Cognitive (in)flexibility as a predictor for sexist workplace attitudes

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Introduction

Gender discrimination is a persistent issue today. According to Parker and Funk (2017), 42% of working American women face workplace discrimination This work aims to understand the underlying psychological determinants of gender discrimination in the workplace. Specifically, it aims to examine the role of cognitive flexibility and tendency to associate women/men to traditional gender roles. To test the hypothesis that an increased cognitive flexibility has an inverse relationship with traditional gender role attitudes, participants (n=300) were asked to fill out an online survey containing measurement tools which aim to quantify said variables.

Important terms:
- **Cognitive flexibility**: "a persons awareness of communication alternatives, willingness to adapt to a situation and self efficacy in being flexible."
- **Implicit stereotypes**: a stereotype that is relatively inaccessible to conscious awareness or control.
- **Explicit stereotypes**: a stereotype that you deliberately think about and report.

Material and Methods

Two Qualtrics surveys were constructed and posted on MTurk
Survey 1/Pilot (N=100, mean age=37.1, 64% male):
- Implicit Association Test (Greenwald, et al, 2001)
- Cognitive Flexibility Inventory (Dennis & Vander Wal, 2010)
- Attitudes towards traditional gender roles
- Demographic items

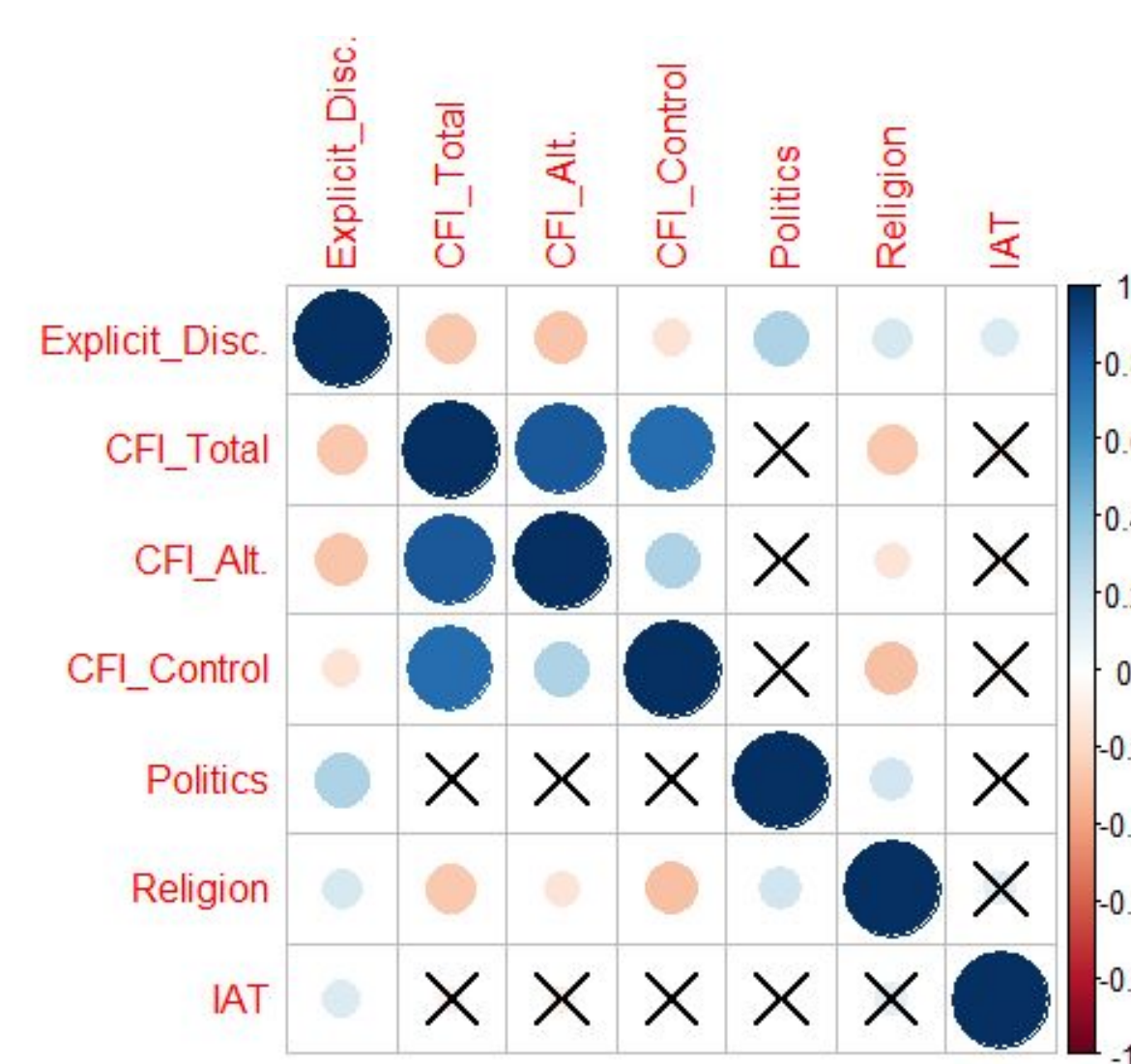Survey 2 (n=200, mean age=38.7, 55.7% male):
- Explicit discrimination towards women in workplace
- Demographic items
- Attitudes towards traditional gender roles
- Participants probability of hiring or imagining different individuals working in the video game industry items
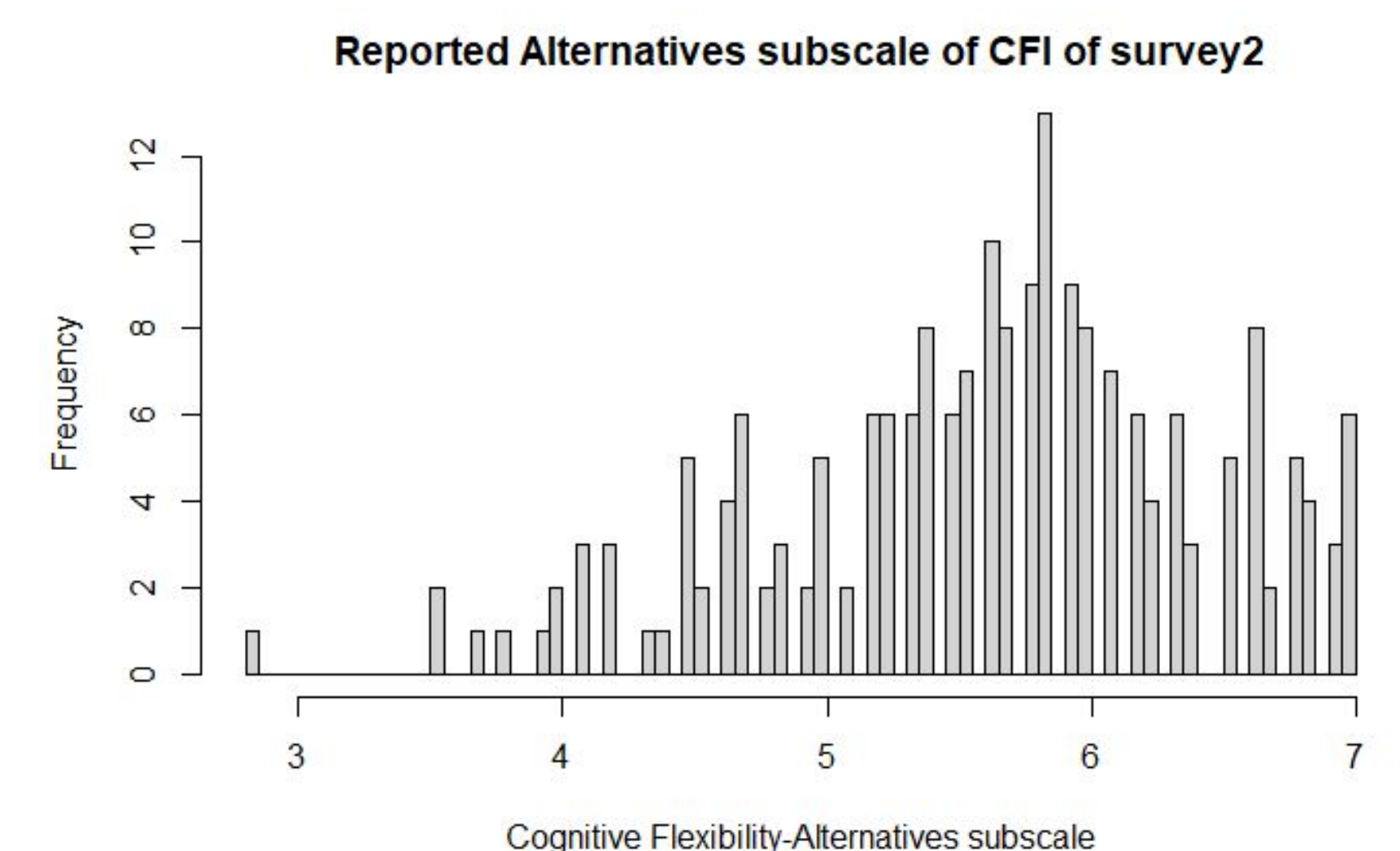
Results

Survey 1 correlation table:

*Politics: politics from liberal-conservative on 7-point Likert scale
*Religion: religion from not at all religious-very religious on 7-point Likert scale
*IAT: score from the Implicit Association Test, ranges from -1 to 1, also known as d score
*Explicit_Disc: explicit discrimination items

Survey 2 Linear Models:

Predictors	"How likely are you to hire a 26 year old woman [video game development]"		
	Estimates	CI	p
(Intercept)	2.94	0.93 – 4.95	**0.004**
CFI- Alternatives	0.37	0.10 – 0.64	**0.008**
CFI- Control	-0.06	-0.25 – 0.14	0.567
Social Desriability	0.03	-0.03 – 0.09	0.260
Education	-0.00	-0.14 – 0.14	0.985
Politics	-0.02	-0.13 – 0.09	0.694
Paternalistic Stereotypes	0.17	-0.11 – 0.45	0.233
Envious Stereotypes	-0.44	-0.75 – -0.13	**0.006**
Contemptous Stereotypes	0.13	-0.19 – 0.46	0.410
Age	0.01	-0.00 – 0.03	0.149
Observations	202		
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.134 / 0.093		

Predictors	"How likely are you to hire a 26 year old woman [video game development] *MALES ONLY"		
	Estimates	CI	p
(Intercept)	1.62	-1.31 – 4.55	0.276
CFI- Alternatives	0.67	0.31 – 1.03	**<0.001**
CFI- Control	-0.12	-0.40 – 0.16	0.388
Social Desirability	0.01	-0.08 – 0.09	0.904
Education	-0.06	-0.26 – 0.15	0.576
Politics	-0.07	-0.24 – 0.09	0.389
Paternalistic Stereotypes	0.22	-0.21 – 0.64	0.314
Envious Stereotypes	-0.58	-1.05 – -0.12	**0.015**
Contemptous Stereotypes	0.29	-0.17 – 0.76	0.216
Age	0.03	0.00 – 0.06	**0.022**
Observations	111		
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.238 / 0.170		

Results continued

Reported Alternatives subscale of CFI of survey2

Conclusions

- There was no significant relationship between the IAT and self reported cognitive flexibility in the pilot.
- There was a stronger relationship between explicit measures and self reported cognitive flexibility in both trials.
- The second trial showed that there was a stronger relationship between envious stereotypes and low probability of hiring a 26-year-old woman for game development.
- After examining the effect by gender, the effect was stronger for men than for women, suggesting moderation by gender
- Future research should focus on understanding differences between genders as well as using measures of cognitive flexibility that are not self reported.

References

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