



# Incongruence between implicit and self-attributed achievement motives and psychological well-being: The moderating role of self-directedness, self-disclosure and locus of control

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## ABSTRACT

The current research tested whether negative effects of achievement motive incongruence were moderated by self-directedness, self-disclosure and external locus of control (LOC). It was predicted that the negative effects (i.e. low life satisfaction and/or high depression) of motive incongruence would be reduced at: (a) higher levels of self-directedness and self-disclosure; and (b) lower levels of external LOC. A secondary data analysis was conducted on the Eugene Springfield Community Sample longitudinal dataset ( $N = 533$ ) to test these hypotheses. The predicted pattern of results found that, relative to individuals who were congruent in their implicit and self-attributed achievement motives, the negative effects of motive incongruence were reduced at: (a) higher levels of self-directedness and self-disclosure; and (b) lower levels of external LOC. The current findings have implications for advancing our understanding of how psychological well-being can be promoted, particularly for those individuals undergoing clinical counseling.

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## 1. Introduction

Recent research has shown that congruence of implicit and self-attributed motive systems may lead to a number of positive health outcomes, such as emotional well-being, life satisfaction, and personal growth (Brunstein, Schultheiss, & Grassmann, 1998; Hofer & Chasiotis, 2003; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995). Furthermore, motive incongruence leads to negative outcomes (e.g. Baumann, Kaschel, & Kuhl, 2005; Brunstein et al., 1998). Langens (2007) found that a moderating variable, activity inhibition (AI), neutralized the positive effects of motive congruence. However, research has just begun to examine whether moderating variables may counteract the negative effects of motive incongruence (e.g. Langan-Fox, Canty, & Sankey, 2008).

The current paper aims to address this issue by: (a) examining self-directedness, self-disclosure and external locus of control (LOC) as potential moderators of relationships between motive incongruence and psychological well-being (i.e. life satisfaction and depression); (b) advancing the literature on dual motive systems, particularly with respect to the effects of motive incongruence relating to two dependant variables; and (c) increasing our understanding of how psychological well-being can be promoted.

Implicit and self-attributed motives represent discrete motivational systems (McClelland, Koestner, & Weinberger, 1989). *Implicit motives* – conceptualized as unconscious thoughts and behavioral tendencies which energize, select, and direct behavior towards motive congruent goal states (McClelland, 1985) – predict long-term behavioral trends over time (e.g. McClelland & Franz, 1992). Operating outside conscious awareness, implicit motives are assessed by operant, fantasy-based methods such as the thematic apperception test (TAT; Murray, 1943). *Self-attributed motives* are consciously accessible thoughts that an individual has about their behavior, cognitions (McClelland, 1985), and goals (Brunstein et al., 1998; Langan-Fox, 1991a, 1991b) and may be assessed directly via self-report questionnaires. The positive effects of motive congruence may be due to a reduction in anxiety caused by motive incongruence (Brunstein et al., 1998). However, motive congruence is not necessarily a sufficient condition for positive well-being.

Langens (2007) reported that AI neutralized the beneficial effects of motive congruence due to the restraint of motivational impulses and emotional responses. Langan-Fox et al. (2008) found that, relative to congruent individuals, motive incongruent individuals were less likely to report feeling depressed as they increased in levels of self-directedness. Self-directedness refers to the ability of an individual to adapt, regulate and control behavior to fit situations according to their chosen goals and values (Smith, Duffy,

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Stewart, Muir, & Blackwood, 2005), and can therefore act as a buffer from the negative effects of motive incongruence.

Self-disclosure and external LOC may also negate the detrimental effects of motive incongruence by reducing anxiety. Self-disclosure refers to “individuals’ verbal communication of personally relevant information, thoughts, and feelings in order to let themselves be known to others” (Wei, Russell, & Zakalik, 2005, p. 602). Self-disclosure is influential in promoting life satisfaction (Kahn & Hessling, 2001) and limiting depression (Berg & McQuinn, 1989). LOC – that is, the extent to which people believe that they have control over their own fate (Ng, Sorensen, & Eby, 2006)–can be differentiated into internal and external beliefs (Rotter, 1966). Internals believe that they have more control over their own fate and are therefore more directive in attempting to control their external environments. External LOC negatively predicts life satisfaction (Diener & Lucas, 1999) and positively predicts depression (Benassi, Sweeney, & Dufour, 1988).

As an extension to Langan-Fox et al. (2008), we propose that: *Hypotheses 1 and 2*: *nAch*, self-attributed achievement motive (SAM) and self-directedness will interact, such that, relative to congruent individuals, incongruent individuals will demonstrate a stronger (*H1*) positive relationship between self-directedness and life satisfaction, and (*H2*) negative relationship between self-directedness and depression. *Hypotheses 3 and 4*: *nAch*, SAM and self-disclosure will interact, such that, relative to congruent individuals, incongruent individuals will demonstrate a stronger (*H3*) positive relationship between self-disclosure and life satisfaction, and (*H4*) negative relationship between self-disclosure and depression. *Hypotheses 5 and 6*: *nAch*, SAM and external LOC will interact to predict life satisfaction and depression, such that, relative to congruent individuals, incongruent individuals will demonstrate a stronger (*H5*) negative relationship between external LOC and life satisfaction, and (*H6*) positive relationship between external LOC and depression.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants and procedure

The first author was given access to The Eugene-Springfield Community Sample (Goldberg, 2008; see ‘Acknowledgments’). For the sub samples ( $N = 533$ ) used in the present analyses, the age ranged between 18 and 83 ( $M = 50.92$ ,  $SD = 12.62$ ). Approximately 96% were Caucasian, 59% were female, and 58% had college degrees.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Predictor variables

*nAch* was measured via the administration of a standard set (Langan-Fox, 1991a; Langan-Fox & Roth, 1995; Langan-Fox, Deery, & van Vliet, 1997; Langan-Fox & Grant, 2006, 2007) of five picture cues from the TAT (see Smith (1992) in the spring of 2000: (1) a ship captain talking to a passenger; (2) a man sitting in an office; (3) a couple sitting on a bench by a river; (4) two women in a laboratory; and (5) two trapeze artists. Stories by participants were content coded for *nAch* and reflected according to Winter’s (1991) approach. Interscorer agreement has been shown to be high (.85; see Winter (1973)). SAM was measured using the 10-item Ambitious (P3) facet of the Temperament and Character Inventory – Revised (TCI-R; Cloninger, 1999) administered in the spring of 1997. Each item was rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *definitely false* to 5 = *definitely true*). An example item is “I am a very ambitious person.” The TCI-R has been shown to have high reliability (Jylhä & Isometsä, 2006).

#### 2.2.2. Moderator variables

Self-directedness was measured using the 40-item Self-Directedness character domain of the TCI-R. An example item is “Most people seem more resourceful than I am (reverse coded).” Self-disclosure was measured using the six item Attachment/Openness (RD3) facet TCI-R. An example item is “I like to discuss my experiences and feelings openly with friends instead of keeping them to myself.” External LOC was measured with the Powerful Others and Chance subscales (each containing 8 items) of Levenson’s (1981) 24-item LOC Scale, administered in the summer of 1998. An example item is “My life is determined by my own actions.” The reliability of the scale was .81.

#### 2.2.3. Criterion variables

Life satisfaction was assessed using the five-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) administered in the summer of 2001. Each item was rated on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). An example item is “In most ways my life is close to ideal.” The internal consistency of the scale was high (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .88$ ). Depression was measured using the eight item N3 subscale of the NEO Personality Inventory Revised (NEO-PI-R; Costa & McCrae, 1992) administered in the summer of 1994. This scale measures the tendency of individuals to experience depressive affect or mood and may therefore be regarded as a relatively stable measure of depression. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). An example item is “Sometimes I feel completely worthless.” Costa and McCrae (1988) have reported an  $\alpha$  coefficient of 0.84 and a 6-month test–retest reliability of 0.80 for the NEO-PI-R trait depression scale.

The time sequence of the measured variables was as follows: depression (summer, 1994), SAM, self-directedness, self-disclosure (spring, 1997), LOC (summer, 1998), *nAch* (spring, 2000), life satisfaction (summer, 2001). The longitudinal manner in which criterion and predictor measures were administered is not considered to be a major limitation of the current study given prior research which supports the temporal stability of the measured variables (Cloninger, Svrakic, & Przybeck, 2006; Cummins, 1998; McClelland et al., 1989; McCrae & Costa, 1994, 2003; Wu, Chen, & Tsai, 2009).

## 3. Results

Table 1 shows the correlations between the key predictor, mediator, and criterion variables.

A hierarchical regression analysis predicting life satisfaction was performed to test *H1*, with *nAch*, SAM, self-directedness, age, sex and education entered in the first step, followed by the three two-way interaction terms in Step 2, and the three-way interaction in Step 3 (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). Following a recommendation by Aiken and West (1991), predictor variables were standardized before their interaction term was calculated. The predicted three-way interaction was significant,  $\beta = -.12$ ,  $se_b = .05$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .01$ ,  $\Delta F(1, 470) = 6.02$ ,  $p < .05$  (see Table 2).

To further probe the three-way interaction, slope difference tests were applied (Dawson & Richter, 2006) (see Fig. 1). As suggested by Dawson and Richter (2006), one standard deviation above and below the mean were chosen as high and low levels of respective variables. The joint influence of high *nAch* and low SAM was associated with a stronger relationship between self-directedness and life satisfaction than the combination of low *nAch* and low SAM,  $t = 2.26$ ,  $p < .05$ . In addition, low *nAch* and high SAM demonstrated a stronger relationship than low *nAch* and low SAM,  $t = 3.37$ ,  $p < .01$ .

*H2* was tested via a second hierarchical regression analysis predicting depression, with *nAch*, SAM, self-directedness, age, sex and

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