

WORK-RELATED MOTIVES AND SELF-ESTEEM IN AMERICAN WOMEN*¹

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SUMMARY

Acknowledging the need for additional research on work-related motives and self-esteem in American women, this study investigated the hypothesis that women with a favorable self-esteem would score high in *n* Ach, *n* Pow, and *n* Auto, whereas women with a less favorable self-esteem would score high in *n* Aff, *n* Agg, and *n* Def. Eighty-five female college students completed Gough and Heilbrun's Adjective Check List and Form B of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. Data were analyzed by means of chi square tests in conjunction with the coefficient of association asymmetric lambda. The results indicated that, as predicted, women with a favorable self-esteem scored high in *n* Ach ($p < .001$) and *n* Pow ($p < .001$), while contrary to expectation, they also scored high in *n* Aff ($p < .05$). All other relationships were found to be nonreliable. These findings were interpreted as stressing the importance of the relationship between self-esteem and work-related motives in women.

A. INTRODUCTION

Conducted nearly three decades ago, Henry's (20) clinical analysis of the executive role remains the most comprehensive and thorough study of its kind. Its results suggested the existence of a pattern of needs among American men that underlie the psychological make-up of the executive personality. More recently, Cummin (11), drawing on the work of McClelland (26, 28) and Whyte (43), identified six motives from Murray's (33, 34) need-press system that match Henry's description of the social role of the business executive. Using a thematic measure, Cummin studied the moti-

* Received in the Editorial Office on March 17, 1978, and published immediately at Provincetown, Massachusetts. Copyright by The Journal Press.

¹ The authors wish to express their appreciation to their colleagues Hubert S. Feild and Robert W. Zmud for comments on earlier drafts of this manuscript.

vational characteristics of a group of male executives classified on the basis of their "entrepreneurial" success. He hypothesized that more successful executives would score high in need achievement, need power (i.e., dominance), and need autonomy, whereas their less successful counterparts would score high in need affiliation, need aggression, and need deference. The results of his investigation indicated that, as predicted, more successful executives obtained high scores in need achievement and need power, while, contrary to expectation, they also obtained high scores in need affiliation. No further significant differences were found between the executive groups with respect to need autonomy, need aggression, and need deference.

Given the all male composition of Cummin's sample and his use of the thematic apperception technique, a method that has produced inconsistent results with women (23, 28, 42), doubt exists regarding the generalizability of his findings to American women. Although a number of studies have demonstrated that women lack certain qualifications required for success as managers (9, 30, 32), there is a growing fund of research that indicates that women do, in fact, possess the qualifications for successful careers in business (7, 12, 24, 31). If this latter position is correct, it would seem logical that many of the same personality traits considered essential for male executives would also be required by their female counterparts. The present study was formulated, in part, to respond to this issue. While the personality literature is replete with motivational-based models to explain human behavior, Murray's (33) need theory of personality was adopted for use in this investigation because of the continuing special interest it has evoked in work-related research (1, 26, 35, 37, 38). In this regard, need achievement (*n Ach*) has perhaps received the largest share of attention because of its close relationship to work performance. The achievement motive, as generally defined, is the relatively persistent tendency to strive for success in competition with a standard of excellence (28). The business executive who is high in this need is characterized as being goal-oriented with an inordinately high drive for achievement (20).

The research literature also indicates that need power (*n Pow*), need autonomy (*n Auto*), need affiliation (*n Aff*), need aggression (*n Agg*), and need deference (*n Def*) are important in influencing work attitudes and behavior (e.g., 2, 17, 29, 39, 40). Need power is manifested by forcefulness, perseverance, and a desire to seek leadership for the purpose of controlling and influencing others (41). As described by Henry (20), the successful executive is a person who is constantly struggling for increased

responsibility and has a strong desire for upward mobility. Need autonomy is seen as a predisposition to act independently and to resist coercion (33). With respect to this need, Whyte (43), in his classic study of the so-called "organization man," differentiated successful from unsuccessful executives on the basis of their assertiveness, strong self-structure, and resistance to influence by outside pressures. Need affiliation represents the need to establish and sustain positive affective relations with others (3). Henry (20) described the successful executive as detached and impersonal toward subordinates and as identifying more with his superiors. In contrast, the executive high in *n* Aff is anxious to please and develop personal friendships. Need aggression is the desire to forcefully overcome opposition and to hurt others (33). Persons with this need behave in an arrogant and hostile manner. Henry (20) stated that the successful executive is one whose "underlying motivations are active and aggressive . . . ," but that this aggressiveness is ". . . channeled into work or struggles for status and prestige . . ." (p. 289). Finally, *n* Def refers to the need to seek and sustain subordinate roles, to yield to influence, and to conform (33). These traits are clearly inconsistent with the traditional picture of the successful executive as energetic, ambitious, and independent.

The foregoing descriptions strongly emphasize the relationship of personality to work attitudes and behaviors and underscore the important role played by what are generally termed "psychogenic needs." However, as argued by McClelland (27), unless an individual's needs are consistent "with the pervasive superordinate network of associations defining the self" (p. 328), they are not likely to persist and influence behavior. This proposition and the notion that individuals are motivated to select and find satisfying those behavioral roles that are congruent with evaluative beliefs about themselves are generally shared by proponents of cognitive balance (19) and dissonance (13) theories. Likewise, as consistency theory would suggest, since "motivational processes are a function of the drive to be consistent with belief systems about the nature of the self" (22, p. 67), it is necessary to examine both the self-system and the psychological needs of individuals. Schwartz and Waetjen (36) have recently pointed up the need for more research in the area of self-theory and female managerial behavior. They concluded as follows:

One of the most recent explanations of human behavior is self-concept: i. e., what one sees and believes about oneself. Little application of self-concept theory has been made to managerial behavior, especially that of women managers. Although much research has now been done on female executives in a

business environment, and some comparative research exists on male and female leadership, there is little empirical research on the female manager's *self-concept* as it relates to her managerial behavior (p. 20).

The present investigation acknowledged the need for additional research on work-related motives and self-esteem in women and expanded the previous work of Cummin (11). Specifically, the hypothesis tested in this study was that women with a favorable self-esteem would score high in *n* Ach, *n* Pow, and *n* Auto, whereas women with a less favorable self-esteem would score high in *n* Aff, *n* Agg, and *n* Def. This hypothesis was derived from Henry's (20) description of the social role of the executive, the work of Cummin (11), and McClelland's well-known research on work-related motives.

B. METHOD

1. *Subjects*

The sample consisted of 85 female undergraduate business students enrolled in five sections of an upper-level course in business at a large southeastern state university.

2. *Instruments*

a. Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory—Form B (SEI-B). Form B of the SEI consists of 25 items to which *Ss* respond as being "like me" or "unlike me." The SEI measures evaluative attitudes toward the self in academic, family, personal, and social areas of experience (10). The validity and reliability of the SEI-B are supported by a variety of studies (5, 6, 8). Internal consistency reliability (KR-20) across items for the present sample was .72.

b. The Adjective Check List (ACL). Developed by Gough and Heilbrun (16), the ACL consists of 300 adjectives (comprising 24 experimental scales) representing a broad range of attributes commonly used to describe a person. *Ss* are requested to check as many adjectives as they consider to be self-descriptive. Validity and reliability data on the ACL are available in Gough and Heilbrun (16). To avoid questions of validity concerning the removal and use of only six scales of the instrument, the complete ACL was administered and machine interpreted before the relevant scales (*n* Ach, *n* Dom, *n* Auto, *n* Aff, *n* Agg, *n* Def) were extracted for the purpose of the study. The ACL was chosen because of its established reliability for both sexes. Test-retest stability coefficients for females on the above men-

tioned scales are reported to range from .74 to .90. Furthermore, in the design of the instrument attempts were made to control for social desirability and acquiescence. The ACL thus avoids problems posed by thematic measures of needs which have been validated primarily with use of male populations. Use of the ACL as a personality assessment research technique is presented in Gough (15).

3. Analyses

In order to investigate the stated hypothesis, the sample was partitioned at the median with respect to the distribution of SEI-B scores into favorable and less favorable self-esteem. Next, the sample was split at the median score of each need. All scores at, or below, the median were considered high. Since the research hypothesis was directional in nature, one-tailed tests of significance were utilized in the analysis. Six chi square tests of differences in conjunction with the coefficient of association asymmetric lambda (18, pp. 745-749) were employed to test each specific prediction.

C. RESULTS

The results of the analyses are given in Table 1. Of six chi square tests of difference between favorable and less favorable self-esteem women under two conditions, half reached significance. Predictions 1 and 2 posited that women with a favorable self-esteem would score high in n Ach and n Pow, whereas women with a less favorable self-esteem would score low. Both predictions received support ($p < .001$). Application of the coefficient asymmetric lambda revealed that self-esteem (independent variable) accounted for 45% of the total variance in n Ach, and 44% in n Pow (dependent variables).

TABLE 1
RELATIONSHIP OF SELF-ESTEEM TO PSYCHOGENIC NEEDS

Need	χ^2	λ	Self-esteem			
			High need		Low need	
			Favorable	Less Favorable	Favorable	Less Favorable
n Achievement	17.90**	.45	30	10	12	33
n Power	16.10**	.44	30	11	12	32
n Affiliation	4.24*	.20	25	15	17	28
n Autonomy	.01	.00	19	20	23	23
n Aggression	.96	.12	18	24	24	19
n Deference	.11	.05	22	20	20	23

* $p < .04$ (two-tailed; results were in the opposite direction from the prediction).

** $p < .001$.

The third prediction posited that women with a favorable self-esteem would have low scores in *n* Aff, whereas women with a less favorable self-esteem would have high scores on this need. Contrary to expectation, the result was in the opposite direction from that which was posited ($p < .04$). Asymmetric lambda indicated that 20% of the variance in *n* Aff was explainable on the basis of self-esteem. The remaining three predictions relating self-esteem to *n* Auto, *n* Agg, and *n* Def were not supported.

D. DISCUSSIONS

Of the three motives (*n* Ach, *n* Pow, *n* Aff) which differentiated women with more favorable self-esteem from those with less favorable self-esteem, the finding regarding *n* Ach is perhaps of greatest interest because of the obvious relationship between this need and work. The strong association between favorable self-esteem and need achievement is consistent with prior research. Bardwick (4), for instance, has emphasized the inextricable link between self-esteem and achievement in both women and men by noting that "the striving for success is the striving for self-esteem" (p. 166).

Support for the proposition concerning self-esteem and *n* Pow is not surprising in view of previous research. Gergen (14) has summarized a number of studies which suggest that high self-esteem persons more often attempt to exert influence and control, whereas individuals with low self-esteem generally tend to accept the influence of others.

The finding regarding self-esteem and *n* Aff was contrary to the study's expectation and the findings of Henry (20). The present study revealed, consistent with the results of Cummin (11), a negative relationship between favorable self-esteem and high need affiliation. Initially, it was assumed following Henry) that *Ss* with a less favorable self-esteem would be concerned about gaining the acceptance and friendship of others, whereas those with a more favorable self-esteem would be less preoccupied with such affiliative goals and would concentrate more on achievement and power. This unexpected result may be related to the female composition of the sample. Despite reported declining sex differences in individual needs (21, 25), Henry's proposed model of the nonaffiliative successful executive may not be totally applicable to women. Perhaps, as Bardwick (4) has argued, success in affiliative relationships is a major source of esteem in women even though they may also have achievement strivings.

From these findings, the overall picture that emerges is that of a woman possessing a favorable self-esteem, who is committed to a high standard of excellence, desirous of leadership positions for purposes of controlling and influencing, and who yet is sensitive to the feelings of others. It may be

argued that all of these characteristics are important for positions of managerial leadership.

In summary, these data most notably suggest that in addition to such considerations as academic qualifications and biographical factors, organizations should examine the strength of relevant psychogenic needs in relation to self-esteem. As Schwartz and Waetjen (36) have noted, "women, in order to be successful managers, must have a self-concept that enables them to be comfortable in and successful with a range of situations, expectations, and roles that are a part of the total managerial responsibility" (p. 24). The nature and importance of self-esteem and work-related motives have been established for men; the present results suggest a similar relationship for women.

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