



Meta-analytic evidence for higher implicit affiliation and intimacy motivation scores in women, compared to men



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ABSTRACT

We used meta-analysis to test for gender differences in implicit needs for affiliation/intimacy, assessed via story-coding methods. We included thirty-three effect sizes from 26 publications and 2 unpublished studies, covering a total of 5962 research participants (58% female). Across studies, women scored higher than men in measures of implicit affiliation motivation ($d^* = 0.45$, 95%CI = [0.37; 0.53]). This finding was not moderated by the coding system used, gender congruence of the picture cues presented, or correction for protocol length. Men and women did not differ in their implicit needs for power ($N = 2493$, $k = 15$, $d^* = -0.19$, 95%CI = [-0.44; 0.05]) or achievement ($N = 2235$, $k = 13$, $d^* = 0.14$, 95%CI = [-0.03; 0.30]).

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1. Introduction

Research on implicit motives, that is, nonconsciously operating affective preferences for specific classes of incentives, has a long tradition and remains an active area of research (Schultheiss & Brunstein, 2010), with recent studies exploring such diverse phenomena as cross-cultural patterns of sociosexuality (Hofer et al., 2010), relationship satisfaction (Hagemeyer, Schönbrodt, Neyer, Neberich, & Asendorpf, 2015; Job, Bernecker, & Dweck, 2012), or hormonal responses to stress (Schultheiss, Wiemers, & Wolf, 2014). Yet despite the centrality of the implicit motive construct and its measures for understanding personality and motivation, there is little systematic research on whether and how women and men differ in their implicit motivational needs. So far, only two qualitative literature reviews have attempted to address this issue. They have come to somewhat different conclusions: Whereas Stewart and Chester (1982) saw no evidence for fundamental gender differences in implicit motives and their sensitivity to motivational arousal, Duncan and Peterson (2010) have noted that research published since 1982 suggests that women score

higher than men on measures of the implicit need for affiliation, but not on other motive measures. However, they did not provide a quantitative estimate for this gender difference.

In the present research, we aim to fill this gap through a meta-analysis focused on gender differences in implicit motive measures related to affiliation and potential moderators of gender differences. We also report findings for measures of the motivational needs for power and achievement whenever these were included in the studies that resulted from our targeted literature search.

1.1. The family of implicit affiliation motive measures

Researchers in the McClelland-Atkinson tradition have developed several distinct measures tapping various aspects of the need for affiliation, broadly defined here as a capacity for deriving pleasure from being with others and experiencing social separation as aversive (see Schultheiss, 2008). These measures share two crucial features. First, they are based on story-telling methods of assessment. To obtain measurements of participants' implicit affiliative needs, researchers present ambiguous picture cues to their study participants, a procedure called picture story exercise (PSE; see McClelland, Koestner, & Weinberger, 1989; sometimes sentence cues are used instead of pictures; see French, 1956). On the PSE, participants are required to write an imaginative story about each

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cue. These stories are then coded, based on coding systems featuring clearly defined coding rules, for affiliation-related imagery, and a score is derived for each participant by summing up all instances of coded imagery.

The second crucial feature is that affiliation motive measures were derived from experimental studies in which a motivational state was induced in an experimental group, but not a control group. Participants of both groups then wrote imaginative stories about pictures suggestive of affiliative contact. Researchers distilled differences between experimental-group and control-group stories into content coding systems that aimed to capture the themes that were unique to aroused affiliation motivation (Winter, 1998). Due to way they were derived, these measures therefore all fulfill a core requirement for validity; that is, it has been demonstrated that changes in the targeted attribute (here: affiliation motivation) have a causal impact on changes in its measure (here: frequency of affiliative imagery) (see Borsboom, Mellenbergh, & van Heerden, 2004; McClelland, 1958, 1987).

The combination of these defining features differentiate affiliation motive measures in the McClelland-Atkinson tradition of motive research from self-report measures of affiliation motivation and older or other contemporary thematic apperceptive methods that were not derived through experimental motive arousal and which therefore are not the focus of our study.¹ Their independence from measures of self-attributed affiliation motivation has been demonstrated meta-analytically, with the variance overlap between empirically derived picture-story methods and self-report measures of affiliation motivation being less than 2% (Köllner & Schultheiss, 2014). In the following, we provide brief descriptions of each of the implicit affiliation motive measures that have been described and used in research reports since the 1950s.

1.1.1. *n* Affiliation

The first measure of the need for affiliation (abbreviated *n* Affiliation) was introduced by Atkinson, Heyns, and Veroff (1958; see also Heyns, Veroff, & Atkinson, 1992) and built on an earlier study by Shipley and Veroff (1958). Atkinson et al. (1958) defined *n* Affiliation as a strong concern with establishing, maintaining or restoring a positive relationship with another person or group. According to the coding system, people high in *n* Affiliation are driven either by the search for the pleasure of close, harmonious social contact or the avoidance of social rejection and exclusion. Perhaps as a consequence of this inherent duality of the measure, research conducted with it has painted a mixed picture of the affiliation-motivated person, with some evidence supporting the idea that affiliation-motivated individuals seek proximity to others, but also evidence that they shun others once they view them as too dissimilar to themselves. Moreover, their fear of rejection may make them anxious, demanding, and ultimately unpopular with others (for summaries, see Weinberger, Cotler, & Fishman, 2010; Winter, 1996). Boyatzis (1973) therefore called for the development of measures targeting more specifically the capacity for interpersonal closeness and love.

1.1.2. *n* Intimacy

McAdams (1980) developed a measure for the need for intimacy (*n* Intimacy), defined as a constant preference or readiness to seek experiences of warm, close, and communicative social interaction. The core experience of intimacy motivation is a noninstrumental, reciprocal sharing of desires, feelings and thoughts. Close dyadic

relationships are more important to highly intimacy-motivated individuals than mere belonging to a social group. In contrast to affiliation motivation, intimacy motivation does not appear to be characterized by a fear of rejection (McAdams, Jackson, & Kirshnit, 1984; but see Hofer & Busch, 2011). In general, intimacy-motivated individuals are happy and satisfied in dyadic interactions and in life more generally and are liked by others (McAdams et al., 1984; Weinberger et al., 2010).

1.1.3. *n* Affiliation-Intimacy

In an attempt to devise a comprehensive coding system integrating previous measures, Winter (1991, 1994) combined affiliation and intimacy motivation into one category. This step was based upon the conceptual overlap of both motives in terms of shared social interaction and warm feelings towards others and also on the substantial variance overlap between their measures (see Hofer & Busch, 2011; McAdams et al., 1984). Winter's integrated coding system does not allow differentiating between *n* Affiliation and *n* Intimacy.

1.1.4. Affiliative trust-mistrust

McKay's (1992) coding system for affiliative trust-mistrust focuses on a balanced assessment of positive and negative aspects of dispositional affiliation motivation. It contains two independent scales that quantify the degree to which a person describes close relationships as dependable, warm, and rewarding (trust) or in negative and cynical terms (mistrust). Both scales can be combined into an overall trust-mistrust difference score. This measure has been linked to immune system functions (McKay, 1991; McKay et al., 1997), reflecting a key role of affiliation motivation in health and disease (see McClelland, 1989).²

Although there is no single, comprehensive study that has assessed *n* Affiliation, *n* Intimacy, *n* Affiliation-Intimacy, and affiliative trust-mistrust in one sample and determined their shared overall variance, several studies exist that document substantial variance overlap between individual members of this family of measures (e.g. Hofer & Busch, 2011: $r(271)_n \text{ Affiliation} \times n \text{ Intimacy} = 0.67$; McKay, 1992: $r(70)_{\text{affiliative trust}} \times n \text{ Affiliation} = 0.50$, $r(70)_{\text{affiliative trust}} \times n \text{ Intimacy} = 0.32$; Winter, 1991: $r(42)_n \text{ Affiliation-Intimacy} \times n \text{ Affiliation} = 0.40$, $r(42)_n \text{ Affiliation-Intimacy} \times n \text{ Intimacy} = 0.41$). We suggest that this, along with the close conceptual relationships between the original studies that derived the coding systems from experimental arousal experiments, justifies the inclusion of findings obtained with these different measures in our meta-analysis.

1.2. Potential moderators of gender differences in implicit affiliation motive scores

Because the literature reviews by Stewart and Chester (1982) and Duncan and Peterson (2010) came to different conclusions regarding the existence of gender differences in affiliation motivation, our first goal in this study is to settle the issue systematically and quantitatively through meta-analytic techniques. But even if we find a gender difference in affiliation motivation favoring women, as suggested by Duncan and Peterson (2010), substantive psychological interpretations of such differences (see Section 4)

² Siegel and Weinberger (1998) have introduced the concept and measurement of the oneness motive, defined as the need to become part of, be at one with, or belong to a larger whole, as another addition to the family of affiliation motivation measures. Similar to *n* Intimacy, the oneness motive can be characterized as largely positive and emerges most clearly in interpersonal relationships (Weinberger et al., 2010). However, at the time we conducted this meta-analysis, only few studies had been published using this measure and none had considered gender differences. We therefore did not consider this measure in our conceptual review and meta-analysis.

¹ Contemporary motive measures that did not meet these criteria and whose conceptual and empirical convergence with PSE-type implicit motive measures has been questioned in recent research include the Operant Motive Test and the Multi-Motive Grid (see Schüler, Brandstätter, Wegner, & Baumann, 2015; Schultheiss, Yankova, Dirlikov, & Schad, 2009).

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