NEED FOR CLOSURE, GENDER AND SOCIAL SELF-ESTEEM OF YOUNGSTERS

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ABSTRACT

The present study focuses on social self-esteem of youngsters (i.e. esteem derived from approval of others), a widespread, important pursuit of youngsters in modern society. More specifically, we explored the relationship between social self-esteem on the one hand, and an individual difference measure, Need for Closure, and gender on the other hand. Results show that NFCL and gender significantly relate to social self-esteem values like eagerness for approval and tranquility, achievement pressure and competence orientation, individualism, independency and appearance mindedness. NFCL and gender also affect youngster's social esteem related self-images. In addition, interesting interaction effects were identified. Limitations and directions for future research are suggested.

Keywords: Need for Closure; Values; Self-Image, Gender, Social Self-Esteem.

INTRODUCTION

In the present research, we study youngsters' social self esteem, a widespread, important pursuit of youngsters in modern society. Self-esteem is determined both by individuals' self-image and their beliefs that this domain is important for approval (which is expressed in their values) (MacDonald, Saltzman and Leary, 2003). As a consequence, both social self image and values related to social self esteem will be investigated. Moreover, previous research has indicated that personality is associated with values (e.g. Olver and Mooradian, 2003). Therefore, we introduce the individual tendency –Need for Closure- and investigate its relationship with social self-esteem, a so far unexamined topic. We also incorporate gender in our study since it has been extensively associated with values. First, we elaborate on social self-esteem, self image and values related to self-esteem. Next, we outline Need for Closure and its relationship to social self-esteem, and finally, we introduce gender in this context.

SOCIAL SELF-ESTEEM, SELF IMAGE AND VALUES

Each of us strives to enhance our self-esteem. Self-esteem is linked in important ways to how people approach their daily lives. Individuals with high self-esteem tend to be more happy, healthy, successful and productive, while those with low self-esteem are more prone to failure. Especially for youngsters, self-esteem is a critical aspect in their development: low self-esteem can negatively affect social and academic achievement.

Interpersonal perspectives of self-esteem are based on the notion that individuals' feelings about themselves are related to how they believe others evaluate them. In addition, the interpersonal perspective suggests that believing one possesses certain attributes (i.e. self-image) predicts self-esteem only to the extent that the individual believes that other people regard those attributes as important or valuable (MacDonald et al., 2003). More specifically, MacDonald et al. (2003) found that individuals had high self-esteem if they viewed themselves positively in a particular domain (i.e. a positive self-image), only if they believed that the domain had important ramifications for winning others' approval or avoiding others' disapproval. Self-esteem is closely tied to the identification or group membership (Stetts & Burke, 2000). In other words, if a

person is a member of a certain group –and wants to be a member of this group- s/he will have or strive for specific attributes that are valued by the group. If these attributes are attained (and the person is accepted in the group), this person will have a high social self-esteem; low self-esteem will exist if the specific attributes are not attained (Burke & Stetts, 1999).

In modern society, striving for approval seems to be reflected in the need for power, status or getting ahead (i.e. agency), more specifically in the adherence to competence, attractiveness and wealth. Especially the value 'competence' often reflects a socially motivated desire to obtain approval and other social benefits (MacDonald et al., 2003). In other words, nowadays, social approval often comes about by displaying competence, attractiveness and wealth. We argue that -especially for youngsters- social approval or the appreciation or recognition of an important group, is considered of paramount importance. Consequently, we hypothesize the following:

H1: competence, attractiveness and wealth are important values for adolescents.

In this respect, values should be considered as concepts or beliefs about desirable end states or behaviours that transcend specific situations, and are inherent to an individual. Certain values are preferred to others and are ordered by relative importance (e.g. true friendship) (Schwartz, 1992). The relative importance attributed to each of the value types constitutes the individual's systems of value priorities. A person's values are assumed to come from 'culture, society and its institutions and personality'(Rokeach, 1973). Values have been shown to guide the selection or evaluation of behaviour and events and are a powerful force in governing the behaviour of individuals in all aspects of their lives (Rokeach, 1973). As a consequence, values may affect a wide spectrum of behaviour across many situations and are therefore of particular interest.

Both individuals' self-images and their beliefs that this domain is important for approval (which is expressed in their values) determine self-esteem (MacDonald et al., 2003). If an individual holds particular values, believing one possesses the attributes that are associated with those values (i.e. self-image) is a necessary condition to bring about positive feelings or high self-esteem, the latter being an important predictor for a happy,

healthy, successful and productive life. As a consequence, studies on self esteem should also incorporate measures of self-image.

NEED FOR CLOSURE AND SELF-ESTEEM

Recently, personality traits and personal values have been integrated conceptually (Olver & Mooradian, 2003). Individuals "react to their environments by evolving patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviors" -i.e. characteristic adaptations or values- "that are consistent with their personality traits" (McCrae & Costa, 1999, p. 145). Several authors have already attempted to explain how these values relate to enduring individual tendencies and found, for example, relationships between the five-factor model and values (e.g. Olver & Mooradian, 2003; Dollinger, Leong & Ulicni, 1996).

Recently, a less intensively investigated individual differences variable, i.e. the Need for Closure (NFCL), has been related to a wide variety of human behaviors, from group behavior (e.g. Pierro, Mannetti, De Grada, Livi & Kruglanski, 2003) to consumer behavior (e.g. Vermeir & Van Kenhove, 2005). NFCL reflects the desire for clear, definite, or unambiguous knowledge that will guide perception and action, as opposed to the undesirable alternative of ambiguity and confusion (Kruglanksi & Webster, 1996). A high NFCL is translated in little cognitive processing and the rejection of deviate views and opinions because high accessible structures (like pre-existing knowledge structures or stereotypes) afford immediate closure. Low NFCL leads to an enhanced cognitive processing of new, alternative information and competing, divergent views when closure is "in danger" of forming (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994).

Some researchers acknowledge that NFCL is not only related to behavior, but also to more inherent individual beliefs. For example, research showed that NFCL is associated with traditionalism in beliefs about politics (Kossowska & Van Hiel, 2003) and ethics (Van Kenhove, Vermeir & Verniers, 2001). Both studies suggest that high NFCL individuals advocate conservative, non-deviant ideas and situations, while low NFCL individuals embrace unorthodox, non-conformist ideas and situations.

Based on the foregoing, we can expect that high NFCL will have less deviate and more conservative, stereotype-based value priorities and will probably try not to 'break

rules' by having deviant, anti-conservative opinions (e.g. Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). Therefore, we advance the following hypothesis:

> H2: high NFCL, as compared to low NFCL individuals, are more prone to adhere the values that are traditionally valued in the current society (i.e. competence, attractiveness and wealth).

GENDER AND SOCIAL SELF ESTEEM

Gender has been extensively associated with specific values (e.g. Prince-Gibson & Schwartz, 1998). In general, results of previous studies show that gender differences exist in value-related instrumental-agentic versus expressive-communal orientations (Struch, Schwartz & van der Kloot, 2002). Men are motivated by mastery strivings, are cued by internal standards of excellence and adhere more competitive values, while women are motivated by affiliative motives and social approval and prefer cooperation and communication. Josephs, Markus and Tafarodi (1992) found that men adhere more the values of independence and autonomy, while women define themselves somewhat more by their social connections. As men adhere more competitive and independence values and women are more motivated by social connections and approval (in a Western culture) (Struch et al., 2002; Josephs et al., 1992), we propose the following hypothesis:

> H3: Competence and wealth are more valued by men, while attractiveness is more valued by women.

To summarize, in the present research we explore the relationship between social self-esteem values and NFCL and gender. We conceptualize social self esteem by self-image and social esteem values. More specifically, we investigate the values competence, attractiveness and wealth, because these values are important in modern society. Based on previous research, we argue that value differences could exist for high and low NFCL male and female youngsters.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

The sample consisted of 1290 youngsters, of which 51.3% were female. The age of the respondents ranged from 15 to 24 years, with a mean of 18.87 (SD=2.78). ???% of the youngsters had a job, of which 45.8% were blue-collar workers, 12.0 % were self-employed and 34.6% engaged in clerical work. The education level of the student respondents was predominantly secondary education (65.8%) and college education (33.9). 90.5% of the respondents lives with their parents, while only 5.8% live alone and 3.7 % live with their partner or friends.

Data were collected using street interviews. Youngsters were addressed at random by two college students in a shopping mall or in a shopping street during two weeks. Youngsters were encouraged to participate in the survey and instructions were given to fill in the questionnaire truthfully. It took respondents on average 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Respondents received a soft drink as a reward for participation. The questionnaire was self-administered and completely anonymous. The response rate was fairly high, about one in two youngsters was willing to participate.

Measures

We developed a self-report measure of social esteem values. More specifically, we selected those values from the Rokeach value survey (Rokeach, 1973) (e.g. independent, self-respect, social recognition, ambitious), the Schwartz survey (1992) (e.g. power, achievement) and the List of Values (Kahle, 1983) (e.g. self-respect, self-fulfillment, sense of accomplishment, being well respected) that are related to social-self esteem. We constructed statements that describe the different values (see Table 1). For example, with regard to the value "independent" we constructed the statements 'I have my own opinion about everything' and 'others have little influence on me'. The respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with the different statements on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 = completely disagree to 6 = completely agree.

In addition, the questionnaire contained 21 self-describing (5-point scale) characteristics related to social self-esteem (e.g. reliable, creative) to determine the youngsters' self-image (see Table 1).

The reliability of the values scale was satisfactory (α=.72), as well as the reliability of the self-image scale (α=, 68). Two principal component analyses with Varimax rotation were carried out to reduce the amount of variables to some common factors The analysis resulted in 8 values (social, eager for appreciation, appearance minded, pressured to achieve, competence oriented, individualistic/wealth, own opinion, relax) and 4 self-images (negative, solid, hard worker, modest). There were no crossloadings above .40; 4 specific values had crossloading between .30 and .36. We averaged the measures of the specific values that loaded on a particular principal component; the mean value scores and reliability measures can be found in Table 1. Some values were slightly correlated (ranging from -.137 to .249, see table 2).

Insert Table 1 and Table 2 about here

Concerning NFCL, a validated[1] translation (Vermeir, 2003) of the original measure of individual differences in NFCL (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994) was used. The scale consists of 25 items[2] (6 items are reverse scored); a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 'I totally disagree' to 'I totally agree' are used to indicate the extent to which the 25 statements are applicable to the respondents. Respondents' composite NFCL is calculated by summing all individual items (after reverse scoring the appropriate items). Higher scores indicate a higher Need for Closure. The NFCL scale discriminates individuals with a different dispositional NFCL. The reliability of the scale is moderate (α=.69). Following previous research, we categorized high and low NFCL respondents using median split (Chiu, Morris, Hong & Menon, 2000). Respondents categorized as

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[1] Validation of the scale is determined by reliability, interitem homogeneity, confirmatory factor, within-method convergent validity, composite reliability, discriminant validity and nomological validity analyses

[2] E.g. I like to have a place for everything and everything in its place; I dislike unpredictable situations; I dislike it when a person's statements could mean many different things; I tend to struggle with most decisions; when thinking about a problem, I consider as many different opinions on the issue as possible.

high (M=4.34) and low (M= 3.29) NFCL significantly differ in their level of closure (F(1, 1289)=2087.89, p<.001).

RESULTS

Repeated measures ANOVA shows that adolescents prefer certain values to others (F(1,7)=595,79, p<.001). Hypothesis 1 predicted that competence, attractiveness and wealth are important values for adolescents. As Table 1 indicates, youngsters find it very important that that they achieve well (i.e. competence oriented), hereby partly confirming hypothesis 1. Furthermore, adolescents want others to appreciate them and they prefer groups or friends instead of being alone; they feel some pressure to achieve well; they slightly consider life without pressure important and have their own opinions about certain issues. They indicate that they are not so engaged in appearance, and consider themselves not as individualistic (e.g. wealth). The latter results disconfirm hypothesis 1. In addition, they consider themselves as solid, slightly hard working, not modest and certainly not negative. On the basis of these results, H1 cannot be fully accepted.

Hypothesis 2 assumed that high versus low NFCL adhere more to traditional values such as competence, attractiveness and wealth, while hypothesis 3 posed that competence and wealth is more valued by men and attractiveness more by women. To test these hypotheses, multivariate analysis of variance was performed taking NFCL and gender as independent variables and the value dimensions and self-images as dependent variables.

A significant main effect was found for both NFCL ((F(1,1189)=21,49, p<.001)) and gender (F(1,1189)=14,06, p<.001), as well as a significant interaction effect (F(1,1189)=2,43, p<.01). Univariate analyses show that the main effects of NFCL and gender hold both for the value dimensions and the self images, but the interaction effect between NFCL and gender is only significant for the value dimensions (see Table 3).

Insert Table 3 about here

Both NFCL (F(1, 1189)= 21.49, p<.001) and gender (F(1, 1189)= 14.06, p<.001) endorsed different values. In addition, a significant interaction effect was found (F(1, 1189)= 2.43, p<.001). Moreover, self-images were associated with different NFCL levels (F(1, 1189)= 22.82, p<.001) and gender (F(1, 1189)= 6.69, p<.001). No significant interaction effect was found for self-images (F(1, 1189)= 1.31, ns). Univariate analysis (see Table 3) indicated that differences in NFCL and gender were significantly associated with different levels of eagerness for appreciation, appearance mindedness, feeling of achievement pressure, competence orientation, individualism, own opinions and relaxations. In addition, NFCL influences social character. More specifically, high (versus low) NFCL youngsters find it more important to be appreciated, are more appearance minded, feel more pressure to achieve, are more competence oriented and are more eager to relax. On the other hand, low (versus high) NFCL youngsters are more social, individualistic and have more own opinions. High (versus low) NFCL youngsters also consider themselves more hard working and modest. These results lend partial support to H2.

Women (versus men) are more eager to be appreciated, are more social, appearance-minded, pressured to achieve and want to relax more. On the other hand, men (versus women) are more competence oriented, more individualistic and have more own opinions. In addition, men (versus women) consider themselves more negative and less solid. These results are in line with H3.

More importantly, some interesting interaction effects were uncovered. More specifically, social character, competence orientation, and own opinions were significantly different for different levels of NFCL and gender. Planned comparisons show that high NFCL men and women have an equal social mentality, while low NFCL men are more social then low NFCL women (F(1, 648) = 5.98, p<.05). Moreover, high NFCL men are more competence oriented (F(1, 640)=14.42, p<.001) and have more own opinions (F(1, 640)=12.13, p<.001) than high NFCL women, while no differences exist between low NFCL men and women (competence orientation, (F(1, 648)=1.29, ns); own opinions, (F(1, 648)=.89, ns)) (see Table 4).

Insert Table 4 about here

DISCUSSION

In general, adolescents are eager for appreciation and competence oriented on one hand and socially motivated (prefer groups) on the other hand. We also postulated that attractiveness and wealth would be important values for adolescents because they can lead to appreciation or recognition of an important group. However, our results showed that these two values were least important (compared to the other social esteem values), although they are not rated as 'unimportant' (i.e. adolescents are rather neutral towards the statements). Possibly, adolescents refrain from giving their real opinion about these rather negatively co-notated values like 'individualism' or 'wealth' and 'appearance'. On the other hand, it is possible that adolescents in current society are becoming less self-centred and appearance minded. The need for power or status that can help bring about approval could be satisfied by showing competence without the adherence to attractiveness and wealth.

High NFCL coincides with higher social esteem values like appreciation and competence. These results are in line with NFCL theory and previous research, that suggest that high NFCL individuals are more committed to conservative and non-deviant ideas and situations (e.g. Webster & Kruglanki, 1994), indicating that peer group consensus is highly valued. These inherent traditional ideas could be translated in an enhanced eagerness to be appreciated by their peers and in addition, a higher pressure to achieve. Consequently, they could attach great importance to appearance and comply with competence-oriented values, which are considered of paramount importance in current society. It is then hardly surprising that high NFCL youngsters look upon themselves as hard-working, achieving individuals who are rather modest. In addition, living up to expectations of the peer group and the coinciding pressure, could make high NFCL youngsters more inclined to escape from this pressure by relaxing and keeping away from others.

On the other hand, low NFCL youngsters seem to comply less with social esteem values as they do more as they please, without pressure of others, and they put themselves first (cfr. Pierro et al, 2003). On the other hand, they mix more with other people, which increases the possible encounter with opinion deviates, and could help them acquire

power and leadership, two situations highly valued by low NFCL youngsters (Kruglanski, Webster & Klem, 1993).

Our results also confirm previous research on gender differences in values and self-images. Women have higher social esteem values (e.g. eagerness for appreciation, appearance-minded, pressured to achieve), while men have more independent and competitive values (e.g. competence oriented, individualistic, own opinions) (cfr. Josephs et al., 1992). In addition, the tendency for social approval could make women more open to engage in social interaction, while men could be more distressed with their competitive efforts and therefore experience more the need to relax.

The interaction effects indicate that previous results concerning values, gender and individual characteristics should be interpreted with caution. The adherence to certain values cannot always be generalized to different groups (e.g. males/females; high/low NFCL). For example, although in general men are more competence oriented than women, in case of low NFCL, no gender differences exist. It could be interesting to investigate other, possibly interacting, characteristics in future research. In addition, future research could incorporate more values (next to social esteem values) to get a broader picture of the relationship between NFCL and values. In this research, we only investigated social esteem values because these are particularly important in youngsters' living environment. We did combine several values questionnaires (Schwartz, Kahle, Rokeach) and constructed more specified statements to acquire more in-depth knowledge on the relation between different aspects of social self-esteem values and NFCL.

The interaction results are particularly interesting when we keep in mind that the level of NFCL an individual possesses, can also depend on the situation (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). Some situations trigger a low (or high) NFCL, which in turn possibly influences the values that are adhered in that situation. For example, in a situation in which the fear of invalidity is increased (e.g. high accountability; accuracy instructions), men and women would not differ in competence orientation. Or in other words, men should become less occupied with competence and career if they are informed that they are accountable for their actions or instructed that accuracy is very important. Furthermore, these results suggest that in low NFCL conditions, women as well as men have their own opinions about some issues, but in high NFCL conditions (e.g. time

pressure, fatigue), women give up their own opinions and are possibly more inclined to conform to the public (i.e. peer group) opinion. Future research can establish this situational dependency of values.

Interestingly, men have a more negative self-image, while women see themselves as responsible and reliable individuals. The latter result could imply that women have a higher general self-esteem. If women think they are solid, an attribute that is generally valuable for youngsters, they should display a higher self-esteem (MacDonald et al., 2003). We did not incorporate a general measure of self-esteem in our study, future research could determine if women have indeed more self-esteem than men.

In sum, the present research indicates that youngsters' values and self-images concerning social self-esteem differ according to their level of NFCL and their gender. In addition, we argue that values and self-images cannot be generalized to both gender groups because interaction effects exist between gender and NFCL. With this research, we added to the studies that underscore the communalities between values and individual characteristics. In addition, we added to the knowledge of the beliefs and motives of high and low NFCL individuals.

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TABLE 1

Results of the Principal Components Analyses on Values and Self-Images

Specific Values	Loading	Common factor (α)	Mean	SD
I like to be in a group[a]	.753			
I prefer staying at home above going out(-)[a]	.713			
I like to be alone(-)[a]	.658	Social character (.70)	4.578	.824
Friends are very important to me[a]	.625			
I easily make contacts[a]	.567			
I find it important that others appreciate me[b]	.877			
I find it important that my surroundings respect me[b]	.843	Eager for appreciation (.78)	4.984	.680
I enjoy to gain recognition for what I do[b]	.659			
I always dress after the latest fashion[a]	.831	Appearance minded (.67)	3.588	1.062
I attach great importance to appearance[a]	.817			
Appearance is at least as important as the inner self[a]	.566			
I am subjected to pressure to achieve[a]	.799			
Most youngsters are pressured[a]	.737			
I possibly cannot live up to the expectations of my environment[a]	.693	Pressured to achieve (.64)	3.935	.753
It is important to achieve well[c]	.610			
I am proud of myself[d]	.607	Competence oriented (.61)	4.416	.709
I have a bright future[d]	.591			
Making a career is important[c]	.499			
Everyone should primarily think of themselves[a]	.723	Individualistic (.65)	3.164	.976
Money and power are important[a]	.723			
Others have few influence on me[e]	.773	Own opinion (.61)	3.967	.967
I have my own opinion about everything[e]	.765			
Life without pressure is important[a]	.790	Relax (.55)	4.066	1.025
I relax as much as possible[a]	.760			

Explained Variance	60,67%			
Self-Images	**Loading**	**Common Factor**	**Mean**	
Selfish	.659			
Unsatisfied	.620			
Stuborn	.593	Negative (.61)	2.315	.629
Aggressive	.568			
Spineless	.535			
Responsible	.740			
Independent	.686	Solid (.61)	4.134	.508
Reliable	.653			
Tolerant	.550			
Perfectionist	.749			
Diligent	.665	Hard worker (.64)	3.431	.658
Perseverant	.540			
Materialistic	.487			
Modest	.825	Modest (.67)	3.130	.985
Timid	.809			
Explained Variance	51,07%			

(-) reverse scored

Original value: [a] power (competence, appearance & wealth), [b] social recognition, being well-respected, sense of accomplishment, [c] ambitious, achievement, self-fulfillment, [d] self-respect, [e] independent

TABLE 2

Correlations between the Value Dimensions

	Eager for appreciation	Appearance minded	Pressured to achieve	Competence oriented	Individualistic	Own opinion	relax
Social character	.122**	.218**	-.034	.234**	-.063**	.041	-.137**
Eager for appreciation		.156**	.206**	.249**	-.043	.090**	.102**
Appearance minded			.104**	.249**	.211**	.022	.017
Pressured to achieve				.178**	-.026	.006	.145**
Competence oriented					.129**	.098**	-.046
Individualistic						.132**	-.031
Own opinion							.040

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

TABLE 3

ANOVA results for the association between Social Self Esteem (Values and Self-Images) and NFCL and gender

	NFCL			Gender			NFCL X Gender
Values	**Low**	**High**	**F-Value**	**Women**	**Men**	**F-Value**	**F-Value**
Social character	4.68	4.46	22.58***	4.58	4.56	1.24	5.07*
Eager for appreciation	4.90	5.01	20.13***	5.05	4.92	8.78***	.88
Appearance minded	3.46	3.70	12.96***	3.69	3.46	12.03***	.20
Pressured to achieve	3.76	3.93	56.57***	4.05	3.80	26.47***	1.02
Competence oriented	4.35	4.48	14.59***	4.36	4.48	11.58***	3.02*
Individualistic	3.23	3.11	2.89*	3.03	3.32	24.82***	.88
Own opinion	4.10	3.85	19.10***	3.91	4.04	3.35*	9.90***
Relax	3.90	4.25	41.17***	4.04	4.11	3.90*	.84
	NFCL			Gender			NFCL X Gender
Self-images	**Low**	**High**	**F-Value**	**Women**	**Men**	**F-Value**	**F-Value**
Negative	2.31	2.31	.34	2.27	2.36	7.94***	.64
Solid	4.13	4.13	.63	4.19	4.06	2.39***	1.85
Hard worker	3.32	3.55	41.01***	4.43	4.44	1.34	.37
Modest	2.95	3.34	44.24***	3.14	3.12	.17	1.55

*** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, (*), p<.1

TABLE 4

Mean scores for the interaction between NFCL and Gender on values and self images

NFCL	Low NFCL		High NFCL		NFCL X Gender
Gender	Women	Men	Women	Men	F-Value
Values					
Social character	4.77	4.60	4.44	4.49	5.07*
Eager for appreciation	4.98	4.83	5.11	5.04	.88
Appearance minded	3.55	3.38	3.80	3.57	.20
Pressured to achieve	3.89	3.65	4.16	3.99	1.02
Competence oriented	4.32	4.38	4.39	4.59	3.02*
Individualistic	2.33	2.77	2.36	2.87	.88
Own opinion	4.13	4.06	3.73	4.01	9.90***
Relax	3.8	3.97	4.23	4.28	.84
Self-Images					NFCL X Gender
Negative	2.27	2.34	2.27	2.39	.64
Solid	4.22	4.06	4.16	4.07	1.85
Hard worker	3.30	3.33	3.52	3.39	.37
Modest	2.90	2.99	3.34	3.28	1.55