

Implicit Motives, Explicit Motives, and Emotional Well-Being¹

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Based on the distinction between implicit and explicit motives as proposed by McClelland and co-workers, we derive the hypothesis that an incongruency between implicit and explicit motives should be associated with impaired emotional well-being, whereas a congruency between the two types of motives should be linked with elevated mood and well-being. Testing this assumption in an empirical study, we found evidence for congruency-effects for male participants. For female participants, having implicit motives in accord with traditional sex-roles and explicit motives with academic demands seemed to mediate emotional well-being. The results are interpreted in terms of the differential effects traditional gender-roles and social expectations have on male and female participants.

Implicit and explicit motives are conceived of as two different kinds of motivational constructs having specific functions and behavioral effects (McClelland, 1985; McClelland, Koestner & Weinberger, 1989). *Implicit motives* are largely non-conscious and mediate *positive affective experiences associated with activities*. Having no conscious representation, they have to be measured indirectly through the thematic content of stories written to pictures. *Explicit motives* serve the function of *representing conscious goals and duties*. They are intimately tied to the self-concept and serve the preservation of self-esteem. In contrast to implicit motives, they can be assessed by questionnaires exploring peoples conscious goals, strivings and needs (Weinberger & McClelland, 1989).

This study tested the assumption that congruencies between implicit and explicit motives can account for individual differences in emotional well-being and morale. The main hypothesis states that a cleavage between the two types of motives is associated with impaired emotional well-being, whereas correspondence should lead to elevated emotional well-being (see Table 1 for an elaboration of this hypothesis).

Method

Participants. 72 students (43 females, 29 males) of Boston University took part in this study and received \$20 for participation. Their mean age was 21.5 years. They were tested in groups ranging from 4 to 12 participants.

Implicit motives were assessed by administering a picture-story exercise similar to the TAT in the standard group format (see Smith, 1992). Protocols were scored by an expert scorer for achievement, power, and affiliation.

Explicit motives were measured by assessing participants personal strivings and self-attributed needs. Participants generated 15 of their personal strivings according to the standard procedure described in Emmons (1986). Strivings were later categorized by two trained coders into the categories of achievement, power, and affiliation. McClelland's Personal Values Questionnaire (McClelland, 1991) was administered to assess participants values (or self-attributed needs) for achievement, power, and affiliation. Participants were asked to rate the importance of various goals and activities on five-point scales.

Table 1
Elaboration of the Congruency-Hypothesis

Explicit Need or Goal	Implicit Motive		
	<i>Weak</i>	<i>Strong</i>	
<i>Strong</i>	Characterisation:	<i>Incongruency:</i> Striving for goals without gaining pleasure from doing so	<i>Congruency:</i> Striving for goals which are associated with positive affect
	Emotional Well-Being:	Impaired	Elevated
<i>Weak</i>	Characterisation:	No goal striving	<i>Incongruency:</i> Lack of striving for goals which would give rise to positive affect
	Emotional Well-Being:	Neither impaired nor elevated	Impaired

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Emotional well-being was assessed using a variety of scales, including the Profile of Mood States (Shacham, 1983), life-orientation and life-satisfaction questionnaires (Carver & Scheier, 1983; Neugarten, 1963), and a checklist for depressive and hostile symptoms (Derogatis, 1979). Factor analysis of these measures yielded two factors, which could easily be interpreted as representing positive and negative affect. A resultant measure of emotional well-being was obtained by computing the difference between positive and negative affect.

Separate 2 x 2 analyses of variance were performed on measures of emotional well-being, with Implicit Motive (high vs. low) and Explicit Motive (high vs. low) as between-subject factors for achievement, power, and affiliation. In one set of analyses, implicit motives were combined with personal strivings, in another set, implicit motives were contrasted with self-attributed needs. In each analysis, an implicit motive (e.g. *need Achievement*) was contrasted with a corresponding explicit motive, either the personal strivings measure (e.g. *striving for Achievement*) or the value measure (e.g. *value Achievement*).

Results

The first result was that congruency effects (interactions between an implicit and an explicit motive) were gender-specific. They occurred either only for females or only for males. Therefore, results will be presented separately for male and female participants.

Two congruency effects in the domains of achievement and power were found for male participants. As can be seen in Figure 1, males having both a strong implicit need for achievement and a strong self-attributed need to achieve report higher levels of emotional well-being than males showing an incongruency between implicit and self-attributed needs to achieve. The effect for the power motive is quite similar (see Figure 2). Males having both a strong implicit need for power and putting a strong emphasis on power concerns in their personal strivings report a more positive resultant emotional well-being than males characterized by incongruencies in this domain.

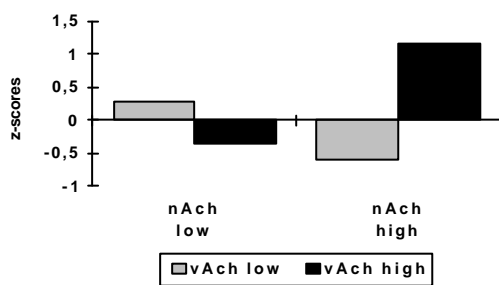


Figure 1. Achievement motivation and resultant emotional well-being in male participants.

(nAch: *need Achievement*, vAch: *value Achievement*)

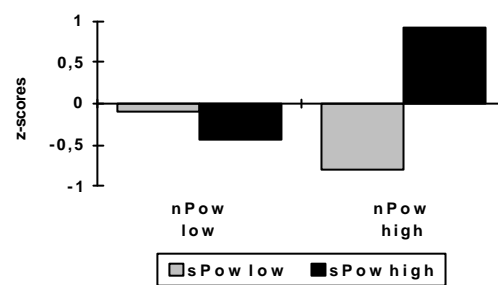


Figure 2. Power motivation and resultant emotional well-being in male participants

(nPower: *need Power*, sPow: *striving for Power*)

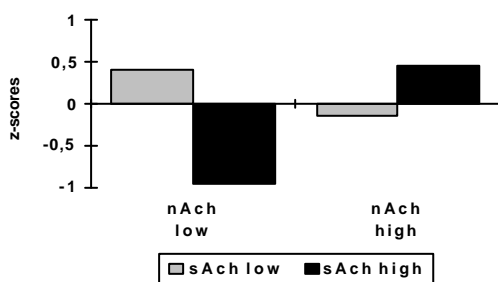


Figure 3. Achievement motivation and Resultant emotional well-being in female participants

(nAch: *need Achievement*, sAch: *striving for Achievement*)

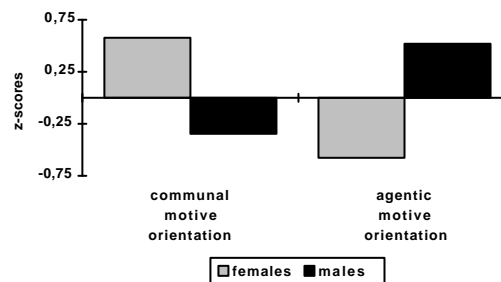


Figure 4. Motive orientation and Resultant emotional well-being in female and male participants

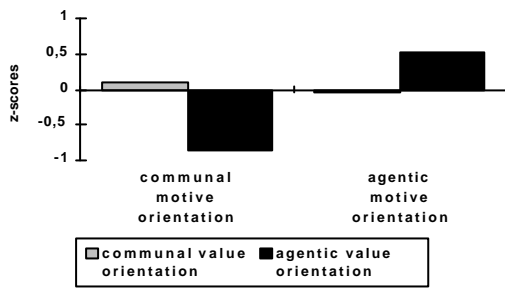


Figure 5. Motive orientation, value orientation and emotional impairments in female participants

For female participants a single interaction was observed in the achievement domain. As Figure 3 shows, this effect was not due to elevated levels of emotional well-being for females having both a high implicit need for achievement and a strong emphasis on achievement in their personal strivings. In fact, females being low in both implicit and explicit achievement motivation report the same level of emotional well-being. However, this analysis points to an impairment of emotional well-being for females having the conscious goal of doing better without being implicitly motivated to do so.

Further analysis demonstrated that implicit motive scores alone were related to emotional well-being. Again, this effect was gender-specific. Participants were first classified as having either an agentic or communal motive orientation. An agentic motive orientation was defined as a dominance of achievement and power compared to affiliation. Conversely, a communal motive orientation was defined as affiliation being stronger than achievement and power. In males, having an agentic motive orientation was associated with elevated levels of emotional well-being, whereas a communal motive orientation was related to impaired morale. In females, this effect was reversed. They reported higher emotional well-being when having a communal rather than an agentic motive orientation (see Figure 4). This effect could only be observed using implicit motive scores. It was virtually nonexistent for the two explicit measures of motivation.

Conclusions

In this study, the congruency-hypothesis stating that a congruency between implicit and explicit motives is associated with elevated emotional well-being could only be confirmed for males for the achievement and the power motive. For females, no such congruency effect could be demonstrated. Unexpectedly, emotional well-being depended on participants implicit motive orientation, in that a dominant agentic orientation led to enhanced emotional well-being in males, whereas for females having a communal motive orientation was related to higher reports of well-being.

We assume that gender-roles may account for some of these unanticipated findings. Generally speaking, research has shown that males are confronted with agentic demands

centering around achievement and power, whereas the female gender-role highlights themes of affiliation and communion.

Given this assumption, one could argue that for males, congruencies between implicit and explicit motives foster emotional well-being, if they are also in accord with traditional gender-roles. For congruency effects could only be demonstrated in domains traditionally linked to the male gender-role.

For females, however, this interpretation does not hold, since a congruency between the implicit and explicit affiliation motive is not linked to emotional well-being, even though it is part of the female gender-role.

A tentative explanation for the lack of congruency effects for females could take into account that students are confronted predominantly with achievement demands stemming from their academic environment. For males, these demands are in accord with their gender-role. For females, however, academic demands and gender-roles are in conflict, which may have inhibited congruency effects in all motivational domains to occur. For females, explicit goals are either in conflict with traditional gender-roles, or with the demands stemming from the academic setting. This explanation is partly supported by further analyses showing that females suffer the least emotional impairment when having communal implicit needs (which are in accord with the female gender-role) and agentic explicit needs (which are in accord with academic demands) (see Figure 5).

Both sexes benefit from having their implicit motive orientation in accord with traditional gender-roles, pointing to the overall influence gender roles may have in mediating motivational effects on emotional well-being.

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