How does motive incongruence develop?

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Theory

Incongruence between implicit and explicit motives has negative outcomes. For example, motive incongruence reduces volitional strength, which in turn leads to reduced subjective well-being (Kehr, 2004). Conversely, motive congruence was shown to positively influence the development of ego identity (Hofer et al., 2006). Self-determination has been explored as one of the most important moderators of motive incongruence (Thrash & Elliot, 2002). Therefore, it would seem reasonable to expect that factors associated with the development of self-determination will also influence motive incongruence. Self-determination results from satisfaction of three basic needs: autonomy, relatedness and competence (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Hypothesis

Childhood factors which support experiences of autonomy, relatedness, and competence should be associated with motive congruence, whereas childhood factors which thwart these experiences should be associated with motive incongruence.

Results

Implicit and explicit motives were unrelated to each other in all three motive domains (ach: r = -.16, pow: r = -.10, aff: r = .06, all p > .10). The results also revealed that adult motive incongruence did not correlate with the children’s gender and childhood socio-economic status (r = -.03 and .07, respectively, all p > .10).

In a multiple regression analysis, motive incongruence was regressed simultaneously on the childhood factors. The childhood factors explained 33% of the variance in motive incongruence at age 31 (see table 1).

Each of the four significant childhood factors were significantly associated with at least two of the three motive specific incongruence measures for achievement, power, or affiliation (p = .01-.25).

Methods

We used archival longitudinal data from five-year-old children and their mothers to explore parent and child characteristics associated with motive incongruence twenty-six years later. The data were provided by the Henry A. Murray Research Archive (McClelland).

Measures

Childhood factors: Maternal interview when children were 5 years old (Sears et al., 1957)

Implicit motives: Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) at age 31 (McClelland & Pilon, 1983)

Explicit motives: Adjective Checklist (ACL) at age 31 (Gough & Heilbrun, 1983)

Incongruence: Sum of incongruence measures for achievement, power, or affiliation (McClelland & Pilon, 1983)

Sample

N = 75 (representative subsample of originally 379) children (37♂, 38♀) and their mothers from upper class and working class suburbs of Boston (Sears et al., 1957).

Discussion

The present study is the first to consider the developmental origins of congruence between implicit and explicit motives. The pattern of results suggests that motive congruence will develop in family contexts where the mother is reliably available during critical attachment stages, the mother is confident in her relationship with the child, and the mother is accepting of the child’s affective tendencies (Schattke et al., in press).

References