

Investigating the Gender Effects on The Five Facets of The Need for Closure

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ABSTRACT

The Need for Closure (NFC) is the individual's desire to seek definite answer and avoid confusion. NFC plays a crucial role in the information processing and decision making. Studies have confirmed that both men and women adopt different ways to process their information. So, this study used a self report measure (Need for Closure Scale, Kruglanski et al., 2013) with adequate reliability (0.761) to tap the gender differences on the five facets: Order, Predictability, Decisiveness, Ambiguity and Close Mindedness of the dispositional need for closure (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Data analysis (Independent t-test) of the two groups (Male = 118, Female = 117) revealed that there is significant difference between both men and women on the facets of Order, Predictability, and Ambiguity. Cohen's d statistics (0.3) further demonstrated that gender has moderate effect on these facets. Higher mean responses of women on Order, Predictability and Ambiguity showed that women compare to men have higher dispositional tendency of structure, preference for secure knowledge and discomfort with uncertainties.

Keywords: *Gender Differences, Need for Closure, Order, Predictability, Ambiguity, Decisiveness, Close Mindedness*

Since ages, the idea of understanding the differences between men and women in the ways of their thinking, feeling and behaving remain very much fascinating. Psychologists are interested in knowing how these differences impact the personal and social life of men and women and whether these differences are largely biologically determined, have evolutionary reasons or influenced by the socio-cultural norms. So far, psychologists have constructed various psychological measures on which they take responses from both men and women to identify the gender differences. Some of the psychological constructs on which gender differences were investigated are personality traits (Goldberg, 1992; Cattell et al., 2008; Briggs, 1987), intelligence (Wechsler, 1955; Thorndike et al., 1985), and values (Schwartz et al., 2001). Someone who scores high on these measures exhibit more characteristics of those specific psychological traits compare to the low scorers. For instance, Costa et al., (2001) found that women score high on agreeableness than men which means the tendency towards cooperation, and consideration of other's concern is more in women than men. However, it does not mean that men do not

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experience such traits, even it is also possible that some men score higher on such traits compare to women. The only goal of investigating the gender differences is to identify the differences in the general patterns of behavior in both men and women on an average (Hyde, 2005).

Studying the gender differences is very much useful in the context of the phenomenon which influences one's cognitive and social processes. The need for closure (Kruglanski, 1989) is the phenomenon which is highly linked with the individual's epistemic motivations and decision making. Both men and women acquire knowledge in their daily life which guides them for their further activities, judgments and decisions. Therefore, there is the possibility that they show differences in their general pattern of knowledge acquisition (Kruglanski, 1990). The selectivity model proposed by Meyers & Levy (1989) suggests that men are selective for highly available cues and do not engage in processing of all the available information to form their judgments compare to women who tend to assimilate all available cues and engage in effortful information processing. Empathizing/Systematizing theory proposed by Baron Cohen (2010) propose that women predict other's mental state on the basis of empathizing style whereas men are disposed to systematized style. This Empathizing/Systematizing theory is supported by various behavioral studies which confirmed that women tend to score higher on the affective dimension of social cognition compared to men like empathy (Baron & Wheelright, 2004) and emotional intelligence (Brackett & Salovey, 2006). In the Lay Epistemic Theory, Kruglanski (1990) proposed an epistemic process to address judgments and decision-making. In this theory, he assumed that cognitive capacity and epistemic motivation affects the sequence of hypothesis generation and validation. Those who have low epistemic motivation or have limited cognitive capacity generate fewer hypotheses for making judgments. Additionally, this theory focuses on the need for closure which explains one's cognitive and motivational predisposition to the social world. Regarding gender differences on the need for closure, Webster & Kruglanski (1994) concluded that there is no significant difference between men and women on their mean scores of NFC but it doesn't confirms that how gender effects on the five facets of need for closure (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Therefore, this study tries to fill this void in the literature by investigating the gender effects on the Order, Predictability, Decisiveness, Ambiguity and Close-Mindedness facets of the need for closure.

Need for closure

Kruglanski (1989) defined the individual's need for closure as a desire to reach on definite information compared to confusion and ambiguity. This desire is assumed to vary along a continuum that array from high need for closure to low need for closure. High need for closure develops urgency tendency, leading individuals to *seize* closure quickly. When this tendency activates, individuals opt for any reasonable but immediate answers and then *freeze* on that answer, become close-minded for further new relevant information or knowledge that comes in front (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). It is worth noting here that the individual's position on the continuum of need for closure determines by both dispositional need for closure and situation variables like time pressure, deadlines and mental fatigue. The basic drive behind determining the need for closure is the individual's perception related to the relative benefits of the closure and cost of avoiding closure (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994).

NFC literature reveals that those who have high need for closure are involved in the superficial analysis of the information and motivate the information search, consistent with the existing knowledge structures. Such superficial analysis often results in simplified

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mental representations. On the other side, those who have lower NFC favors tolerance, ambiguity, and uncertainty. Such individuals are open to new information and avoid final judgments (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Individuals with high NFC are high in confidence compare to low NFC individuals in their decisions (Mayseless and Kruglanski, 1987).

Webster and Kruglanski conceived the concept of need for closure as a one dimensional construct, incorporating both seizing and freezing tendencies. As per Webster & Kruglanski (1994), the need for closure is a unitary latent variable which potentially manifests itself in one of five ways: *Order*, *Predictability*, *Ambiguity*, *Decisiveness* and *Closed mindedness*. Although the need for closure construct developed by Neuberg, Judice & West (1997) does not comply with the one-dimensional construct and presents the two factor structure of need for closure in which the first factor is labeled as *need for structure* and other factor is *decisiveness*. However, in the current study, Webster & Kruglanski's five facets of need for closure were taken into the consideration.

Order

Person higher in the preference of Order should desire the order and structure in their environment instead of chaos and disorder (e.g., "I think that having clear rules and order at work is essential for success"). This facet included ten items of NFCS scale (namely item 1, 6, 11, 20, 24, 28, 34, 35, 37 & 47).

Predictability

This facet pertained to the preference for secure and stable knowledge. A secure knowledge can be relied upon across circumstances and cannot be challenged even in disagreements. Such secure knowledge has an implication of predictability in the future contexts (e.g. "I don't like to go in a situation without knowing what I can expect from it"). Seven items included in this subset of NFCS scale (namely item 5, 7, 8, 19, 26, 30 & 45).

Ambiguity

In this facet, it was assumed that the person with high need for closure would experience the affective discomfort occasioned by Ambiguity in the absence of closure. (e.g. "I'd rather know bad news than stay in a state of uncertainty"). Individuals high in experiencing discomfort with ambiguity need to have certainty and they avoid confusions. Nine items included in this facet of NFCS scale (namely item 3, 9, 15, 21, 31, 32, 33, 38 & 42).

Decisiveness

Decisiveness refers to the urgency during decision making and thus to avoidance of indecision. (e.g., "I usually make important decisions quickly and confidently"). Persons with a high need for closure would experience an urgent desire to reach closure. This desire reflects in their judgments and choices. Seven items are included in this group of NFCS scale (namely item 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 23 & 40).

Closed Mindedness

This facet points out the need to protect knowledge. Closed mindedness induces the feeling of unwillingness to be confronted by alternative opinions or inconsistent evidence (e.g., "I do not usually consult many different opinions before forming my own view"). Eight items included in this group of NFCS scale (item 2, 4, 10, 25, 29, 36, 41, 44).

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Hypotheses and study overview

Previous research demonstrated the gender differences on the cognitive persistence subscale of the dispositional need for cognition (tendency to engage in elaborative thought) (Roothman et al., 2003) and found that women tend to score high on this subscale compare to men. Along these lines, gender differences could also be found on the dimensional structure of the need for closure. Thus, in this study we hypothesized that men and women would score differently on the need for closure scale (Kruglanski et al., 2013). Additionally, we hypothesized that women will score high on all the the five facets: Order, Predictability, Ambiguity, Decisiveness and Close Mindedness of the need for closure scale (Kruglanski et al., 2013).

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Data were collected from 450 students studying in different academic disciplines through online measures using convenience sampling method. However, the NFC scale used in this study had the criteria of removing samples on the basis of lie score (lie score should be less than 15) which reduced the sample to a total of 235 respondents (118 Males, 117 Females) between ages of 18 to 30 (Mean age = 19.5, SD = 2.5). The sample comprised of 23 students from science, 122 students from engineering and 90 students from humanities and social sciences background. Socio-economic status of the respondents ranged from middle socio economic to higher class, owning semi urban and urban residences. Participation in the study was on voluntary basis and the average time to fill the scale was 15 minutes.

Instruments and Procedure

Need for Closure Scale developed by Kruglanski et al. (2013) was used. This is a six point Likert scale comprised of 47 items (including 5 lie score items) ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree (Strongly Agree = 6, Moderately Agree= 5, Slightly Agree = 4, Slightly Disagree = 3, Moderately Disagree = 2, Slightly Disagree = 1) with higher score reveals higher need for closure. Reverse scoring was done for items 2, 5, 7, 12, 13, 16, 19, 20, 23, 25, 28, 29, 36, 40, 41 and 47. An example of the item is “I don’t like situations that are uncertain”. This scale represents the five dimensions of NFC: Order (10 items), Predictability (8 items), Decisiveness (7 items), Ambiguity (9 items) and Closed mindedness (8 items). Scoring for the total Need for closure was done by summing 42 items. Additionally, five dimensions were scored by summing their subscale items.

RESULTS

Reliability analysis revealed Cronbach’s alpha of **0.761** for the total NFC and **0.744, 0.759, 0.733, 0.623, 0.524** for Order, Predictability, Decisiveness, Ambiguity, and Closed mindedness respectively.

Table 1. Summary of the mean scores and the standard deviations of both males and females on the total NFC and all the five dimensions of NFC. Bolded d values indicate statistically significant effect sizes.

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cohen’s d
TOTAL NFC	Male	118	147.4068	18.88301	0.37
	Female	117	154.1111	17.29699	
ORDER	Male	118	38.3898	8.90120	0.35
	Female	117	41.2479	7.34132	
PREDICTABILITY	Male	118	27.2627	6.85058	0.34

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	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cohen's d
	Female	117	29.7009	7.25314	
DECISIVENESS	Male	118	24.3390	5.91856	0.10
	Female	117	24.9915	7.01414	
AMBIGUITY	Male	118	36.1525	6.37654	0.27
	Female	117	37.8803	6.29335	
CLOSE MINDEDNESS	Male	118	21.2627	4.82413	0.19
	Female	117	20.2906	5.12105	

Independent samples t-test was conducted to analyze the gender differences (For summary see Table 2). Cohen's d values revealed the moderate effect of gender on the Order, Predictability and Ambiguity dimensions with females scoring higher than males (For summary see Table 1). But no significant effect was found on the Decisiveness and Close mindedness dimensions of NFC.

Table 2: Independent samples t-test results

	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
TOTAL NFC	-2.837	233	0.005
ORDER	-2.684	233	0.008
PREDICTABILITY	-2.649	233	0.009
DECISIVENESS	-.771	233	0.442
AMBIGUITY	-2.090	233	0.038
CLOSE MINDEDNESS	1.498	233	0.136

DISCUSSION

Results showed that men and women have significant differences in their mean scores on the Order, Predictability and Ambiguity but no differences were found on Decisiveness and Close Mindedness. Cohen (1992) suggested the categorization of the obtained d values into small (0.20), moderate (0.50) and large (0.80) effects. In the results, the obtained value of Cohen's d statistics as 0.3 on the facets of Order and Predictability further helped us to understand that gender has moderate effect on these facets. Women compare to men tend to prefer more structure in their life. They have the preference for stable and secure knowledge and avoidance from the discomfort created by the uncertainties. The insignificant results on Decisiveness and Close Mindedness revealed that urgency of decision making and avoidance from the confrontation of alternative opinions in both men and women do not regulate by their gender.

The results of this study are inconsistent with a previous study (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994) which reported no significant difference between men and women on their mean scores of need for closure. The difference in the results of this study could be because of several factors like age, culture, educational background of the sample population. In this study, data was taken from Indian population which introduces the cultural expectations in the predisposition to the social world of both men and women (Chandrakar, 2014).

There are several limitations of this study like sample of this study comprise undergraduate students, and it would seem relevant to test the hypothesis within non-student population. However, the sample size was wide enough to ameliorate this limitation. Secondly, the results did not show the causal relation between gender and the facets of need for closure.

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However, the results were interpreted on the assumption that gender might induce the preferences of Order and Predictability and avoidance of uncertainties in the women. In future, experimental researches should be conducted to examine the causal relations between gender effect and need for closure. Also, to generalize the results, the data should be collected from different cultures and ethnicities.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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