



Explicit and implicit affiliation motives predict verbal and nonverbal social behavior in sports competition



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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The present study investigated the predictive value of the explicit and implicit affiliation motive for social behavior in sport competitions. From an information processing perspective, an explicit motive is linked to verbal cues and respondent behavior. The implicit motive in turn is linked to nonverbal stimuli and operant behavior (McClelland, Koestner, & Weinberger, 1989; Schultheiss, 2008). Both respondent affiliative behavior (e.g., verbal interactions with teammates) and operant nonverbal social behavior (e.g., pleasant to opponents) can be observed in racquet sports team competitions.

Design & Methods: Fifty-two male racquet sportsmen completed the Personality Research Form (explicit affiliation motive) and the Operant Motive Test (implicit affiliation motive). Motive measures were used to predict social behavior during competitions using multiple regression analyses. To this aim real competitive matches were videotaped and analyzed.

Results: Results show that the explicit affiliation motive is associated with time spent in verbal team contact. The implicit affiliation motive, by contrast, is linked to pleasant nonverbal behavior shown toward opponents.

Conclusions: Findings suggest that implicit and explicit affiliation motives predict different kinds of social behavior in sports competition respectively. Indirect motive measures may be of additional predictive value for different behavior in real sports settings.

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Playing singles competitions in racquet sports is a very lonely endeavor for the players involved when it comes to social interaction during matches, personal responsibility for errors, or the need to travel alone. In contrast to singles competitions, there are team competitions in all three sports of tennis, badminton, and table tennis that leave much more space for social behavior. These team competitions are either national league, collegiate sport, or international competitions such as world championships, Olympic Games, or the Davis Cup in tennis. In tennis, for example, even the rules for social interaction in team competitions differ from the singles competitions. In tennis team competitions, social exchange with teammates or coaches is allowed during breaks. Athletes can talk to their teammates between rallies as well. In

badminton, for example, a teammate is even allowed to sit right behind the player during the whole match. In addition to the interaction with opponents or referees commonly found in singles competitions, in team competitions the athlete has the opportunity to explicitly interact with his teammate or coach throughout the match.

In the present study, we were interested in whether athletes who usually compete alone and rely on themselves – without the help of any other teammate or coach – actually use this opportunity for social interaction during a racquet sports game. We investigated whether the social behavior shown in a match could be related to the strength of their implicit vs. explicit affiliation motives. This is particularly interesting because we observed highly competitive matches in which social interaction and affiliation should have been of little interest to the players involved. As the data in the present study illustrate, players vary in the degree to which they make use of opportunities for social interaction.

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The explicit vs. implicit affiliation motive

The affiliation motive is defined as a person's willingness to establish, maintain, or restore friendly and positive relations with others (French & Chadwick, 1956; Schultheiss & Pang, 2007). People with a high affiliation motive enjoy the presence of others and show positive social behavior more frequently (Jemmott, 1987; McClelland, 1985b; Sokolowski, 2008). Friendly relationships with others can be achieved through verbal interaction such as talking, writing letters or calling someone on the phone (Lansing & Heyns, 1959; McAdams & Constantian, 1983). Affiliative behavior can also be observed in nonverbal behavior like eye contact with others (Exline, 1963), evading conflicts in a group setting, or even evading games involving arguing with strangers (Exline, 1962; McClelland, 1975, 1985b). Exline (1962), for example, could show that participants with a high implicit affiliation motive avoided making decisions when they were put in a group with two strangers working on a task requiring team coordination and effort. One of the author's explanations was that subjects high in the affiliation motive avoid disagreements and possible antagonisms with unknown persons. This finding is also relevant to racquet sports in which the interaction with alien opponents is common.

Verbal and nonverbal behavior have been associated with different motivational systems respectively and reflect how explicit or implicit motives are expressed in human behavior (McClelland, Koestner, & Weinberger, 1989; Schultheiss, 2008). According to McClelland et al. (1989), *explicit motives* have a cognitive base, are triggered by verbal stimuli and social expectations, and are associated with respondent, controlled behavior such as conscious decisions, goals, attitudes, or wishes (Schultheiss, 2008). For example, if individuals are asked to make a personal judgment in a questionnaire about how much they like being with others or doing activities with others, the explicit motive is assumed to be of predictive value (McClelland, 1985a). The questionnaire response is assumed to reflect a deliberate and conscious wish for friendly relationships with others (Wong & Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). With an experience-sampling technique, Wong and Csikszentmihalyi (1991) found that participants high in the explicit affiliation motive significantly more often wish to be with friends as expressed in random samples taken throughout the day- when compared to students with a low affiliation motive. Other researchers found that sport students' self-attribution of personal cooperativeness and sociability are linked to measures of the explicit affiliation motive (Elbe, Krippel, Melzer, & Teubel, 2013). Moreover, people with a high explicit affiliation motive display a more positive attitude toward giving and receiving in a team, and show greater concern for their teammates (Brewer & Klein, 2006). The explicit motive is thus predominantly reflected in how much a person values social interaction.

Implicit motives, in contrast, are affectively based goal concerns that energize, orient, and select behavior (McClelland, 1985b, p. 590). They are activated by nonverbal cues, action-innate incentives, and manifest themselves in operant behavior, spontaneously uttered and repeatedly generated, over which individuals to a large degree have no conscious control (McClelland, 1980; Schultheiss & Pang, 2007). Individuals with a high implicit affiliation motive have accordingly more spontaneous social contact and interpersonal thoughts over the course of the day and experience more positive affect in interpersonal situations (McAdams & Constantian, 1983; McClelland, 1985a). They show more dyadic friendship episodes and more self disclosure (McAdams, Healey, & Krause, 1984). They are sympathetic and accommodating toward others (Koestner & McClelland, 1992; Sorrentino & Field, 1986), show lower cortisol responses to social stressors (Wegner, Schüler, & Budde, 2014), try to please their affiliative counterparts (McClelland, 1975), place a high value on living in a peaceful

environment (Rokeach, 1973), and evade interpersonal conflicts with strangers (Exline, 1962).

Measuring explicit and implicit motives

The difference between the two motivational systems is especially important when it comes to motive assessment. Explicit motives are measured directly, by responding to self-statements in questionnaires (Jackson, 1999; Mehrabian, 1970). Implicit motives, in turn, can be determined indirectly by exposing participants to picture stimuli (Schultheiss & Pang, 2007). In picture story exercises, for example, individuals have to write a story (PSE; Schultheiss & Pang, 2007), or reply to guiding questions in a written form (OMT; Kuhl & Scheffer, 1999). Interestingly, it could be shown that measures of explicit and implicit motives are only weakly associated (deCharms, Morrison, Reitman, & McClelland, 1955; Spangler, 1992). Low, non-significant correlations between explicit and implicit motive measures are usually found (e.g., $r_s < .16$, Schüler, Job, Fröhlich, & Brandstätter, 2008; $r = .09$, Spangler, 1992; $r = -.02$, Wegner & Teubel, in press). The conceptual difference between explicit and implicit motives underlines the importance of stating clearly which motivational process is targeted, what kind of behavior is supposed to be predicted, and what instrument should be used. It is expected that explicit motives measured with questionnaires predict respondent behavior such as attitudes, opinions, self-attributes of personality (Spangler, 1992), and deliberate decision behavior (Wegner & Teubel, in press). By contrast, implicit motive measures are better at predicting operant behavior including long-term, self-initiated, and spontaneously shown behavior like occupational success, participation in organizations, or affiliative behavior occurring in natural settings (McClelland et al., 1989; Spangler, 1992), such as described in the present research. The predictive power of implicit motives for operant behavior is especially high if the behavior includes activity incentives.

The affiliation motive in a sport context

The affiliation motive has so far rarely been the matter of investigation in competitive sport settings. Yet its relevance has been illustrated for establishing and maintaining sport participation, as well as for performances in groups compared to individual settings. In several studies affiliation and social interaction (measured using self-reports) have been shown to be a great motivator for sport participation (e.g., Gill & Williams, 1996; Sudeck, Lehnert, & Conzelmann, 2011). For non-competitive cyclists, for example, the social aspect is the central reason for getting involved in and maintaining cycling (Brown, O'Connor, & Barkatsas, 2009). It could also be shown that higher levels of the explicit affiliation motive could be found in team sports compared to individual sports (Elbe et al., 2013). In a field experiment with competitive intercollegiate swimmers, Sorrentino and Sheppard (1978) found faster swimming speeds in a group competition compared to an individual competition for athletes with higher affiliation motivation. In a golf putt experiment, students with an advantageous combination of the explicit affiliation motives (a low avoid dance component) scored better when they performed in a team compared to when they performed only for themselves (Teubel, 2012). However, these experiments used measures of explicit and implicit affiliation motives indiscriminately or even combined explicit and implicit motive measures. It can be assumed that the decision for a measure of explicit or implicit affiliation motives was primarily based on the kind of dependent affiliation variable employed, as well as considerations regarding test economics. Questionnaires (explicit motives), for example, require less time for participants to complete as well as for evaluators to analyze when compared to implicit motive measures.

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