



When the needs for affiliation and intimacy are frustrated: Envy and indirect aggression among German and Cameroonian adults

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ABSTRACT

This article tests the hypothesis 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. Assumptions were examined in a sample of 273 adults from Germany and Cameroon. Components of the affiliation–intimacy motive, i.e., needs for affiliation and intimacy, were assessed with a picture story exercise. Additionally, participants reported on experiences of relatedness, indirect aggression, and envy. Low experiences of relatedness are associated with enhanced levels of envy and indirect aggression among individuals with a pronounced implicit affiliation–intimacy motive. Those effects hold true across cultural groups. Findings point to the prominent role of the implicit affiliation–intimacy motive for interpersonal emotions and behavior.

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1. Introduction

Humans have the inborn desire to be accepted by a social group and to experience friendship and love, in short: to affiliate. The satisfaction of this desire is associated with enhanced well-being, its frustration with diminished well-being. This study conducted in Germany and Cameroon presents an experience-related and a behavior-related correlate of the frustration of the desire to affiliate: envy and indirect aggression. Moreover, it shows that the strength of these variables depends on how pronounced the desire to experience close and warm interpersonal relationships, i.e. the implicit affiliation–intimacy motive, is. Thus, it is not frustration of the implicit affiliation–intimacy motive per se which is linked to emotional and behavioral effects, but the strength of the implicit affiliation–intimacy motive is an important reference value. Imagine two freshmen being rejected by the sorority they intended to join: while the student with a low implicit affiliation–intimacy motive will take the rejection relatively lightly, the student with a high implicit affiliation–intimacy motive is more likely to envy those allowed to join and to indirectly aggress against them by gossiping and backbiting about them.

1.1. The implicit affiliation–intimacy motive (*n* Affiliation–Intimacy)

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 (McClelland, Koestner, & Weinberger, 1989; Schultheiss, 2008). Thus, implicit motives are general dispositions to act in specific ways and determine spontaneous choice of behavior.

The affiliation–intimacy motive is one of the basic implicit motives that are subject to motivational research. It allows people to establish, maintain, and restore warm interpersonal relations (Weinberger, Cotler, & Fishman, 2010). The affiliation–intimacy motive (abbreviated as *n* Affiliation–Intimacy for need for affiliation–intimacy in the following) is a composite of two emotional tendencies towards interpersonal relations. The affiliation aspect of *n* Affiliation–Intimacy reflects the tendency to seek company of others to avoid loneliness (Koestner & McClelland, 1992) while the intimacy aspect reflects the tendency to seek interaction with others to experience warm mutual exchange (McAdams, 1992).

In general, individuals with a high *n* Affiliation–Intimacy try to avoid conflict with others (e.g., Langner & Winter, 2001) and thus pay a lot of attention to facial expressions (Schultheiss & Hale, 2007). People high in *n* Affiliation try to initiate contact with well-disposed others (Lansing & Heyns, 1959), for example by establishing eye contact (Exline, 1963). Similarly, high *n* Intimacy is positively correlated with the amount of interpersonal thoughts and conversation behavior (McAdams & Constantian, 1983) as well as contact initiation by seeking physical proximity to others (McAdams & Powers, 1981). Given these associations it is not surprising that *n* Affiliation–Intimacy has repeatedly been shown to relate to well-being (McClelland, 1987). For instance, individuals high in *n* Intimacy report less severe illness (McClelland & Jemmott, 1980). They also derive more satisfaction from their romantic relationship (McAdams & Vaillant, 1982). Recent research

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has shown that the link between *n* Affiliation–Intimacy and life satisfaction is conditioned by the necessity to set affiliation-related goals and show corresponding behavior (Schüler, Job, Fröhlich, & Brandstätter, 2008).

However, *n* Affiliation–Intimacy does not necessarily associate with positive interpersonal relations. For example, individuals high in *n* Affiliation tend to reject others as potential future interaction partners when those others voice opinions deviating from their own (Byrne, 1961). Zurbriggen (2000) demonstrates that among women *n* Affiliation–Intimacy is associated with more coercive and manipulative sexuality. In line with this finding, Mason and Blankenship (1987) report a three-way interaction effect in that women under highly stressful conditions inflict more psychological and physical abuse on their partner when they are also low in activity inhibition and high in *n* Affiliation. In sum, these findings show that a pronounced desire for interpersonal relations, i.e., *n* Affiliation–Intimacy, also has a dark side (Boyatzis, 1973; Weinberger et al., 2010).

This dark side of *n* Affiliation–Intimacy might be of particular relevance when this motive is dissatisfied. Like with all basic implicit motives, the frustration of *n* Affiliation–Intimacy is associated with reduced well-being (McClelland, 1987). Illustrating this point, single women report lower gratification and more uncertainty than women living in a steady partnership (McAdams & Bryant, 1987). On an experiential level, satisfaction of *n* Affiliation–Intimacy should be felt as satisfaction with the amount and quality of one's interpersonal contacts. This experience could be called relatedness in Self-Determination Theory terminology (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Thus, we use high and low relatedness as indicator of the satisfaction and frustration, respectively, of *n* Affiliation–Intimacy.

Combining the two strands of thought that under aversive conditions *n* Affiliation–Intimacy can reveal its dark side (e.g., rejection, abuse against the partner) and that frustration of *n* Affiliation–Intimacy relates to decreased well-being, we hypothesize that individuals characterized by a high *n* Affiliation–Intimacy but low relatedness will experience the aversive emotion of envy and show indirect aggression to a greater extent than individuals characterized by low relatedness but low *n* Affiliation–Intimacy. That is, the association between dissatisfaction of *n* Affiliation–Intimacy (low relatedness) and emotional and behavioral representatives of its dark side is qualified by the strength of *n* Affiliation–Intimacy.

1.2. Why envy and indirect aggression?

The examination of envy as a correlate of the frustration of the *n* Affiliation–Intimacy is somewhat exploratory. However, Smith and Kim (2007) define envy as “an unpleasant and often painful blend of feelings characterized by inferiority, hostility, and resentment caused by a comparison with a person or group of persons who possess something we desire” (p. 49). It is an emotion that is felt in all human cultures (e.g., Russell, 1930; Smith & Kim, 2007). As can be seen from the definition, envy develops from a social comparison with an unfavorable outcome for the own person. Thus, it stands to reason that individuals with a pronounced desire for interpersonal relations, i.e., *n* Affiliation, have an inclination to experience the feeling of envy when this desire is frustrated, i.e., low relatedness. In the average living environment, there are abundant opportunities to observe others enjoying what the person with a pronounced *n* Affiliation but low relatedness so sorely misses: couples kissing and holding hands, friends laughing together, acquaintances having a friendly chat and so forth.

Individual aggression comprises acts that covertly and circuitously are undertaken to intentionally harm others (such as spreading rumors and backbiting) (Archer & Coyne, 2005). Such acts aim at diminishing a victim's social acceptance through lowering his or her social status or social relationships. They have an advantage for the

aggressor: given their covert nature, the aggressor cannot easily be traced back by the victim. Thus, indirect aggression is associated with relatively low costs (especially in comparison to overt aggression) (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Björkqvist, 1994). In sum, indirect aggression shares its manipulative character and its focus on psychological harm found to be associated with high *n* Affiliation–Intimacy under aversive circumstances (Mason & Blankenship, 1987; Zurbriggen, 2000). So individuals whose high *n* Affiliation–Intimacy is frustrated might show a propensity to use indirect aggressive behavior against their fellowmen more frequently.

1.3. The present research

The aims of the presents study are threefold. First, the dark side of *n* Affiliation–Intimacy is further explored by linking its frustration with both, envy as an aversive emotional and indirect aggression as behavioral correlate. Thus, the first hypothesis reads: Envy and indirect aggression are negatively correlated with relatedness. Second, we test whether these associations are moderated by the strength of *n* Affiliation–Intimacy. Thus, the second hypothesis reads: Envy and indirect aggression are high among those individuals whose *n* Affiliation–Intimacy is high but who experience low relatedness but not among those individuals whose *n* Affiliation–Intimacy is low and who experience low relatedness. This hypothesis will be tested separately for *n* Affiliation and *n* Intimacy for theoretical reasons: As *n* Affiliation and *n* Intimacy are assumed to serve different functions (avoidance of loneliness vs. desire for closeness), their frustration might have different emotional and behavioral consequences. Third, as implicit motives are postulated to be universal (Weinberger & McClelland, 1990) but cross-cultural research on *n* Affiliation–Intimacy is scarce (see Hofer, Chasiotis, Friedlmeier, Busch, & Campos, 2005) we test whether the associations between strength of *n* Affiliation–Intimacy, relatedness, and envy and indirect aggression are found in two different cultural contexts. Thus, the third hypothesis reads: The association between *n* Affiliation–Intimacy, relatedness, envy, and indirect aggression suggested in the second hypothesis hold true for individuals from a cultural background in which an interdependent self-construal prevails, too. The cross-cultural design also allows for an exploratory test of mean differences for the variables at hand.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

2.1.1. Selection of cultural groups

Based on our hypothesis that individuals' cultural background does not affect the relationship between measured constructs, we collected data from two cultural samples that have shown to widely differ in their ecological contexts and associated socio-cultural orientations: Germany and Cameroon. Such a design allows a strong claim for universality, if similar relationships among constructs are obtained (Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). Recent research has provided conclusive evidence that samples recruited in Germany and Cameroon differ from each other in socialization strategies, cultural norms, beliefs, and values (see Hofer et al., 2010; Keller, 2007). Although research has consistently shown that Cameroonian and German samples differ in their value orientation, these differences will be tested in the present samples. This additional test is run to ensure that the two cultural samples indeed represent diverse socio-cultural orientations. Thus, we hypothesize that previous findings (e.g., Hofer et al., 2005) can be replicated which show that German participants commit more to values that reflect autonomy (i.e., Openness to Change) than do Cameroonians who in turn commit more to values that reflect social stability (Conservation).

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