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Implicit Motives Across Cultures

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Abstract

In recent years, methodological and substantial progress has been made in the field of cross-cultural studies on implicit motives. By reporting results of recent empirical studies we propose that cross-cultural studies on implicit motives are indispensable to understand universal and culture-specific variations in individuals' mental processes and behavior. It is assumed that implicit motives represent the first motivational system to be shaped in a human being's ontogeny and that they have far reaching consequences for individuals' development, their feelings and actions in everyday life across different cultural groups. Applying psychometrically sound measurements cross-culturally, researchers have revealed a number of universal relationships between implicit motives and psychological and behavioral correlates. Despite these promising advancements, fundamental work still needs to be done with respect to the developmental antecedents of motives and behavioral correlates, particularly focussing on affiliation and power, which have received much less scientific attention compared to the achievement motive. We conclude that if we are to do a better job at predicting behavior both within and across cultural groups, we need to supplement our typical reliance on explicit measures with implicit measures of motivation, beliefs, and values.

Introduction

The study of human motivation, i.e., what it is that moves people to act under certain situational conditions and why they pursue their activities with a certain intensity for a certain period of time (Atkinson, 1958), is a key issue in psychology that has attracted the interest of scholars for more than a century. The suggestion that there are conscious and unconscious psychological forces that cause goal-directed behavior is reflected in many prominent psychological theories (e.g., Erikson, 1950; Maslow, 1954; McClelland, 1987). As such, motives are considered to constitute a special and significant element of personality. Yet, in the course of the so-called cognitive revolution (e.g., Neisser, 1967), cognitive models of motivation became very popular to explain individuals' behavioral acts. At the same time, research interest on motivational processes that are difficult to access by introspection has clearly abated for decades. Fortunately, recent years have witnessed a renewed interest in non-conscious aspects of cognition, emotion, and behavior as it has become increasingly evident that experiences, thoughts, and actions can be influenced by mental contents or some event in the current stimulus environment of which we are unaware (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Kihlstrom, 2002). Consequently, empirical research also is rediscovering the fact that unconscious psychological forces, i.e., implicit motives, can have profound effects on human behavior.

In the following, we illustrate methodological and substantial progress that has been made in the field of cross-cultural studies on implicit motives in recent years (for a more detailed overview see Hofer, 2010; Hofer & Bond, 2008; van de Vijver, Hofer & Chasiotis, 2010). We conclude that implicit motives are a decisive part of the model for research on personality and behavior across cultural groups, as they universally have far reaching consequences for individuals' development, their feelings and actions in everyday life.

Two Motivational Systems

Implicit motives are defined as the unconsciously represented propensity to engage in situations which afford certain incentives, and thus are experienced as associated with positive affect (Schultheiss, 2008). Implicit motives are general dispositions to act in specific ways and determine spontaneous choice of behavior. In their seminal theoretical approach McClelland, Koestner, and Weinberger (1989) contrast implicit motives with explicit motives. McClelland and colleagues argue that goal-directed behavior is caused by two types of qualitatively different motives, namely implicit motives (e.g., need for affiliation-intimacy) and explicit (self-attributed) motives (e.g., motivational orientation towards interpersonal relatedness) that direct and energize human goal-directed striving.

According to McClelland and colleagues (1989), both types of motives are acquired and shaped at different times during ontogeny and are associated with different classes of behaviors. It is assumed that implicit motives are built on early prelinguistic affective experiences and remain affectively aroused by them rather than by salient social experiences. This seems to be the reason for their substantial predictive validity concerning long-term behavior compared to self-reported explicit goals and values.

Particularly interesting in this respect are studies with evidence that implicit motives are also strongly related to endocrinological processes (e.g., Mazur & Booth, 1998; Schultheiss, Dargel, & Rohde, 2003) while explicit self-reports are not.

Due to being shaped primarily in the pre-linguistic period, implicit motives lack symbolic representation and, thus, operate outside of conscious awareness and control, and are difficult to verbalize. However, implicit motives express themselves in individuals' fantasies and are therefore measured by fantasy-based methods. Picture-story exercises (PSE), based on the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT; Murray, 1943), have been routinely used to assess implicit motives (for a recent overview see Schultheiss & Brunstein, 2010).

Research focuses, above all, on the so-called "Big Three" of implicit motivation, i.e., the needs for affiliation-intimacy, achievement, and power. The affiliation-intimacy motive represents a concern for warm, close relationships and for establishing, maintaining, or restoring a positive affective relationship with a person or group. The achievement motive is defined as a need to enhance one's performance or to surpass certain standards of excellence. Finally, the power motive is defined as one's desire to influence the behavior or emotions of other people (for details see Smith, 1992).

The second motivational system involving individuals' values, goals, beliefs, and attitudes evolves later in ontogeny when cognitive structures have developed further. More complex, self-regulatory mechanisms allow children to consider immediate environmental pressures and incentives or social expectations and demands of others (Chasiotis, Kiessling, Hofer, & Campos, 2006; Chasiotis, Kiessling, Winter & Hofer, 2006). Particularly, the mastery of language is supposed to be crucial for children to acquire advanced access to and control over their mental processes. There is evidence that explicit teaching by parents and others with respect to what is important for the child (e.g., to follow certain rules) shapes components of the explicit motivational system. Obviously, learning by instructions can take place only after children have acquired an advanced mastery of language, which enables them to grasp the significance of the linguistic information, and to organize its meaning into such constructs as self, others, and socio-cultural norms (McClelland et al., 1989).

People can report on their explicit motives in interviews or personality questionnaires as they can volitionally and consciously reflect on their intentions, projects, and choices, and are able to manipulate goal states. Available evidence suggests that explicit motives, which are more apt to be stimulated by extrinsic social demands and expectations (Weinberger & McClelland, 1990), influence actions and choice behavior in constrained situations in which individuals cognitively decide on a course of action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1970).

Cross-Cultural Research on Implicit Motives

Even if advocates of thematic apperception methods have successfully refuted a number of objections raised by critics (Winter, 1998) and our understanding on the role of implicit motives for human functioning has been greatly enhanced in recent years, most contemporary research

efforts are still limited to Euro-American cultural contexts. In contrast, culture was a significant concept in early studies on implicit motives that were probably set off by the pioneering work of McClelland and colleagues on the need for achievement (McClelland, 1961; McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953).

In early work focusing on motive scores at the collective (national) level, McClelland's and others' work indicates that dominant motives or motive patterns within a cultural group are meaningfully related to societal outcomes (e.g., economic growth), including modal behaviors of its members (e.g., drinking behavior) (see McClelland, 1987). It might be that particular child-rearing practices result in the development of (culture-adequate) motive patterns which in turn represent a source for divergent developmental pathways across cultures (Keller, 2007). However, respective findings also show that implicit motives are far from representing a stable or uniform national character, but are open to changing patterns of socialization within a given society.

Early research on implicit motives across cultures at the individual level is difficult to evaluate. While, for example, studies on developmental antecedents of the implicit achievement motive across cultural and ethnic groups generally confirm the significance of emphasis on mastery and autonomy in childhood (e.g., Rosen, 1962), several studies have shown statistically significant differences in motive strength between groups of individuals drawn from culturally divergent groups and societies. Particular, the latter research efforts seem to be problematic as methodological flaws cannot be ruled out (e.g., non-equivalence of stimulus materials; language differences, etc.), above all, if findings on motive strength were not meaningfully linked to, for example, antecedents of motive formation.

Methodological considerations: Measuring implicit motives across cultures

The crucial concept in evaluating the adequacy of cross-cultural assessment procedures and test scores is bias which generally refers to the occurrence of systematic error in a measure. Only if test scores are unbiased, they are equivalent and can meaningfully be compared across cultural groups (for an overview of methodological issues in cross-cultural research see van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). The problem of bias is often studied for objective instruments but has been widely neglected for thematic apperception measurements (van de Vijver, 2000). However, like any other test instruments picture-story exercises have to be scrutinized for validity-threatening factors.

In principle, three types of bias are distinguished that affect equivalence of measurements at different levels. Construct bias is present when the definition of a construct only partially overlaps across cultures. Depending on its main source, three types of method bias are differentiated: administration bias (e.g., communication problems between test administrator and participants), instrument bias (e.g., differential familiarity with test settings and methods of assessment), and sample bias (e.g., sampling differences in participants' test-relevant background characteristics). Finally, item bias is based on characteristics of single items (e.g., items' content or wording is not equivalent). An item shows bias when participants with the same underlying psychological construct

(e.g., need for achievement) from different cultural samples react diversely to a given item (e.g., PSE stimulus card).

In a study conducted by Hofer, Chasiotis, Friedlmeier, Busch, and Campos (2005) an integrated examination of construct, method, and item bias in their cross-cultural research on implicit needs for power and affiliation-intimacy was implemented. In the study construct equivalence of needs for power and affiliation-intimacy was established by inspecting meaningfulness of established motive indicators in samples from Cameroon, Costa Rica, and Germany. These cultures were chosen due to well-known differences in self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and prototypical family interaction models (Kagitcibasi, 2005): People in Cameroon are typically described as holding an interdependent self construal – defined as comprising heteronomy and relatedness – which is adaptive in mostly rural populations with lower socioeconomic and educational status; people in Germany are best characterized as holding an independent self – defined as comprising autonomy and separateness – which is adaptive in a culture characterized by great wealth, mass and elite education as well as a long democratic tradition. Finally, samples from Costa Rica were selected because an autonomous-related self is adaptive for individuals who live in a traditionally interdependent society characterized by increasing urbanization, education, and affluence.

A number of precautions were already set in the design of the study to circumvent the occurrence of method bias when collection the data. For example, cultural samples were balanced with respect to relevant background characteristics (e.g., level of education), local test administrators were extensively trained, fixed rules were applied in data scoring, interrater agreements were examined. Referring to instrument bias the most significant problems that thwart equivalence of test scores are group differences in familiarity with test material (e.g., items and response procedures) and response styles (e.g., extremity ratings, and social desirability). To reduce differences in familiarity with stimulus material and testing between cultural groups, Hofer and colleagues (Hofer et al., 2005; see also Hofer & Chasiotis, 2004) adapted PSE test instructions as participants from non-Western cultures were more likely to produce mere descriptions of picture cards rather than to create fantasy stories. Thus, group differences were minimized by giving participants from all cultural groups a detailed and vivid introduction to the PSE.

Finally, item bias (differential item functioning) was statistically examined in the study. Due to theoretical considerations on culture-bound situational incentives for motive pull, namely item/picture bias, Hofer et al. (2005) aimed to identify contexts (picture cards depicting various scenes) which elicit motive imagery to an equal extent among participants, regardless of their culture of origin. In an earlier study, Hofer and Chasiotis (2004) could demonstrate noticeable cross-cultural differences in cue strength of picture cards between samples from Germany and Zambia. Also in the study conducted 2005, half of the picture cards had to be removed in pretests because they aroused motives differently across cultures. Thus, even if individuals have universally a desire for affiliation and power, contexts for motive realization, as depicted in the picture cards, differ to some extent across cultures.

Recent insights and developments in cross-cultural research on implicit motives

In the following, we will give two examples for recent research on implicit motives across a wide range of cultural groups. Although there is a clear trend towards detection of differences across cultures (Brouwers, van Hemert, Breugelmans, & van de Vijver, 2004), it is equally important to reveal similarities and to discover whether, despite cultural variations, hypothesized relationships between psychological constructs can be identified in humans universally (for an overview, see Chasiotis, 2011). In research on implicit motives, both lines of research have proved to be fruitful for our understanding of human motivation.

Congruence between implicit and explicit motives

Available evidence suggests that many people developed consciously represented motivational orientations that are unrelated to or even at odds with their implicit motives. Thus, it is not necessarily the case that the two motivational systems match well in their content (e.g., Spangler, 1992) suggesting that, under normal circumstances of motive acquisition, cognitive mechanisms enabling the transfer across the two motive systems do not exist. However, available evidence also indicates that individuals greatly differ from each other in their alignment of implicit and explicit motives. It seems that particular personality dispositions that are associated with moderate congruence of motivational systems (see Thrash, Cassidy, Maruskin, & Elliot, 2010). Taken together, these studies suggest that individuals vary in their capacity to access pre-consciously represented motives. Consequently, people who are not able to gain access to their inner needs cannot test how congruent any given goal really is with their implicit motives, sometimes even confusing goals that were imposed upon them with those they chose themselves (Kuhl & Kazén, 1994).

As research on determinants of motive congruence was limited to Euro-American cultures in which individual needs are less strictly constrained by the social environment than in other cultural contexts, Hofer et al. (2010a) cross-culturally examined whether personality dispositions affect congruence of motive systems. Recruiting samples from Germany, Cameroon, and Hong Kong, the authors tested whether individuals' sense of self-determination, i.e., defined as a trait-like, enduring aspect of personality that reflects being aware of the self's needs and grounding decisions of whether (not) to give way to behavioral impulses relating to this awareness, moderated motive alignment. Results showed that individuals able to test a conscious goal for its fit with their implicit motivation commit themselves more fully to self-congruent goals. The associations described above were valid in all three cultural groups.

A related line of research studies consequences of motive congruence. It has been found that congruence between unconscious and conscious aspects of motivation fosters well-being (see Brunstein, 2010). Such findings on positive consequences of motive alignment for individuals' well-being have been repeatedly affirmed across groups of participants from sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Cameroon, Zambia) and Latin America (Costa Rica) for motivational domains of affiliation and achievement (Hofer & Chasiotis, 2003; Hofer, Chasiotis, & Campos, 2006). Interestingly, the effect of motive congruence for well-being could also be verified in a recent cross-cultural study by Hofer, Busch, Bond, Li, and

Law (2010). The authors examined the relationship between power-related values and goals, the need for power, and reported well-being. While it is often emphasized that power-related strivings have detrimental effects for personal well-being (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000), Hofer and colleagues found a beneficial effect of congruence in the power domain for well-being of German, Hong Kong Chinese, and mainland Chinese participants.

A final study with samples from Cameroon and Germany is a fine example for negative consequences of motive frustration (Hofer & Busch, 2011). In the study that exclusively focused on the implicit need for affiliation-intimacy was assumed that a lack of experiences of relatedness is linked to negative outcomes such as envy and indirect aggression in particular if individuals are characterized by a high implicit affiliation-intimacy motive. Regardless of cultural background, it was found that low experiences of relatedness were associated with enhanced levels of envy and indirect aggression among individuals with a pronounced implicit affiliation-intimacy motive. Thus, findings point to the prominent role of the implicit affiliation-intimacy motive for interpersonal emotions and behavior.

Implicit motives, behavior, and development

The aforementioned studies clearly confirm that it is indispensable to consider both types of motivational sources to understand the nature of humans' psychological processes and goal-oriented behavior within as well as across cultural contexts. Not only do conscious and non-conscious forms of motivation operate independently and add to the prediction of subjective well-being, but they can interact to conjointly shape individuals' phenomenal experience related to well-being and their behavioral acts and strategies. Above all, implicit motives have been considered a major energizing and directing source of individuals' behavior and, in the long run, of their developmental course.

Inspired by research on the two faces of power (McClelland, 1970), i.e., that the implicit power motive can be associated either with prosocial, socially appropriate behaviors or profligate, impulsive behaviors, Hofer et al. (2010b) conducted a cross-cultural study on individuals' implicit power motives and their tendency to engage in sexual activities without strong emotional ties, i.e., sociosexuality. Assessing data from participants in Cameroon, China, Costa Rica, and Germany, it was found that higher levels of implicit power motivation universally predicted higher level of unrestricted sexuality among men but not among women, even if personality traits were controlled for. Furthermore, the realization of the power motive was tamed by participants' disposition for responsibility (see Winter & Barenbaum, 1985) and moderated the relationship between power motivation and sociosexuality: higher levels of an unrestricted sociosexual orientation were associated with a more pronounced need for power only among men who were not characterized by a strong disposition for responsibility. Thus, power seems to be tamed in those men with a strong tendency to act in a responsible way. For women, only a main effect of responsibility on sociosexuality was found across cultural groups. These findings clearly corroborate the link between high scores in implicit power and various sex-related behavioral tendencies among men (e.g., Winter, 1973) that may also be

considered when reasoning why a high level of implicit power motivation in men seems often to be detrimental to intimate, romantic relationships (Mason & Blankenship, 1987).

In another cross-cultural study (Hofer, Busch, Chasiotis, Kärtner, & Campos, 2008), a linkage between implicit power motivation and generativity, i.e., the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation (Erikson, 1950), could be identified. It could be verified that a pronounced pro-social realization of the power motive is turned into a generative disposition which itself has important consequences: It determines to what extent the individual develops generative goals, and this generative disposition has a direct link to global life satisfaction. Again, this is a demonstration of a possibly pan-cultural universal related to Erikson's (1950) earlier speculations about a key developmental concern, viz., whether the final stages of one's life are characterized by generativity or stagnation and despair.

As a final example, studies have fostered the notion that implicit motives play a significant role in generative goals in general and reproductive behavior like age at first sexual experience, sexual activity (e.g., Winter, 1973), or number of children (Peterson & Stewart, 1993) in particular. The proposed developmental link between the presence of younger siblings and a pro-social realization of the power motive (Winter & Barenbaum, 1985) has been supported by cross-cultural research and may constitute a cross-cultural universal: Chasiotis, Hofer, and Campos (2006) assessed explicit and implicit motivation for parenthood in Cameroon, Costa Rica, and Germany. They assumed that childhood context is important for the emergence of caregiving motivation and tested the model of a developmental pathway to parenthood across cultures. A developmental pathway assuming that the interactional context of having younger siblings during childhood shapes the development of an implicit pro-social motivation which in turn influences the verbalized, explicit articulation of parenting attitudes finally leading to becoming a parent was confirmed among cultural samples from Latin-America, sub-Saharan Africa, and Europe regardless of participants' gender. Therefore, it can be concluded that the psychological mechanisms of parenting behavior are the same in male and female participants and in cultures under examination. This study points to the significance of childhood context variables for development in diverse cultural contexts (for an overview, see Chasiotis, in press 2011).

Conclusions and Future Perspectives

The presented examples of recent cross-cultural studies on implicit motives demonstrate the enhancement of our knowledge on various aspects of implicit motives and their significance for cross-cultural psychology. Applying psychometrically sound measurements cross-culturally, researchers have revealed a number of universal relationships between implicit motives and psychological and behavioral correlates. Despite these promising developments, fundamental work still needs to be done with respect to the developmental antecedents of motives and behavioral correlates, particularly focussing on affiliation and power, which have received much less scientific attention compared to the achievement motive.

However, even if the achievement motive is the single most researched need, the work done by McClelland was criticized for being individualistically oriented and neglecting situational and contextual determinants of human motivation (Maehr, 1974). Typically, challenge is considered to represent a crucial incentive for achievement-motivated behavior. Yet, there is evidence suggesting that the pool of achievement-related incentives has to be extended. Findings reported by Sorrentino (1974; Sorrentino & Shepphard, 1978) for US-American samples, for example, indicate a link between relational concerns (i.e., need for affiliation), social approval, and effort in an achievement-oriented activity. In line with such arguments, a number of studies point to a qualitatively differing pattern of achievement-oriented motivation which in non-Western societies is characterized by a pronounced, socially oriented element (e.g., Doi, 1982). The concept of social-oriented achievement is based on a need for social approval (or taken differently by one's fear of social rejection) by meeting expectations of significant persons and groups, rather than on an effort to solely strive towards self-enhancement. Thus, even if a kind of mastery motive (a general desire for agency and control) is to be seen as universal, the disparity of experiences, rewards, and punishments across cultures may lead to the development of different concerns for achievement, different releasing stimuli, different domains of action, and different standards of evaluation. Studies conducted by Ng (2006) and Hofer, Busch, Bender, Li, and Hagemeyer (2010), indicate differences between cultural groups with respect to arousal of power motivation and achievement motivation, respectively. For example, Ng (2006) reported that Chinese participants were primarily motivated by the status aspect of power, while the US American students were mainly motivated by the decision-making aspect of power.

These latter findings point to a research topic that is widely neglected in current research on implicit motivation across cultural contexts: Past research with Euro-American samples indicated that historical and situational contexts (e.g., availability of motive incentives) shape the formation of motives (e.g., fear and hope components) and people's values and skills, i.e., incentive for and probability of success, further direct the realization of motives (Atkinson, 1957; McClelland, 1985). Yet, crucial studies, for example, on culture-bound motive incentives resulting from experiences with rewarding and punitive parenting techniques in response to a child's early attempts to realize a given motive are unavailable. Furthermore, knowledge on the role of prominent value orientations for the determination of behavioral strategies linked to the realization of a given motivational impulse is widely missing. For example, dominant cultural ideologies may even act as a source of motivation, potentially in conflict with evolved motive dispositions, but in conformity with externally imposed social control (MacDonald, 1991; see Sorrentino, 1974, on the role of extrinsic incentives in motive realization).

In sum, our knowledge on motive development in various cultural contexts is still very limited (e.g., McClelland & Pilon, 1983). According to McClelland (1987), implicit motives represent highly generalized preferences derived from individuals' experiences during early, preverbal childhood. Whether children implicitly associate pleasure with experiencing behavior linked to achievement, power, or affiliation shapes their future preferences. In a recent cross-cultural study in which a preschooler version of an

instrument measuring implicit motives to five-year-olds from Cameroon and Germany was applied, Chasiotis, Bender, Kiessling, and Hofer (2010) were able to demonstrate that implicit motivation in preschoolers is related to significant sociocognitive abilities like autobiographical memory and mentalistic understanding („theory of mind“) and to culture-specific self-construals.

Thus, in line with Veroff's (1983) argument that personality depends on the given cultural context, recurrent contexts in given cultures may differ in their claim for a particular realization of implicit motives and consequently lead to observed differences in behavior. As such, cultures may be conceived of psychologically as salience-inducing contexts, making certain aspects of a general phenomenon more apparent and more responsive to certain stimulus conditions. Yet, constructs salient in one culture, and forming a focus for psychological investigation in that cultural tradition, may nonetheless be useful complements to any pan-cultural theory of motivated behavior. Their discovery constitutes one of the key legitimations for cross-cultural research (Bond, 1999).

Past and current socio-cultural contexts are part of our personalities, affecting forms of expression of all the other parts (Hofer & Bond, 2008). If we are to do a better job at predicting behavior both within and across cultural groups, we need to supplement our typical reliance on explicit measures of personality with implicit measures of motivation, beliefs, and values. Despite the extra training required for their measurement, despite their complex relationship with the social situations in which these concepts become operative, despite the struggles to make these measures cross-culturally equivalent, they are significant predictive tools in cross-cultural psychology to enhance our knowledge of cultural peculiarities and universal phenomena in psychological functioning and social behavior.

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Questions

a) In how far can motive development differ across cultures?
b) What types of motivated behavior can be regarded as being universal and which types can vary between cultures?
c) How can "culture" influence or even shape motive realization?
d) Give reasons why research on the alignment of implicit and explicit motives (motive congruence) might be especially important for cross-cultural psychology

Further reading

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Useful links

Human Motivation & Affective Neuroscience Lab (Prof. Dr. Oliver Schultheiss)

http://www.psych2.phil.uni-erlangen.de/~oschult/humanlab/index.htm