Complex Motives

To be *motivated,* we have suggested, is to be ready to take any means available to attain an imagined goal. If so, our goals may literally be as complex as our imaginations permit. Some of us want to get to the moon, others to be president, others to get a promotion. Some want more abstract goals: to be respected, or to control their lives, or to achieve their potential, or to contribute to the happiness of others.

In this chapter we will look at four case studies in complex motives: the striving for personal achievement; the reaction to uncontrollable events; the idea that long-term needs for love and for self-development emerge when more basic needs are met (and only then); and the possibility that motives based on others' welfare, not just our own, are included in the untaught repertoire that constitutes human nature.

ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION

The modern study of achievement motivation began with the work of David McClelland. He has devoted a long and productive research career to its complex ramifications.

McClelland's Studies of Achievement Motivation

McClelland began with a conception of motivation very much like the one we have developed in earlier chapters. One seeks goals that haven't happened yet. Therefore it is the expectation of a goal—the image—that affects behavior now. So, to study people's goals, McClelland began by studying what they imagine.

Projective Tests as Measures of Motivation

For his methods, McClelland drew upon the pioneering work of Henry Murray, who invented one of the best-known projective tests—the Thematic Apperception Test, or TAT.

A **projective test** is one in which a person is shown an ambiguous stimulus—a blob of ink, as in the Rorschach test, or a picture showing a scene, as in the TAT (Figure 14-1). The picture could mean any of a number of things, but the person is asked to describe what *he* sees in it, or to tell a short story based on it.

Figure 14-1.
A picture from the test used by McClelland's group to measure achievement motivation. (From McClelland et al., 1976.)

The idea is that, if different people have different preoccupations, drives, or needs (Murray's term), they will *project* these inner states into their interpretation of the stimulus material. They will see in the stimulus what is on their minds—what they are preoccupied with, or what they want or what they fear.

In other words, these ambiguous stimuli are *cues for imagery.* Because they are ambiguous, they permit us to respond with whatever thoughts and images are on our minds—including goal images.

One TAT picture, for instance, shows a man at a worktable with a small family photograph to one side. Here is one story that might be written about it:

> The engineer is at work on Saturday when it is quiet and he has taken time to do a little daydreaming. He is the father of the two children in

the picture—the husband of the woman shown. He has a happy home life and is dreaming about some pleasant outing they have had. He is also looking forward to a repeat of the incident which is now giving him pleasure to think about. He plans on the following day, Sunday, to use the afternoon to take his family for a short trip.

This story shows a person's thoughts moving toward his family and the things they would do together. Such a story would be scored very low in achievement imagery. But compare this one:

The man is an engineer at a drafting board. The picture is of his family. He has a problem and is concentrating on it. It is merely an everyday occurrence—a problem which requires thought. How can he get that bridge to take the stress of possible high winds? He wants to arrive at a good solution of the problem by himself. He will discuss the problem with a few other engineers and make a decision which will be a correct one—he has the earmarks of competence.*

Here we have a focus on a problem, and its solution by the engineer's own efforts. That story would rate a very high score in achievement imagery. If a subject told many stories like that, she or he would be considered high in **need for achievement**, or *nAch* for short.

Validating the Measure

The early studies using this technique were attempts to validate it—that is, to see whether or not the story images evoked by the TAT cards really could be used to measure motives. McClelland and his colleagues[1] showed that the *experimental* arousal of achievement motivation would, in fact, increase the subjects' achievement imagery as measured by the TAT. For example, if subjects were about to take an important test, and therefore had achievement on their minds, they gave more achievement-related TAT responses. The measuring instrument worked.

Some Correlates of *nAch*

But that was only preliminary. McClelland's interest was not in a subject's momentary desire to achieve, activated by a here-and-now challenge. He was interested in *lasting* differences between one person and another.

Some people might be concerned about achievement all the time, as a persisting long-term goal, whereas other people might seldom think about achievement. If so, and if the difference is important to the life one leads, then differences between people in *nAch* ought to be related to differences in other things. How would we expect persons who are *generally* concerned about achievement to differ from persons who are not?

*These stories are from McClelland (1964).
[1]McClelland, Clark, Roby, and Atkinson, 1949, p. 243.

Occupational Choice

For one thing, McClelland reasoned, high *nAch* people might make good business executives. If they think about getting ahead, defining and solving problems, and the like, they ought to gravitate toward jobs that permit and reward these activities in real life.[2]

So McClelland and his students took samples of business executives, and of people in other occupations—for example, technicians, and students at professional schools—of comparable age, intelligence, and social background. As Figure 14-2 shows, the executives did score higher in *nAch*—in America, in Italy, and even in a Communist country, Poland.

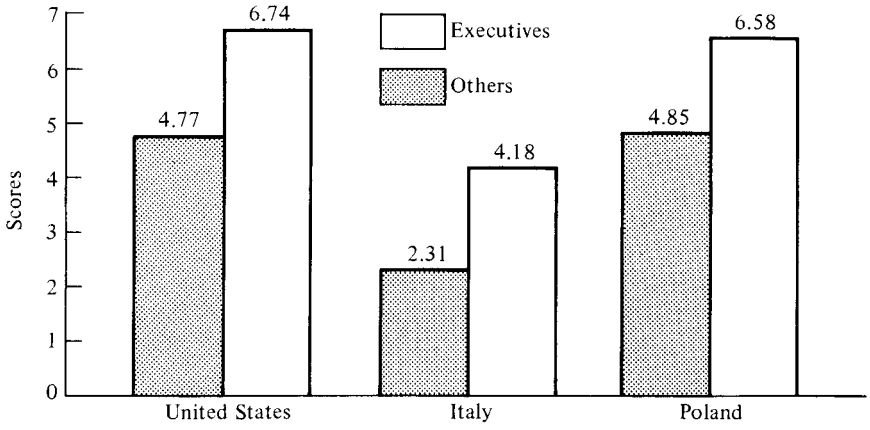

Figure 14-2.
Achievement motivation as measured in business executives, as compared with other professional persons of comparable social and economic backgrounds. (From McClelland, 1964.)

Now as always with correlational data like these, it is hard to know what causes what. Maybe businessmen go into business because they are high in *nAch.* Or maybe it's the other way around; maybe businessmen *develop* high *nAch* because their profession demands it.

So McClelland and his students did a longitudinal study, looking at the relationship between *nAch* scores in college students and the jobs they held 10 to 14 years later. He divided the jobs into *entrepreneurial* ones, with individual responsibility and individual risk—for example, real estate, insurance sales, private business—and other, non-entrepreneurial ones. Sure enough, people who were high in *nAch* early, when they were college students, were more often found in entrepreneurial jobs later on. It seems that *nAch* can precede career choice, and may play a role in determining it.

[2]McClelland 1965, 1978.

What Kind of Achievement?

One wonders: Why businessmen? Isn't a concern for doing well, for achieving, necessary for success at almost anything—a scientific career, for instance?

Perhaps so; but it becomes clear as McClelland discusses this matter that *nAch* is a particular kind of achievement orientation. It is more specific than the term *need for achievement* implies.

The high-*nAch* person, says McClelland, seeks situations in which she takes personal responsibility for solving problems. She tends to set moderate goals: not too hard, or failure is too likely; and not too easy, or success brings no satisfaction. And she wants concrete, rapid knowledge of how well she is doing. Business of course provides this kind of information in sales, profits, and production figures.

Compare these qualities with what a career in science, or in teaching, offers. A research scientist may work for a very long time, not knowing whether she is on the right track or not; she does not get immediate rewards or immediate information about the rightness of her decisions. A teacher may never be sure just how much he is getting across to his students. Concrete, rapid knowledge about how well one is doing does not occur in these professions. Such careers will not attract the high-*nAch* person. They offer other kinds of rewards, but not those that *nAch* is directed toward.

Toward a Psychology of History: Achievement and Society

McClelland is an investigator of daring imagination. Armed with his tool of *imagery* as a way of measuring motivation, he has made ingenious forays into the psychology of historical and cultural trends in whole societies.

Protestantism and Capitalism

The sociologist Max Weber had suggested that the rise of capitalism in European civilization may have been accelerated by the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Briefly, his argument was this: The Protestant religions stress an *individual* relationship between persons and God, as opposed to a relationship through an institution, the Catholic Church. Martin Luther himself had spoken of a "priesthood of all believers," and Protestantism emphasized each person's seeking his own salvation. In other words, *personal initiative and effort* were valued.

Weber notes that Protestant entrepreneurs seemed to rise to the top in the emerging world of capitalistic business, despite the initial advantage in wealth that many Catholic families enjoyed. And the early Protestant businessman could not use the money he made for his own enjoyment, for early Protestantism frowned on self-indulgence. So he was likely to

reinvest it in his business. Such a man "gets nothing out of his wealth for himself, except the irrational sense of having done his job well."[3]

But McClelland realized that that outlook could also describe the person high in *nAch.* Could the link between two great social movements—Protestantism and capitalism—be mediated at the individual level by the achievement motive? If it were set up as a value by the religion of a society, taught to children by that society, and expressed as individual entrepreneurship by those children when they grew up—why not?

Figure 14-3 shows the idea. Protestantism, valuing self-reliance and initiative, leads parents to train their children to be independent and to take initiative. Such training builds *nAch.* That leads to entrepreneurship, which in turn leads to economic and technological development within a capitalistic society.

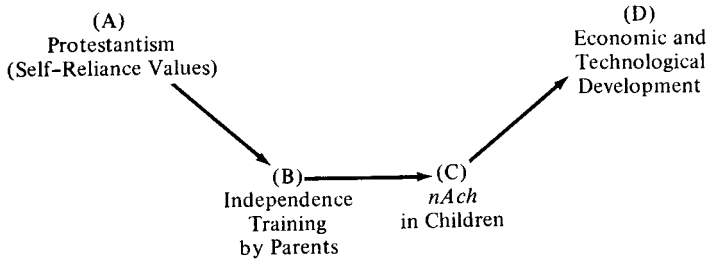

Figure 14-3.
McClelland's suggested sequence of events relating religion, childrearing practices, achievement motivation, and economic and technological development. (From McClelland, 1955.)

Now if all this happened, it happened long ago. But if the idea is correct, modern societies should still show the *process* going on. With the world for a laboratory, McClelland and his students set out to gather data.

Is there a relationship between Protestantism and economic growth? As preliminary data, McClelland divided the nontropical countries of the Western world into ones that were predominantly Catholic and predominantly Protestant. As an index of economic development, he looked at the average per capita consumption of electric power for the year 1950. Table 14-1 shows the results. By that measure, Protestant countries were indeed more heavily industrialized than Catholic ones.

What about McClelland's hypothesized steps in that relationship? First, it should be the case that Protestant families favor more and earlier independence training for their children than Catholic families do. McClelland's group tested and confirmed this prediction at least for American families.[4]

[3]Weber, 1930, p. 71.
[4]McClelland, Rindlisbacher, and deCharms, 1955.

Table 14-1. Average per capita consumption of electric power in Protestant and Catholic countries beyond the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn (For the year 1950, in kilowatt-hours, from Woytinski, 1953)

Protestant		*Catholic*	
Norway	5,310	Belgium	986
Canada	4,120	Austria	900
Sweden	2,580	France	790
U.S.A.	2,560	Czechoslovakia	730
Switzerland	2,230	Italy	535
New Zealand	1,600	Poland	375
Australia	1,160	Hungary	304
United Kingdom	1,115	Ireland	300
Finland	1,000	Chile	260
Union of South Africa	890	Argentina	255
		Spain	225
Holland	725	Uruguay	165
Denmark	500	Portugal	110
Mean	1,983	Mean	457

Second, independence training by parents ought to be correlated with *nAch* in children. There is evidence that this also is true.[5] When interviewed, mothers of high-*nAch* children said that they had expected their children to show independence—dressing themselves, finding their own way around the neighborhood, and the like—at earlier ages than the mothers of low-*nAch* children.*

Finally, does high *nAch* lead to business entrepreneurship and so to industrialization? Well, we recall that high-*nAch* people do in fact show a greater likelihood of choosing business occupations than do people with low *nAch.*

Thus, we have in this research program an *independent* bit of evidence for every step in the chain of events McClelland hypothesized.

Achievement and Industrialization

Later, McClelland came back with still more evidence.[6] Suppose high levels of *nAch* in individuals do lead to economic growth of whole societies. Can one trace a relationship between *nAch* and economic growth over the history of a nation?

What McClelland looked for here was an estimate of the interest in, or concern for, personal achievement that characterized a particular society at a particular time. To do this, he took samples of the fantasies of various time periods—their fiction! Stories, poems, songs, and plays were scored

[5]Winterbottom, 1953.

*One can have doubts about this *retrospective* method, in which the mothers, being interviewed *now,* recall as best they can what they had done *then* when the children were younger. Winterbottom's findings are controversial (cf. Weiner, 1980).

[6]McClelland, 1964.