



Achievement motivation in the social context: Implicit and explicit Hope of Success and Fear of Failure predict memory for and liking of successful and unsuccessful peers

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ABSTRACT

The authors examined relations between implicit and explicit Hope of Success (HS) and Fear of Failure (FF) and memory and liking for successful and unsuccessful peers. Implicit motives were expected to predict memory and explicit motives to predict liking of peers. Results from 106 American and 79 Singaporean students supported the implicit–explicit motive distinction as well as a link between HS and the successful peer and between FF and the unsuccessful peer. In both samples, explicit HS predicts liking while implicit HS predicts memory about the successful peer, and implicit FF predicts memory about the unsuccessful peer. Findings indicate achievement motives affect interest in and reaction towards peers and provide evidence for differential validity of implicit and explicit motives.

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1. Introduction

I'll be your foil, Laertes: in mine ignorance/Your skill shall, like a star I'th' darkest night/Stick fiery off indeed... (Hamlet, Act 5 Scene 2)

I stimulated [Holmes]... by a certain methodical slowness in my mentality... that... served to make his own flame-like intuitions... flash up the more vividly and swiftly (Dr. Watson, from "The Adventure of the Creeping Man", The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes).

Achievement motivation—a recurrent need to improve on one's past performances (McClelland, 1987)—is a widely studied construct that has been related to better performance in various domains. In the laboratory, it has been related to more efficient performance on reaction-time, implicit learning, verbal, and memory and attention tasks (e.g., Halisch & Heckhausen, 1989; Lowell, 1952). In the workplace, greater achievement motivation is related to economic success and managerial ability (e.g., McClelland, 1961; McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982). In the classroom, it has been related to the possession of greater intrinsic motivation and to superior academic performance (e.g., O'Conner, Atkinson, & Horner, 1966).

However, while achievement motivation has generally been related to more efficient, task-oriented performances, research has been silent as to how achievement-motivated people accomplish these superior performances in collaboration or in competition with others. Most organizational and educational settings require individuals to work with others in order to obtain these superior performances; beyond the laboratory, interpersonal interactions are unavoidable and relevant social information could become increasingly important for achievement success. However, the achievement motive has traditionally been conceptualized as an "autistic" motive—in the sense that achievement-motivated people feel most challenged by tasks in which they can have personal control over the outcome; they also show less interpersonal sensitivity while performing an achievement task (Berlew & Williams, 1964; Horowitz, 1961). Hence, little is known about how achievement-motivated individuals make use of social information in service of their achievement goals.

The classroom and the workplace are social places and it seems likely that peers would be important influences on people's achievement beliefs, goals, and behaviors. Relevant peers such as classmates and coworkers are examples of social informants who highlight standards for good work as well as provide strategies for working efficiently. In our opening quotations, Laertes and Dr. Watson are foils which highlight major facets of Shakespeare's Hamlet and Conan Doyle's Holmes, but they also serve to prompt the main characters into action by vicariously providing positive (Laertes) or negative (Watson) role models to which Hamlet and Holmes can compare their future courses of action, obtain feedback

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about their own abilities, as well as discover different strategies with which to achieve success or to avoid failure.

This process of deriving information about one's ability vis-à-vis the performance of others is also known as social comparison (c.f. Wood, 1996). Specifically, a person could either compare herself to a peer who is better-performing (a process also known as upward social comparison) or she could compare herself to a peer who is worse-performing (also known as downward social comparison). Accordingly, Laertes is an upward comparison target for Hamlet while Watson is a downward comparison target for Holmes. More generally, upward social comparison targets are positive role models who represent successful achievement strategies and outcomes whereas downward social comparison targets are negative role models who represent unsuccessful achievement strategies and outcomes.

Previous research has shown that people display consistent individual differences in their motivational and attitudinal biases to positive and negative role models. For instance, Lockwood, Jordan, and Kunda (2002) found that when people adopt a promotion-regulatory focus, that is, when they frame their goals in terms of gains rather than losses, they are more receptive and show greater motivation when exposed to positive role models, and also spontaneously generate more examples of positive role models. Conversely, people who adopt a prevention-regulatory focus, that is, when they frame their goals in terms of losses, pay more attention to and show greater motivation after being exposed to negative role models, and spontaneously generate more examples of negative role models. A plausible reason for these results is that positive role models showcase successful outcomes and goal attempts—essentially gains relative to typical performances—which are congruent with a promotion-regulatory focus, whereas negative role models showcase unsuccessful outcomes and mistakes—essentially losses relative to typical performances—which are congruent with a prevention-regulatory focus.

Following these lines of research, the present study investigates how achievement-motivated people react towards and deal with information about peer achievement. While we do not study upward and downward social comparison directly, we investigate whether individual differences in achievement motivation result in cognitive and attitudinal biases towards positive and negative role models. Specifically, one would expect achievement-motivated people to pay greater attention to peers who are successful if the achievement goal is to obtain a positive achievement standard, because these successful peers are positive role models who embody positive achievement goals. Conversely, achievement-motivated people should pay greater attention to peers who are doing badly if the achievement goal is to avoid a poor achievement outcome, since these unsuccessful peers embody achievement goals that are undesirable.

In motivation research, a related conceptual distinction has been made between achievement motivation that is oriented towards attaining positively-framed goals on one hand—otherwise referred to as Hope of Success (HS)—and achievement motivation that is oriented towards avoiding negatively-framed goals—otherwise referred to as Fear of Failure (FF)—on the other (McClelland, 1987). Whereas a person motivated by HS derives pleasure from mastering a challenging task, a person motivated by FF derives relief from overcoming a similar challenge. HS-motivated people have been found to prefer moderately challenging goals (e.g., DeCharms & Carpenter, 1968), suggesting that they should pay greater attention to peers who personify positive—and motivationally-congruent—achievement outcomes. Conversely, since FF-motivated people are oriented to avoiding negative achievement goals (Atkinson, 1958), one would expect FF-motivated people to pay greater attention to peers who personify unsuccessful—also, motivationally-congruent—achievement outcomes.

Based on the robust finding that self-report and non self-report motive measures seldom correlate strongly with each another, McClelland, Koestner, and Weinberger (1989) argued for the existence of two different systems of motivation. While explicit motives—which are assessed by self-report measures such as the Personality Research Form (Jackson, 1984) and the Achievement Motives Scale (Nygard & Gjesme, 1973)—involve self-conscious goals that individuals ascribe to themselves, implicit motives—which are assessed by indirect measures such as the Picture Story Exercise (Koestner & McClelland, 1992)—represent non-conscious yet persistent needs to obtain emotionally-rewarding experiences. While implicit achievement motive scores relate to task performance and long-term behavioral trends such as entrepreneurial success, explicit achievement motive scores predict short-term and deliberate choice behaviors such as preference for certain socially-normative achievement activities (McClelland et al., 1989; Spangler, 1992).

There is some evidence that the differential validity of implicit and explicit achievement motives also extends to the retention of information about, and emotional reactions to, peers, especially when these peers signify successful or unsuccessful achievement outcomes. For instance, DeCharms, Morrison, Reitman, and McClelland (1955) cited findings that implicit achievement motivation is associated with greater recall of material from stories regarding people in different achievement settings, while explicit achievement motives significantly predicted participants' favorable or unfavorable ratings of a person who was previously described as either "successful" or "unsuccessful" respectively. Brunstein and Hoyer (2002) found that explicit achievement motives predicted participants' decision to continue in a task after they had been given norm-referenced performance feedback (vis-à-vis the performance of others), while implicit achievement motives predicted participants' speeds in a reaction-time task after participants were given self-referenced feedback (vis-à-vis their speeds on previous trials).

Although Brunstein and Hoyer (2002) showed that receiving social-comparative information does not affect the task performance of implicitly achievement-motivated people, previous research suggests that implicit motives orient people's attention towards motivationally-congruent information in the social environment (e.g., Schultheiss & Hale, 2007; Schultheiss et al., 2008). Thus, it is possible that implicit motives direct the attention of achievement-motivated people towards peers who represent motivationally-congruent achievement outcomes, and these attentional biases would translate into selective memory gains. The capacity of directing an individual's attention towards motivationally-congruent stimuli is at the core of implicit motive functioning (c.f. Schultheiss & Brunstein, 2005). Specifically, behaviors and cues that have previously been associated with incentive attainment are more likely to capture the individual's attention, especially in similar achievement contexts. In line with this idea, we propose that achieving and non-achieving peers arouse implicit motives by tapping into vicarious achievement-related consummatory behaviors. Accordingly, selective attention and memory should exist for the peer that represents the achievement outcome that is most congruent with participants' predominant motives; participants who are motivated by HS should display selective memory for the successful peer, while those motivated by FF should display selective memory for the unsuccessful peer.

According to McClelland (1989), explicit motives guide voluntary goal expression, are influenced by, and influence one's achievement-related self-knowledge. Furthermore, explicit motives predict decisional and attitudinal outcomes such as peer ratings and task continuance (Brunstein & Hoyer, 2002; DeCharms et al., 1955) suggesting that explicit motivation should predict participants' achievement-related evaluative judgments. It is likely

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