QUEERING THE AGENDA? A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF CONTEMPORARY ASSUMPTIONS UNDERPINNING THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER STEREOTYPES UPON ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITY (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

Susan Marlow
University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK, susan.marlow@nottingham.ac.uk

Francis Greene
University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK

Alex Coad
European Commission, Spain

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QUEERING THE AGENDA? A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF CONTEMPORARY ASSUMPTIONS UNDERPINNING THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER STEREOTYPES UPON ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITY

Susan Marlow, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK
Francis Greene, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK
Alex Coad, European Commission, Spain

Principal Topics

Since the early 1990s, increasing attention has been afforded to the influence of gender upon entrepreneurship. Despite growing complexity, the focus and direction of this maturing strand of research adopts some troubling assumptions in that gendered analyses draw almost exclusively upon women as their unit of analysis. Moreover, there is an assumption of an exclusive heteronormative binary. Thus, heterosexual women have become synonymous with the gendered subject and moreover, are universally categorised through the metonymy of the ‘female entrepreneur’ who sits as ‘other’ to the normative and so unlabelled, heterosexual male entrepreneur. As such, it is somewhat paradoxical that a critique developed to expose gender bias is potentially promoting it by designating heterosexual women as the embodiment of the gendered subject.

Methods

Within this presentation, we advance debate by moving beyond such limitations by focusing upon gay men and lesbian women. Accordingly, our objective is to explore the following research question: ‘is there evidence that gendered stereotypes and related discrimination influences the entrepreneurial activity of gay men and lesbian women?’ Investigating this question in the light of relatively little substantive evidence is challenging; consequently, we adopt a competing hypothesis approach: First, a null hypothesis that there are no differences in entrepreneurial activity patterns between homosexuals and heterosexuals; and second, male and female homosexuals may be more likely to select into self employment as a ‘refuge’ from employment discrimination and so, are more likely to be entrepreneurially active.

Results and Implications

To investigate, we use the UK Integrated Household Survey (IHS); a large scale population based representative sample of 163,000 British adults with a robust measurement of sexual identity and information related to entrepreneurial activity. Our measure of entrepreneurial activity is self employment status which captures a broad range of entrepreneurial activities. Interim analyses support our first hypothesis - no difference between the entrepreneurial propensity of homosexuals and heterosexuals. We argue that there are important implications for this analysis regarding the influence of gender upon entrepreneurial activity; we do not suggest that gender does not matter but question its utility when used as a generic category to gauge entrepreneurial propensity and activity. This paper advances debate by moving beyond women as the gendered subject, challenging the current heteronormative bias within the research field and raise broader questions regarding current approaches to studying gendered influences.

CONTACT: Susan Marlow, susan.marlow@nottingham.ac.uk, Phone: +44 (0) 7913 083149, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK.