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[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/15681/gender/v05/GCB-05

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Psychological Gender Differences in Ethical Perceptions: 
An Exploratory Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Limiting the study of gender to that of biological sex has resulted in conflicting empirical results regarding the relationship between gender and managerial ethical behaviors. Gender research may benefit from a deeper appreciation of and respect for gender theories found within the social psychology, feminist, and cultural anthropology literatures, among others.

This study limits its focus to the measurement of psychological gender. An exploratory analysis is conducted to provide insight into gender effects on managers' ethical behaviors, perceptions and attitudes. Psychological gender is positioned as a way to explain within- and between-sex differences in managerial ethical perceptions.

Extant literature indicates women are more ethically sensitive than men. Higher ethical perception scores in women are attributed to the assumed presence of expressive traits. Research has neglected to assess the presence of expressive traits in men. This research empirically tests the assumption that expressive, stereotypical feminine traits, explain the differences in ethical perceptions between and within male and female managers.

Findings suggest that expressive traits, rather than biological sex, more fully explain managerial ethical perceptions. This conclusion may account for some of the inconsistent results gleaned from previous studies that investigated differences between males and females.

The authors suggest that future research, focused on ethics and gender differences, should investigate the effects managerial ethical perceptions have on consumer perceptions and behaviors. Also, theories and methodologies common to women's studies, social psychology, and cultural anthropology should be considered.