A Study of Dominant Motives Among College Students

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Abstract

The present study assessed Chinese college students' motivation by measuring their personal strivings and proposed 17 major motives. These motives could be grouped into three dimensions: self—other or society, material or biology – spirituality, and appearance – inner motives. Among these 17 motives, the most popular four motives were Self-Improvement, Achievement, Enjoyment, and Health. In general, male students exhibited significantly higher Achievement than female students, and female students showed significantly higher Intimacy, Enjoyment, Good Appearance, and Environmental Protection than male students.

Key words: Personal strivings; Motivation; Types of motivation

INTRODUCTION

Motive is the reason behind people's behavior and the power system of people's personality. Understanding the motives behind every behavior can be helpful not only to a better understanding and prediction of human behaviors, but also to a comprehensive understanding of the personality system. Previous studies on motive are mainly of two types. One of which regards motive as a power system with different phases, in which motive is considered as a whole. To illustrate, Maslow (1970) believes three stages are included in motivation: the generation of desire, taking actions and the satisfaction after the completion of the target. Heckhausen (1991) holds that, from motivation to action, there are three intermediate processes: the formation of motive, the formation of intention and the implementation of action. However, according to Xu and his colleagues, motive is divided into four phases: the formation of desire, planning, taking actions and continue to act (Xu, 2009; Xu & Millar, 2010).

The other type sorts motive into different classifications and discusses how they affect human behaviors. Actually, Murray and Xu from America have already put forward a relatively complete list of Motives based on researches on Americans (Murray, 1938; Xu, 2006; Xu, Mellor, Xu, & Duan, 2013). In order to thoroughly understand people's personality, Murray and his colleagues systematically studied 51 male participants, using multiple methods, i.e. projective test, interview, questionary, etc. (Murray, 1938). Based on the studies, they proposed twenty Motives: Humility, Achievement, Adscription, Attack, Autonomy, Resistance, Defense, Obedience, Rule, Performance, Avoid Injury, Avoid, Parenting, Order, Games, Refused, Sensory Abilities, Sex, Assistance and Understanding (Murray, 1938). This research has a profound influence on the development of the whole area, for most of the researches since then were based on this one. For example, edwards personality preference schedule and personality research form (Edwards, 1959; Jackson, 1999) established by Edwards and Jackson, McClelland's research on motive of achievement, Winter's research on motive of power and Heyns, Veroff and Atkinson's research on motive of friendship are all based on Murray's research.

Recently, Xu and his team renewed their list adopting new measuring methods, in which they measures personal motives through measuring Personal Strivings (Emmons, 1986). Emmons believes that Personal

Strivings belongs to the behavior part of personal motives (Emmons, 1986). Personal Strivings, in definition, is the most similar to motives and it is in accordance with the measuring methods Allport proposed in 1955 (Allport, 1955; Emmons, 1999). The new list includes the following sixteen specific motives: Achievement, Power, Affiliation, Intimacy, Acquisition, Health, Independence, Organization, Self-Improvement, Honesty/Integrity, Instrumentality, Novelty, Religion, Enjoyment, Social Goodness and Sex (Xu, 2006; Xu et al., 2013). In addition, the team also compiles a motive coding manual. The manual includes several parts, such as introduction, definition of individual motivation, Personal Strivings examples and its rating examples, Personal Striving scale, Personal Striving coding exercises and answers as well as abbreviations of each motive (Xu et al., 2013).

At present, researches on motives in China are mainly focusing on the individual motive, motive of achievement for instance. The two types of research mentioned above have their own limits. Based on the research proposed by Murray, Xu and their team, the research in this thesis chooses a number of full-time Chinese college students as subjects and measure their motives through measuring their Personal Strivings, in this way conducting a primary study of the types of motives among Chinese by forming a relatively thorough motive list of modern Chinese college students and discussing the main characteristics thereof. We sincerely hope this research could contribute to the development of researches on motive and personality, and of both theoretical and experimental researches on motive in China.

1. RESEARCH APPROACH

1.1 Research Approach

This research adopts the Personal Strivings Scale proposed by Emmons (1986). The definition of Personal Strivings according to Emmons (1999) are something that one often tries to do. An individual might or might not be able to complete these things (Emmons, 1999). This definition corresponds with not only people's understanding of the current affecting motives (for example, Ryan and Deci's understanding of motive), but also Allport's judgment on how to effectively measure motive (Allport, 1955; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The scales are semi-open scales with the same beginning "I often try to (attempt to/try my best to) _____."(Emmons, 1986) Thus, it can be translated and used to scale the motives of Chinese. The scale used in this thesis is composed of twelve Personal Strivings, which can be referred to in the appendix. This research uses the Chinese version of Xu's coding manual as the primary coding tool and will code the result according to that.

1.2 Subjects

This research takes college students from Sichuan Normal University as study subjects and scales them in groups. There are totally 266 undergraduate students participating in the research, 188 female and 78 male, with an average age of 20.

2. RESULTS

2.1 List of Motives

Every subject were asked to give twelve personal strivings, thus we get 3192 personal strivings in total, which were coded by the researchers after. Most of them can be concluded in the motives listed by Xu and his team, such as Achievement, Power, Affiliation, Intimacy, Acquisition, Health, Independence, Organization, Self-Improvement, Honesty/Integrity, Instrumentality, Novelty, Enjoyment, Social Goodness and Sex. However, beside those, another two motives are concluded: Good-Image Maintenance and Environmental Protection. Please refer to Table 1 for the definition of the motives and the personal strivings related.

Table 1
List of Motives

Motives	Definition	Examples of personal strivings
Achievement	Strong desires of showing one's best performance, of hoping to achieve one's goal, of being competitive or of being persistent in hardships.	1 To achieve my goals; 2 To be successful; 3 To get good results.
Power	Strong desires of affecting, persuading and protecting others, of becoming the organizer and executer or of acting like the leader by being tough.	1 To raise my fame; 2 To affect others' emotions; 3 To win others' respect.
Affiliation	Strong desires of building friendships and knowing people, of maintaining the interpersonal relationships, of being liked and accepted or of cooperating with people.	1 To have good relationships with my classmates; 2 To make more friends; 3 To get along with people; 4 To be liked.
Intimacy	Behaviors of loving and tenderness; a desire of sharing the feelings and ideas of intimacy under mutual trust; a desire of seeking for mutual aid and cooperation; frequent personal and interpersonal conversations and discussions.	1 To provide my parents with a better life; 2 To listen to others; 3 To consider more about others' feelings; 4 Let my partner be happy.

To be continued

Continued

Motives	Definition	Examples of personal strivings
Acquisition	Wishes of owning possessions and property; participating in bargain and fighting for property; working for money or materials; protecting or defending the property.	1 To earn as much money as possible; 2 To own my own house, car or something valuable; 3 To earn much money but to spend little.
Health	Strong desires of exercising, of eating well, of living in a healthy environment, of staying in shape, of maintaining clam, of sleeping well or of avoiding being over stressed.	1 To keep fit; 2 To take exercises; 3 To eat healthy food.
Independence	Wishes of being independent, of resisting oppression and effect from others, of seeking for freedom, of caring about being unique, of refusing to siding with others or even the authority.	1 To live independently; 2 To be different; 3 To take care of myself.
Organization	Emphasizing the importance of plan, punctuality, keeping neat and a regular life.	1 To plan everything; 2 To do things according to the schedule; 3 To live a regular life.
Self-Improvement	Seeking for self-growth; trying to maintain an open attitude; seeking for self-satisfaction, especially those achieved through self-forming and facing the truth self.	1 To be more mature; 2 To be more confident; 3 To be tougher; 4 To learn more knowledge.
Honesty/Integrity	Wishes of acting and living according to one's moral standards, of being responsible for one's own actions, of keeping clam and not losing one's temper.	1 To stick to my principles; 2 To be responsible; 3 To improve my self-cultivation.
Instrumentality	Needs of effectively spending time, of avoiding laziness and inefficiency, of keeping oneself busy, of being necessary or important in one's or other's life.	1 To effectively spend my time; 2 To make every minute worth; 3 To find more work to do in order keep me busy.
Novelty	Needs of experiencing new things, especially those impressive and exciting ones, of trying fresh and special activities in free time or of doing something surprising out of the blue.	1 To try new things; 2 To search for new excitement; 3 To search for freshness.
Enjoyment	Needs of having fun, of enjoying life, of pursuing happiness, of playing, of appreciating or showing sense of humor.	1 To make myself feel happy; 2 To make myself happy; 3 To have a good mood.
Social Goodness	Needs to be a good person, to be willingly to help others, to be selfless or to think of others first.	1 To help people around with things I can do; 2 To be a excellent volunteer; 3 To help those in need.
Sex	Needs to attract persons of the opposite sex or desire for sex.	1 Little masturbation 2 To find a free sex partner; 3 To attract persons of the opposite sex.
Good-Image Maintenance	Needs to be beautiful or handsome and to maintain a nice appearance.	1 To make myself look more beautiful; 2 To dress properly; 3 To look decent and elegant.
Environmental Protection	Needs to protect the environment, to save energy, to protect the animals and the plants.	1To contribute to the environmental protection career of China; 2 To save water and electricity; 3 To protect the plants.
Exceptions	Distinctive social motives and objectives reflected by individuals.	1 To seek for shortcuts; 2 To chat online everyday.
Lack of Information	Undetermined individual potential motives due to lacking of information.	1 To try to remember something; 2 To find another world.

2.2 Raters' Reliability

Based on the list, two researchers recoded the 600 personal strivings so as to scale the raters' reliability. The result shows, with an average score of 76, a high reliability of the raters of each personal striving. Among those raters, only raters from four motives are below 70. Among all the reliability scores, the highest is 93 (Motive of Sex) and the lowest is 46 (Lack of Information).

2.3 The Overall Frequency Distribution of Motive

In order to understand how the motives are distributed among the participants, we carried out a frequency analysis. As we can see from Table 2, 50% people have the following motives: Achievement (79%), Affiliation (78%), Intimacy (61%), Health (64%), Self-Improvement (89%), Honesty/Integrity (54%) and Enjoyment (67%). In addition, a lot of people have motives of Power (47%), Acquisition (38%), Independence (39%) and Social Goodness (40%).

Table 2
The Number of Each Personal Striving That Belongs to Each Motive and the Percentage of the People Showing This Motive

Motives	The number of personal strivings	Percentage (%)
Achievement	425	79
Power	192	47
Affiliation	381	78
Intimacy	264	61
Acquisition	126	38
Health	279	64
Independence	138	39

To be continued

Continued

Motives	The number of personal strivings	Percentage (%)
Organization	69	22
Self-Improvement	651	89
Honesty/Integrity	215	54
Instrumentality	46	16
Novelty	35	12
Enjoyment	293	67
Social Goodness	120	40
Sex	15	5
Good-Image Maintenance	54	18
Environmental Protection	18	5
Exceptions	101	26
Lack of Information	51	15

2.4 Sexual Difference

In general, the number of male participants is larger than that of female in the following motives: Achievement, Power, Health, Organization, Honesty/Integrity and Novelty, among which only in the Motive of Achievement does the male significantly outnumbered female ($t = 2.69$, $p = .008$). In the following motives, the number of female participants is larger than thar of male: Intimacy ($t = 4.05$, $p < .001$), Enjoyment, ($t = 2.34$, $p = .02$) Good-Image Maintenance ($t = 4.99$, $p < .001$) and Environmental Protection ($t = 2.07$, $p = .04$). Please refer to Table 3.

Table 3
The Sexual Difference on Motives

Motives	Average Number		t	p
	Male	Female		
Achievement	18	16.33	2.69	.008
Power	14.38	13.78	1.63	.11
Affiliation	16.40	17.04	1.29	.20
Intimacy	14.03	15.99	4.05	.000
Acquisition	13.38	13.48	.34	.74
Health	15.12	15.07	.09	.92
Independence	13.23	13.66	1.39	.17
Organization	12.94	12.71	1.02	.31
Self-Improvement	19.42	19.49	.11	.92
Honesty/Integrity	14.63	14.31	.80	.43
Instrumentality	12.47	12.51	.19	.85
Novelty	12.45	12.51	.32	.75
Enjoyment	13.97	14.80	2.34	.02
Social Goodness	13.36	13.54	.67	.51
Sex	12.23	12.08	1.32	.19
Good-Image Maintenance	12.12	12.80	4.99	.000
Environmental Protection	12.05	12.29	2.07	.04
Exceptions	14.26	13.21	1.83	.07
Lack of Information	12.92	12.70	.77	.44

3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

3.1 The Main Motives of Modern College Students

According to the analysis above, we can group the main motives of modern Chinese college students into the following 17 kinds: Achievement, Power, Affiliation, Intimacy, Acquisition, Health, Independence, Organization, Self-Improvement, Honesty/Integrity, Instrumentality, Novelty, Enjoyment, Social Goodness, Sex, Good-Image Maintenance and Environmental Protection. Everyone has these motives. However, the importance of the motives is different from person to person. For example, for some, Achievement might be the most important while for others, Health matters most. These motives could be understood in these three dimensions: self—other or society, material or biology – spirituality, and appearance – inner motives. To illustrate, Independent could belong to self-motive, and Affiliation and Environmental Protection could be included in society motive; Acquisition and Sex could belong to material or biology motive while Honesty/Integrity could belong to spirituality motive; Good-Image Maintenance could be appearance motive but Self-Improvement is inner motive. Nevertheless, some motives are between the lines, or in this case, dimensions, thus cannot be completely included in one type, such as Achievement. In a word, human motives are very complicated and more researches are required in order to fully understand them.

3.2 An Analysis on the Characteristics of the Motives of Modern College Students

According to the frequency distribution, modern college students generally concern about their self-improvement (Self-Improvement Motive) and hope to achieve success (Achievement Motive), to gain friendship (Affiliation Motive) and to be healthy (Health Motive). Meanwhile, they also regard self-happiness and self-enjoyment seriously. This is in accordance with the practical situation. They know that, in real life, only by constantly improve themselves can they be successful eventually; in real life, friendship is indispensable and being healthy is the basis of doing anything else; in the meantime, they care about life quality and want to be happy. In addition, 40% of the participants want to be helpful to others and the society. Compared with the females, male college students value personal achievements more. However, females are relatively more willing to have an intimate relationship and a good appearance. They pay more attention to personal feelings (which means to be happy themselves) as well as environmental protection.

In summary, the list of Motives resulted from this research represents the main motives of modern college students, truthfully and detailed. These motives show the characteristics of being optimistic and healthy. Motives are multidimensional, thus for different people, the importance of the same motive can be different.

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APPENDIX

Personal Strivings

We can describe a person according to the goals in his daily life. These goals are called Personal Strivings. No matter which stages we are in, there will be goals to drive us moving forward. We want you to describe the things that you often try to do. Here are some examples:

I often try to be a good example for others.

I often try to/ try my best to improve my spiritual cultivation.

I often try to help those in need.

I often try to search for something new and exciting.

I often try to avoid feeling inferior.

I often try to eat healthy and balanced.

Please pay attention to this: these goals (personal strivings) are expressed in this term "I often try to/ try my best to/ attempts to)" whether you succeed or not. These goals might be very general, like "I try to make people happy", or be very specific, like "I try to make my partner happy". However, the goals can be both something you try to obtain or keep, and something that you try to avoid.

Maybe you have noticed that this is different from using personality adjectives to describe a person (for example, friendly, smart and honest). We don't want you to use these adjectives. You might never use this way to express yourself, so please think about what kind of goals you had before writing them down.

Now, please write down twelve personal strivings. When thinking about you and your goals, please be honest and objective. That means DO NOT just simply list the goals that will be approved or you think you should have. Just think twice before you start. And remember to be relax, because the answers will be anonymous. (Please write clearly.)

I often try to/ try my best to/ attempts to_____.

I often try to/ try my best to/ attempts to_____.

I often try to/ try my best to/ attempts to_____.

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