Make It Special! Negative Correlations Between the Need for Uniqueness and Visual Aesthetic Sensitivity

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Abstract

This study investigated the need for uniqueness, visual aesthetic sensitivity, and their correlation. To investigate these variables, we asked 71 participants to complete the German adaptation of the Need for Uniqueness scale (NfU-G) and the Visual Aesthetic Sensitivity Test (VAST) —including the VAST-Revised (VAST-R). The NfU-G measures the need to set oneself apart from others, whereas the VAST(-R) tests the ability to identify the objective aesthetic goodness of a figural composition. The findings of this study are significantly compliant with theoretical considerations: the higher a participant scores on the NfU-G scale, the lower the percentage of correctly identified drawings on the VAST(-R), with the VAST being a stronger predictor than the VAST-R. Thus, the results suggest that participants who strive for individuality exhibit lower visual aesthetic sensitivity since they tend to violate norms in order to assert their uniqueness. Limitations regarding this outcome are discussed.

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While the construct *need for uniqueness* understood as the desire to achieve uniqueness (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977), is quite well established, it is not clear whether it is associated with *visual aesthetic sensitivity*, the ability to judge an entity aesthetically in a standard way, and if so, to what extent (e.g., Eysenck, 1940, 1983; Götz, 1985). For example, as consumers, individuals decide within fractions of a second whether something is perceived as aesthetically positive or negative. In addition, it is apparent that some consumers prefer products that are innovative, unique, and individually manufactured. Consequently, this preference manifests itself when consumers score high on the NfU scale (Lynn & Harris, 1997a). At the same time, even though being able to recognize what is aesthetically pleasing in a standard way, for example, as judged by experts, this might not necessarily turn into one's own (product) preference (Holbrook, 2005; Holbrook & Addis, 2007). Hence, there is a need to scrutinize whether consumers' preferences for such manufactured products coincide with the aesthetic perceptions of others, specifically, when a product is perceived as objectively aesthetically positive. In this study, we investigated whether such a connection between nfu and visual aesthetic sensitivity exists: Do individuals who seek uniqueness deviate more from prescriptive norms of good figural composition?

The Need for Uniqueness

Seeking nonconformity in relation to others or choosing nonconventional options is considered as a need for uniqueness (Imhoff & Erb, 2009; Simonson & Nowlis, 2000; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977). Need for uniqueness is characterized by two extreme tendencies: first, by a need for uniqueness with respect to social norms, and second, by a desire to be as different and individual as possible (Belk, 1988). The underlying process is assumed to emerge from social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Individuals who want

to evaluate themselves based on objective criteria but are not successful in doing so will consider themselves in social comparison with other individuals who may be similar in terms of various important personal characteristics (Fromkin, Dipboye, & Pyle, 1972). Previous research has produced evidence that feelings of extreme similarity to others are perceived as negative (Fromkin, 1972; Jarymowicz & Codol, 1979) and that individuals tend to describe themselves as fundamentally less similar to others than they are and would instead identify themselves with different groups (McGuire & Padawer-Singer, 1976). Confirming this, Snyder and Fromkin's (1980) theory of uniqueness states that high levels of similarity or dissimilarity are subjectively experienced as displeasing.

It can be argued that every individual craves uniqueness, although the manifestation of this craving may differ across individual situations (Snyder, 1992; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Nevertheless, to avoid possible social isolation or rejection, most individuals prefer to express their uniqueness within the bounds of social norms (Lynn & Harris, 1997a, 1997b; Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2012). Not only can different situations influence the manifestation of the craving for uniqueness, but individual differences can also play a significant role (Snyder, 1992; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). In this connection, Bauer, Huber, Hett, and Neumann (2007) postulated four explanatory approaches to explain the craving for uniqueness, including a gender difference (Tepper & Hoyle, 1996). Bauer et al. (2007) have shown that there was a greater need for distinction among women with unusual first names than among women with common first names; however, these findings could not be replicated for men, which points to a gender difference (Zweigenhaft, 1981). Often, the need for social nonconformity is favored not only for functional reasons but rather for symbolic reasons (Hyatt, 1992). The same holds for tattoos: Among other things, these allow an individual to define his or her self-concept through symbolic consumption that is outwardly visible (Belk, 1988).

Visual Aesthetic Sensitivity

The process of aesthetic appreciation seems omnipresent in everyday life since far more entities than just artworks, such as paintings and sculptures, can be aesthetically appreciated (Jacobsen, 2010). Nevertheless, people seem to differ in their ability to perceive entities aesthetically, that is, they vary in their aesthetic sensitivity (e.g., Eysenck, 1940, 1983). In this regard, experimental psychological approaches in studies of aesthetic experience, which can be traced back to the early works of Gustav Theodor Fechner (1876), seem crucial.

The meaning of the word *aesthetics* is multifold. As highlighted by Jacobsen (2006), two main clusters of meaning can be elicited. The term is derived from the ancient Greek concept of *aisthesis*, which refers to perception or sensation, and the first cluster thus entails the processes underlying these perceptions and sensations. The second cluster relates to the concept of *beauty* (Jacobsen, 2006*)*. Various studies in both German and international research have identified a bipolar beautiful–ugly dimension as primary and prototypical for referring to the aesthetics of objects (Jacobsen, Buchta, Köhler, & Schröger, 2004), to the aesthetics of music (Istók et al., 2009), to the aesthetics of visual stimuli (Augustin, Wagemans, & Carbon, 2012) and to the aesthetics of literature (Knoop, Wagner, Jacobsen, & Menninghaus, 2016). As highlighted by Jacobsen (2006), this second cluster predominates in contemporary Western culture in the understanding of aesthetics. But still, the first cluster is fundamental. Aesthetic processing understood as receptive, central, or productive processing (Jacobsen & Höfel, 2002), relies on a sensory component, including mental simulations using the imagination. Thus, aesthetic processing can be defined as a "sensation-based evaluation of an entity with respect to the . . . conceptual system, primarily the beauty dimension" (Jacobsen, 2006, p. 158).

Aesthetic processing requires a stimulus to be processed. Since the early work of Fechner (1876), many (universal) characteristics of stimuli that influence aesthetic processing have been determined: The symmetry or asymmetry of the stimulus (e.g., Berlyne, 1971; Fechner, 1876; Jacobsen & Höfel, 2002), its complexity or simplicity (e.g., Berlyne, 1970, 1971), and its novelty or familiarity (e.g., Berlyne, 1970) are known to be some of the central characteristics that determine aesthetic evaluation and behavior.

However, cultures seem to differ in what is conceived as beautiful, and within each culture, individuals can differ in what they consider beautiful (Jacobsen, 2010). As an example, Leder et al. (2018) demonstrated that "Symmetry is Not a Universal Law of -Beauty" in a study of the same name (p. 1). In this study, two groups of art experts—artists and art historians—and a group of nonexperts were instructed to spontaneously rate visual stimuli that varied in symmetry as well as complexity on the beauty dimension. The art experts evaluated the asymmetrical, simple stimuli as most beautiful, whereas the nonexperts rated the symmetrical, complex stimuli as most beautiful. Thus, rather than simply considering stimulus features, researchers may also want to consider a number of various vantage points such as the participants who are processing the stimuli (Jacobsen, 2006).

Concerning aesthetic preferences in relation to visual objects, Eysenck (1940) already seemingly identified a preference for complexity. Given that people vary in their taste regarding paintings, music, literature, and so forth, he asked whether there is such a thing as aesthetic sensitivity (Eysenck, 1940, 1983). Based on these assumptions, he developed—together with the artist Götz (1985)—an instrument, the Visual Aesthetic Sensitivity Test (VAST), which aimed to assess aesthetic sensitivity. Eysenck (1997) stated that people "differ[ed] in the degree to which they approximated [an] objective measure of 'good taste'" (p. 70), and thus, in addition to a preference for complexity, he postulated a second main determinant of aesthetic preference judgments: so-called *good taste* (Eysenck, 1940, 1983).

Nevertheless, today, we understand that the VAST measures how well participants reproduce a standard, normative composition, for example, as judged by the author and other experts, in their answers. Still, we chose the VAST for this study because it is the only instrument that comes close to assessing aesthetic sensitivity. However, even being a rare instrument to measure this ability, the weakness of unidimensionality and structural validity of the VAST (Myszkowski & Storme, 2017) led us to additionally examine correlations based on the revised version, VAST-R, introduced by Myszkowski and Storme (2017). This abridged instrument, based on a subset of items of the VAST, has an improved internal consistency and structural validity (Myszkowski & Storme, 2017).

While today it is assumed that good taste can be notably predicted by intelligence (Myszkowski, Çelik, & Storme, 2018), the relation with personality traits, such as need for uniqueness, is not as clear. Still, it is conceivable that participants with higher NfU scores, that is, individuals in pursuit of being different, will diverge more strongly from the norm of good figural composition (as set by Götz, 1985), which means a lower score on the VAST(-R). That is, individuals with a higher need for uniqueness will tend to violate norms to assert their uniqueness. In this study, this prediction should result in a negative correlation between the NfU(-G) and VAST(-R) scores.

Method

Participants

A group of 71 individuals (38 females) volunteered to participate in our study. They were recruited in the waiting rooms of citizen centers and vehicle registration authorities in various German cities and gave their informed consent prior to data collection, which was carried out anonymously.

Materials and Procedure

The questionnaire used for the data collection consisted of two major parts, the NfU-G scale (Schumpe et al., 2016), which is based on the English scale invented by Snyder and Fromkin (1977), and the VAST (Götz, 1985), including the VAST-R (Myszkowski & Storme, 2017).

The German NfU-G scale was used to measure individuals' need for uniqueness. This self-report questionnaire regarding the participants' perception of their own characteristics in various situations can provide differentiated insights into the individual's need for uniqueness: Apart from the general NfU score, the underlying components lack of concern regarding others' reactions to one's different ideas, actions, and so on, a person's desire to not always follow rules and a person's willingness to publicly defend his or her beliefs can be elicited (Schumpe et al., 2016; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977). Further, participants were asked to fill out the VAST. Using the translated German instruction of the fourth version (Götz, 1985), the participants were asked to decide for a series of 50 pairs of nonrepresentational drawings "which of the two designs is the better one, i.e., the more harmonious" (Eysenck, 1983; see Figure 1). That is, they were instructed to recognize which is the drawing with the "higher aesthetic value" (Myszkowski & Storme, 2017). Note that in line with the original instructions, participants were exclusively told not to base their choice on which design they find more pleasant. The German instruction is given in online Appendix A.

Please insert Figure 1 about here

Due to time constraints, and in order to provide a pleasurable experience for the participants, the test procedure was adapted insofar as we provided them with a loose-leaf pad containing all stimuli rather than handing them a separate answer sheet. The stimuli were laminated in advance so that participants could mark their answers directly on the film. To

avoid reflection of light, a dull film was used. Following the test session, the participants' answers were transcribed on a separate sheet of paper for further analysis. Subsequently, demographic data, such as age, gender, native language, marital status, level of education, current occupation, and monthly income, were collected in order to check for possible interaction effects.

The data collection was accomplished over a time span of 3 months. Participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire in the waiting hall where they were recruited. The participants were not given a time limit. The sessions lasted 20 minutes on average. To avoid a potential confounding, the order of the NfU-G and VAST was counterbalanced.

Results

As a result of the randomized assignment to the two different groups (n_1 = VAST first vs. n_2 = NfU first), the group sizes were not assumed to be equal but close to equal (n_1 = 33, n_2 = 38). We used an αlevel of .05 for all statistical tests. Nevertheless, the two groups had similar means for the entire NfU-G scale, M_1 = 91.12, M_2 = 93.87, Cohen's d = 0.20, $t(69)$ = -.83, p = .41, and the subscales for Factor 1: *lack of concern*, M_1 = 45.09, M_2 = 46.08, Cohen's d = 0.14, $t(69)$ = -.56, p = .58, Factor 2: *desire to not always follow rules*, M_1 = 25.03, M_2 = 26.68, Cohen's d = 0.31, $t(69)$ = -1.28, p = .20, and Factor 3: *defends beliefs publicly*, M_1 = 21.00, M_2 = 21.11, Cohen's d = 0.03, $t(69)$ = -.10, p = .92. In terms of ages, Cramer's V = .40, $\chi 2$ (8, N = 71) = 11.38, p = .18, and gender distribution, n_{1male} = 17, $n_{1female}$ = 16, n_{2male} = 16, $n_{2female}$ = 22, Cramer's V = .09, $\chi 2$ (1, N = 71) = .63, p = .43, no significant differences were observed. Thus, the two groups are by design equivalent, although similar in different respects.

The demographic data collected—age, gender, native language, marital status, level of education, current occupation, and monthly income—did not have an influence on the NfU-G

scores or the VAST(-R). In addition, gender did not influence the interaction of the predictor and the criterion (see online Appendices B, C, D).

Single linear regression analysis was used to test whether the quantity of correctly identified pictures (VAST-(R)) predicted participants' ratings on the total NfU-G scale. The results of the regression analysis for the VAST indicated that the predictor explained 12% of the variance, $R^2 = .12$, $F(1,69) = 9.24$, $p = .003$.[1] The quantity of correctly identified pictures (VAST) was found to significantly predict ratings on the NfU-G scale, $\beta = -.34$, $t(69) = -3.04$, $p = .003$ (see Figure 2). Furthermore, Cohen's (1988) f^2 values ($f^2 = .13$) suggest a small to medium effect size.

Please insert Figure 2 about here

The results of the revised version show that 8% of the variance can be explained through the predictor, $R^2 = .08$, $F(1,69) = 5.64$, $p = .02$. The number of correctly identified pictures (VAST-R) was found to significantly predict ratings on the NfU-G scale, $\beta = -.28$, $t(69) = -2.37$, $p = .02$ (see Figure 2). Cohen's (1988) f^2 values ($f^2 = .08$) suggest a small to medium effect size.

Looking at Factors 1–3 individually (see Figure 3), the results of the regression analyses revealed the following: Considering all VAST items, Factor 1 explained 7% of the variance, $R^2 = .07$, $F(1,69) = 5.37$, $p = .02$ This corresponds to a small to medium effect size $f^2 = .08$ (Cohen, 1988) .The quantity of correctly identified pictures (VAST) significantly predicted the ratings for Factor 1, $\beta = -.27$, $t(69) = -2.32$, $p = .02$. This predictor was found to

[1] Since each regression contains just one independent variable, the reported R^2 are not adjusted for the number of explanatory terms.

be not significant for the VAST-R, $R^2 = .05$, $F(1,69) = 3.24$, $p = .08$, $\beta = -.21$, $t(69) = -1.80$, $p = .08$.

Please insert Figure 3 about here

Factor 2 (VAST) explained 8% of the variance, $R^2 = .08$, $F(1,69) = 6.18$, $p = .02$. The effect size ($f^2 = .09$) was small to medium (Cohen, 1988). The quantity of correctly identified pictures significantly predicted the ratings for Factor 2, $\beta = -.29$, $t(69) = -2.49$, $p = .02$. This predictor was not significant for the VAST-R, $R^2 = .03$, $F(1,69) = 2.32$, $p = .13$, $\beta = -.18$, $t(69) = -1.52$, $p = .13$. The results of the regression for Factor 3 (VAST) indicated that this predictor explained 8% of the variance, $R^2 = .08$, $F(1,69) = 6.01$, $p = .02$. This corresponds to a small to medium effect size $f^2 = .09$ (Cohen, 1988). The quantity of correctly identified pictures significantly predicted the ratings for Factor 3, $\beta = -.28$, $t(69) = -2.45$, $p = .02$. The results of the regression of the VAST-R revealed that this predictor explained 9% of the variance, $R^2 = .09$, $F(1,69) = 6.52$, $p = .01$. This corresponds to a small to medium effect size $f^2 = .09$ suggested by Cohen (1988). The quantity of correctly identified pictures significantly predicted the ratings for Factor 3, $\beta = -.29$, $t(69) = -2.55$, $p = .01$. Assessing any emerging sequence effects using an analysis of variance, no significant differences in the variances were observed for the NfU-G total score, $F(1,69) = .69$, $p = .41$, neither for the VAST, $F(1,69) < 1$, $p = .99$ nor for the VAST-R, $F(1,69) = .20$, $p = .66$. Therefore, it can be assumed that the order of the tests had no influence on the participants' response behavior.

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the correlation between the latent constructs *need for uniqueness*, as measured by the NfU-G scale, and *visual aesthetic sensitivity*, as measured by the VAST(-R). The results indicated that an increased need for uniqueness correlated with a

decreased visual aesthetic sensitivity, as shown by the participants correctly identifying fewer pictures when scoring high on the NfU-G scale. The reasons why people who opt for a nonconventional option within the bounds of social norms also differ in their degree of approximating the norm for aesthetic stimuli can be manifold. On the one hand, the need for uniqueness might cause an unconscious value shift, to wit, towards a unique—in the sense of nonconventional—aesthetic sensitivity. On the other hand, people might consciously strive to stand out from the crowd. The latter would imply an inherent basic understanding of an aesthetic stimulus, which in the case of the VAST(-R) is a well-designed picture. Thus, individuals may actively opt to incorrectly identify these stimuli in order to be unique.

The findings of this study revealed further that, concerning the overall NfU, the VAST is the relatively stronger predictor than the VAST-R. One of the possible explanations might be due to the unidimensionality of the latter. It may be that the VAST-R left aside a secondary dimension that the VAST initially captured, that is, visual aesthetic sensitivity may not be unidimensional.[2]

In addition, the results revealed that the NfU Factor 2, *not follow rules,* and 3, *defends beliefs publicly*, were the strongest predictors for this model and that participants did not have a desire to follow rules yet were willing to show their differentness rather than being unconcerned. Respective individuals will therefore not be commensurate with Eysenck's (1940, 1983) interpretation of "good taste." Looking more closely at cultural differences, individualism, as opposed to collectivism, is a dimension comprising the individual and the community that is predominant in certain societies (Hofstede, 2001). All participants' nationalities were premised on Western cultures, in which they have learned to embrace uniqueness and individuality and have chosen these as their personal characteristics (Kim & Drolet, 2003; Kim & Markus, 1999). In a study on social interaction, Barnlund (1975)

[2] We would like to thank one of our reviewers for suggesting this interpretation.

ascertained that in the United States, learning group skills are equally understood as "standing out" and embracing individuality. Hence, an individual seeking individuality would want to express it to others (McGuire & Padawer-Singer, 1976) rather than be unconcerned. It can be presumed that a smaller percentage of correctly identified pictures, as measured by the VAST(-R), arose because of the participants' willingness to show their differentness and individuality. This would resonate with McGuire and Padawer-Singer's (1976) premise about one pertinent motive for individual behavior, the need for expression, whereby individuals need to express their individuality to others. Factor 2 and 3 being the strongest predictors could be based on the fact that individuals not following the rules could be understood as not respecting norms of modesty and politeness, which may be connected to wanting to defend these beliefs publicly (Lalot et al., 2017). Further, Factor 3 was the only significant factor considering VAST-R. A reason for the predictive power of Factor 3 might be the explicit nature of the task, which was to decide "which of the two designs is the better one, i.e., the more harmonious" (Eysenck, 1983). Individuals were thus encouraged to defend their beliefs publicly, which speaks in favor of an unconscious value shift.

Need for uniqueness, as a proxy for striving for differentiation in relation to others or as a motivation for nonconformity (Tian et al., 2001), should not merely be regarded as a trait by virtue of which individuals wish to differentiate themselves from others but also as a temporary motivation (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Nevertheless, it can be considered as a relatively stable personality trait (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Previous studies have examined the relationship between personality traits and have found a relationship between need for uniqueness and, for example, being more extraverted and open to experiences (Schumpe et al., 2016). Future research might therefore include questionnaires focusing on personality traits and intrinsic/extrinsic motivation while methodologically collecting data using the VAST(-R) and the NfU(-G) scale.

A questionnaire that is similar to the NfU-G scale is the Consumers' Need for Uniqueness (CNfU) scale (Tian et al., 2001). This questionnaire was specifically developed for understanding consumer behavior, and the role that consumption plays in expressing identity. Driven by counterconformity, individuals with high CNfU scores tend to choose rather unique designs. Examining the coherence between the NfU(-G), the CNfU, and VAST(-R) could, therefore, be of major interest.

When filling out the VAST, individuals are explicitly instructed to decide "which of the two designs is the better one, i.e., the more harmonious" (Eysenck, 1983) and not to base their choice on personal pleasure. Thus, the question remains whether the VAST(-R) can be seen as a measure of good taste. It has been noted more than once (Gear, 1986; Myszkowski, Storme, Zenasni, & Lubart, 2014) that the instrument operationalizes aesthetic value solely in terms of design features (e.g., harmony and balance) and therefore only measures the recognition of these; as a consequence (as mentioned earlier), the VAST(-R) merely measures how well participants reproduce a standard normative composition in their answers, for example, they judge in accordance with experts in the field of paintings (Eysenck, 1983). Historical change and cultural development may influence aesthetic judgments and preferences (Höfel & Jacobsen, 2003; Jacobsen, 2006), so these may change with the passage of time. Götz began his work close to 40 years ago, and the youngest version of the VAST dates back to the 1980s. All conclusions drawn from the study should thus be done bearing in mind Diachronia (Jacobsen, 2006), the perspective regarding possible changes over time, in this case, on a group level.

Whereas the extent to which one's own aesthetic appreciation corresponds to the "average" aesthetic appreciation was initially conceived as an intelligence independent and personality independent disposition (Frois & Eysenck, 1995; Götz et al., 1979), today it is assumed that good taste can be predicted by a variety of dispositional factors (Myszkowski et

al., 2014), especially by intelligence (Myszkowski, Çelik, & Storme, 2018). Further personality traits, such as conscientiousness, extraversion or openness to experience (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2004; Furnham & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2004; Myszkowski, Çelik, & Storme, 2018; Myszkowski et al., 2014) were found to have a relation with VAST(-R) scores. In addition, cognitive facilitation—given, for example, through dispositional figural creativity (Myszkowski et al., 2014)—has been elicited as an influential predictor (Leder, Belke, Oeberst, & Augustin, 2004; Reber, Schwarz, & Winkielman, 2004; Silvia, 2005, 2006; Smith & Smith, 2006). This study contributes to the relevance of highlighting personality traits when examining the aesthetic sensitivity, but further studies might focus on the impact of the aforementioned factors . The correlation between need for uniqueness and (visual) aesthetic sensitivity might vary as a result of these influencing individual differences.

Adding mental chronometry to the investigation may be an interesting venue for future research. Individuals scoring high in the VAST-R have been shown to exhibit relatively longer response latencies (Myszkowski, 2019). Under the assumption that longer response times reflect more elaborate mental processing, this may also apply to individuals with a higher need for uniqueness, and thus hint at a possible common third variable, partly, underlying our results. This, of course, may also apply to other general personality constructs that have not been investigated in this study.

Related to this, the *Aesthetic Quotient*, introduced by Myszkowski and Zenasni (2016), should be mentioned. Instead of just focusing on merely one aesthetic ability, the authors suggest illuminating various aesthetic abilities at once. They propose to understand aesthetic aptitude as a complex of multiple abilities, including aesthetic sensitivity (reported as aesthetic balance recognition), aesthetic exploration, art expertise, sensitivity to

complexity, and aesthetic empathy. Further studies might examine whether the present results also apply to these other aesthetic abilities.

In addition, as highlighted by Jacobsen (2006), various perspectives should be adopted when striving to obtain an impression of the entire realm of aesthetic processing. To mention just a few, it would be crucial to consider aspects of individuals' emotional states (Konecni, 1979). Our participants were recruited in the waiting rooms of citizen centers and vehicle registration authorities. Negative emotional states due to long waiting times, such as boredom or bad temper, were not controlled for and thus cannot be ruled out. Moreover, other situational aspects could have played a role. The combination of a given time and place—in the present case, the anticipation of being called in the waiting hall—can affect how objects are processed aesthetically (e.g., Jacobsen, 2006). Mentally stored scripts or schemata are activated as a function of situational variables. Whether people are as sensitive to aesthetic objects in waiting halls as, for example, in museums remains an open question. Furthermore, because individuals were instructed to identify harmony and balance and to bear in mind the eternal nature-nurture question, it seems reasonable to question whether the participants' own experiences and expertise with respect to (visual) art can be disregarded.

Myszkowski and Storme (2017) proposed an alternative scoring strategy for the VAST(-R). In contrast to the classical test theory (CTT), the authors suggest using Item-Response Theory (IRT), as a potential enhancement for interpreting the results. Using the IRT, it might be possible to gain a deeper, more detailed understanding of one's aesthetic sensitivity and draw greater interindividual differences. The question remaining using CTT is: What exactly do we measure with our items? In the CTT, items are simply summed up without demonstrating if there is a latent dimension underlying.

Through random selection and nonsystematic willingness of participants to participate in the study, selection and interview bias might also be present. In addition, the questions

may have been filled in with a propensity for social desirability because participants were given little privacy (Stocké, 2004). Due to possible time pressure (a participant might have thought it should be his or her turn in the line), acquiescence—for example, the pursuit of a certain response tendency—may have been present, and thus a possible response bias cannot be ignored. Note, however, that this study found a substantial correlation between the need for uniqueness and visual aesthetic sensitivity, despite all of these potentially confounding variables.

The sample size of this study was limited. Effect sizes were, however, sufficient. Also, we believe that our recruitment method added to better generalizability of the present results. Nonetheless, a replication of this study with a larger sample would be desirable.

A future conception of (visual) aesthetic sensitivity would benefit from being broader in scope than the VAST or the VAST-R. Ideally, it would cover all relevant facettes of the domain it is intended to measure. Also, it would precisely target its level of analysis, that is, mere perceptual sensitivity would have to be excluded. If (visual) aesthetic sensitivity is intended to be an ability construct, it needs to be normative, in our view, external criteria would be required for it. Such a conception may be distinguished from approaches acknowledging the subjective, self-referential nature of aesthetic processing that is often employed, for example, in applications of judgment analysis for judgment policy capturing (e.g., Jacobsen & Höfel, 2002).

This study is a first step into considerable research that must be conducted regarding the relation between the two constructs, *need for uniqueness* and *visual aesthetic sensitivity*. Despite its apparent limitations, this study did find a substantial correlation between the constructs. As discussed earlier, one might speculate that an even higher correlation could be obtained under better measurement conditions. Nevertheless, this study opens possibilities for further research desiderata.

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Figure 1. Easy (No. 27, top), difficult (No. 3, middle), and medium difficult (No. 9, bottom) items from the Aesthetic Sensitivity Test. Adapted from "A new visual aesthetic sensitivity test: I. Construction and psychometric properties" by K. O. Götz, A. R. Borisy, R. Lynn, & H. J. Eysenck, 1979, *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, *49*, p. 797. Copyright 1979 by Sage Publications.

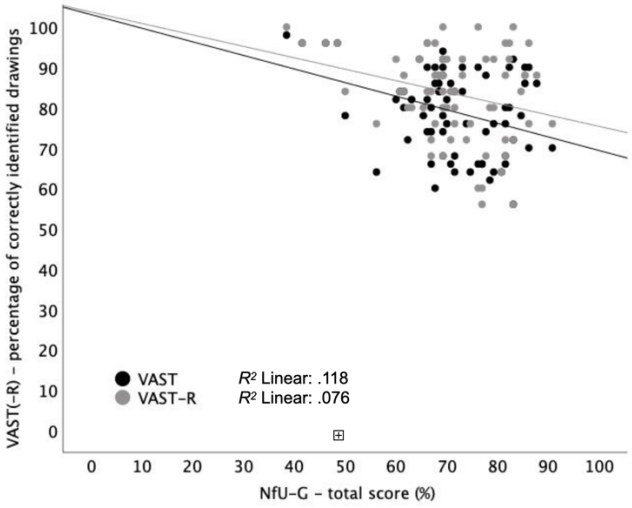

Figure 2. Scatterplot (bivariate) of the correlation between the total scores on the NfU-G scale and the percentage of correctly identified drawings of the VAST and VAST-R. Predictor: NfU-G total score displayed in percentages; criterion: percentage of correctly identified VAST(-R) drawings; $N = 71$.

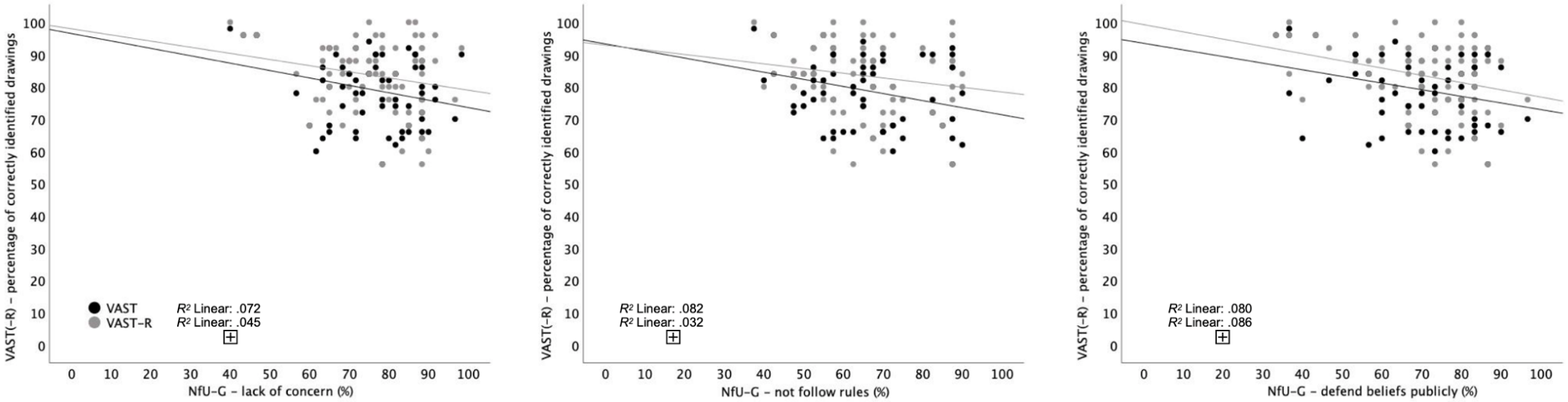

Figure 3. Scatterplot (bivariate) of the correlation between the scores for the NfU-G Factors 1, 2, & 3 (from left to right) and the percentage of correctly identified drawings of the VAST and the VAST-R. Predictor: NfU-G Factors 1, 2, & 3; criterion displayed in percentages: percentage of correctly identified VAST(-R) drawings; $N = 71$.