the entrepreneurship personality literature (DeNisi, 2015; Miller, 2015) by examining the interaction of a dark trait (psychopathy) on entrepreneurial intentions.

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