

CONDITIONED TO CARE? GENDER DIFFERENCES IN ENTREPRENEURIAL SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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ABSTRACT

Researchers generally agree that entrepreneurs' socially responsible behavior and community economic health are intricately intertwined. However, relatively little research examines social responsibility in the small business realm. Prior research in this area suggests that although men and women do not differ in their propensities to engage in helping behaviors, gender is an important consideration. We extend this viewpoint by integrating the sorting model used in the civic engagement literature with self-construal theory to examine how social sorting via education and social priority values influence social responsibility engagement for entrepreneurs, as well as how gender gives context to these relationships.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurs owning and operating small businesses are widely acknowledged for serving as pillars of social responsibility since their activities generally directly benefit the community in which the entrepreneur lives and works (Besser, Miller, & Perkins, 2006; Fitzgerald, Haynes, Schrank, & Danes, 2010; Niehm, Swinney, & Miller, 2008). The limited research in this area suggests that social responsibility and prosocial behaviors hold significant importance to entrepreneurs' operation of their small businesses, yielding economic and civic health benefits to their communities (e.g., Blanchard, Tolbert, & Mencken, 2012; Lähdesmä & Takala, 2012; Thompson et al., 1993; Tolbert et al., 1998). The context related to *why* and *how* entrepreneurs engage to create a more meaningful presence for their businesses via small business social responsibility, however, is under-investigated.

Reviews of the literatures on helping in civic engagement and volunteerism suggest that education, as a social sorting mechanism, provides the most pervasive effect in promoting

prosocial behaviors (e.g., Campbell, 2006; Campbell, 2009; Putnam, 2000; Taniguchi, 2006; Zúñiga & Valenzuela, 2011). Additionally, these literatures suggest that being male strengthens the relationship between education level and these behaviors (Campbell, 2009; Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996; Schlozman et al., 1994), and that men and women therefore undertake different types of prosocial behaviors (Besser & Jarnagin, 2010; Wilson & Musick, 1997) based on their self-construal and gender roles (Cross & Madson, 1997; Eagly, 2009).

More specifically, the sorting model applied in civic engagement research suggests that an individual's education relative to his/her reference group proxies status and that status is a key factor in competitive environments (i.e., elections, business) (Campbell, 2009; Nie et al., 1996). Further, with higher status, awareness of collective betterment improves (Persson, 2011). Gender has been found to serve as an important contextual factor for the sorting model, since it appears to apply more to men than women (e.g., Campbell, 2009; Nie et al., 1996), suggesting that gender may strengthen or weaken the model with a moderating influence.

The tenets of self-construal theory further clarify the context that gender provides in choice of helping behaviors. Self-construal suggests that women more often engage in helping behaviors that focus on smaller groups that allow them to develop close relationships (Wilson, 2000; Wilson & Musick, 1997; Zúñiga & Valenzuela, 2011) due to their interdependent self-construals. Conversely, men are generally associated with more independent self-construals; thus, research on helping behaviors suggests that men more frequently engage in helping behaviors that have an audience, an opportunity to exhibit chivalry, and are related to their jobs (Eagly & Crowley, Wilson & Musick, 1997).

We extend sorting model theory to the small business social responsibility domain to examine the context of gender via self-construal in these relationships for entrepreneurs owning and operating small businesses, based on the following hypotheses:

H1: Education is positively related to entrepreneurs' social responsibility participation.

H2: Social value priority increases entrepreneurs' social responsibility participation.

H3: The gender of the entrepreneur moderates the relationship between education level and engagement in social responsibility..

H4: The gender of the entrepreneur moderates the relationship between social value priority and engagement in social responsibility..

We examine each of our hypotheses for the three dependent variables: *Employee work environment and development*, *Employee well-being*, and *Local and civic responsibility* via linear regression in SPSS 23.

Our results suggest that education and social value priority exhibit a positive, significant relationship with only local and civic responsibility. However, gender appears to be an important moderator, particularly for the education and engagement relationship. At lower levels of

education, men report lower levels of engagement than women. However, at higher levels of education, men report higher levels of engagement than women across all three variables. The contexts of social responsibility type and gender lend important academic implications, as well as opportunities for future research. This study provides a unique perspective on small business social responsibility by offering the sorting model as a theoretical lens through which to view small business engagement in socially responsible behaviors. Further, we offer context to *when* and *how* these behaviors might occur by considering the gender of the entrepreneur and exploring a broad range of socially responsible activities.

Result tables and references are available from the authors upon request.