Examining closed-mindedness and uncertainty’s effects on likelihood to hire ex-convicts

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Abstract
In this study, we examined the effects of personality (closed-mindedness) and situational uncertainty on a participant’s likelihood to hire ex-convicts. The results indicate that participants who were open-minded had a higher need for cognition, and thus in preference for order had more favorable attitudes toward hiring convicts.

Introduction
What is it about a person that makes an individual less willing to hire someone with a criminal background? Based on previous research, closed-minded individuals seek out closure and thus, are more likely to utilize stereotypical and heuristic strategies when making decisions (Kruglanski, 2014). In other words, we would expect individuals high in closed-mindedness to be less likely to hire an applicant. However, does the amount or quality of information one receives about a potential hire make a difference? One could argue that an aspect of open-mindedness is the ability to see new and possibly unpredictable influences on things or make decisions in the face of a lack of information. In this study, we explored this notion by examining how likely participants were to hire an individual who committed a crime, in one piece, and is now looking for employment. We were interested in examining two factors: open/closed-mindedness (Kruglanski, Webster, & Klein, 1990) and the uncertainty of the situation. In future studies, we plan to explore this potential interaction between the uncertain of the situation and individual differences that may affect one’s tolerance for this uncertainty (e.g., openness to experience, need for cognition, uncertainty tolerance, etc.). The research from this study is intended to be a starting point for examining ways to improve the chances of rehabilitation by changing employment and hopefully as a result decreasing recidivism.

Hypothesis
• People who are more closed-minded will be less likely to hire individuals with a criminal background.
• People who are given more information will feel more comfortable in making a decision based on hiring an individual with a criminal background.

Methods
We obtained a sample of 72 students from Roanoke College Introductory Psychology students who were to obtain course credit for participation. The participants were randomly assigned to either the Certain Condition or the Uncertain condition. In order to manipulate the uncertainty of the situation, participants were given a letter mentioning that a student in Psychology 101 was looking for a job. Participants in the Certain Condition were given a letter with specific details about the individual form the psychology department. Participants in the Uncertain Condition were given a letter with specific details about the individual and information about the psychology department. Participants were randomly assigned to either the Certain Condition or Uncertain Condition.

Results
In this study we were interested in the uncertainty affects attitudes about hiring ex-convicts. In addition to the manipulation of certainty level in the letter participants read, we also examined several individual difference measures intended to indicate one’s tolerance for uncertain situations (i.e., closed-mindedness, need for cognition, preference for order). Unfortunately, the certainty manipulation failed to significantly affect participants attitudes about hiring.

Belief in Rehabilitation
In order to evaluate the effects of closed-mindedness and level of uncertainty on likelihood to hire, a 2 (uncertain/certain) X 2 (high(low) closed-mindedness) between subjects analysis of variance was conducted. The open-minded participants were more likely to hire (M = 2.78) than closed-minded participants (M = 2.50); however, this difference was not statistically significant. When we exclude need for cognition, we found that participants who were high in need for cognition (M = 2.60) were more likely to hire than those who were low in need for cognition (M = 2.50). Finally, participants who were high in preference for order (M = 2.64) were less likely to hire than those who were low in preference for order (M = 2.58).

Belief in Rehabilitation
In order to evaluate the effects of closed-mindedness and level of uncertainty on the belief that criminals can be rehabilitated, a 2 (uncertain/certain) X 2 (high(low) closed-mindedness) between subjects analysis of variance was conducted. There were no significant effects for closed-mindedness; however, we did find a significant main effect for need for cognition, F(1, 66) = 5.60, p = .05, η² = .08 (Figure 1). Participants who were high in need for cognition (M = 5.20) were more likely to feel that criminals could be rehabilitated in comparison to those who were low in need of cognition (M = 3.20). When we look at preference for order, we found that participants who were high in preference for order (M = 3.17) were less likely than those who were low in preference for order (M = 3.37) to believe that criminals can be rehabilitated, F(1, 67) = 12.00, p = .001, η² = .15 (Figure 2).

Likelihood to Hire
In order to evaluate the effects of closed-mindedness and level of uncertainty on the belief that criminals can be rehabilitated, a 2 (uncertain/certain) X 2 (high(low) closed-mindedness) between subjects analysis of variance was conducted. There were no significant effects for closed-mindedness; however, we did find a significant main effect for need for cognition, F(1, 66) = 5.60, p = .05, η² = .08 (Figure 1). Need for cognition was also significant, F(1, 66) = 7.09, p = .024, η² = .10 (Figure 4). Participants who scored higher in need for cognition held more positive views of said candidate (M = 2.49) than those who scored lower in need for cognition were less likely to hold more positive views of said candidate (M = 2.47). Finally, participants who were high in preference for order (M = 2.67) were less likely to hold positive attitudes about the candidate (M = 2.73) as compared to those low in preference for order, F(1, 66) = 7.46, p = .008, η² = .10 (Figure 5).

Likelihood to Hire

References