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978-0-521-36951-0 - Human Motivation  
David C. McClelland  
Frontmatter  
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# *Human Motivation*

*David C. McClelland*  
BOSTON UNIVERSITY



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## *Preface*

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The psychology of motivation is a broad and loosely defined field. It covers everything from detailed investigations of the physiological mechanisms involved in animal drives to elaborate analyses of the unconscious motives behind abnormal or symptomatic acts in a person to factor analyses of the motives people assign to themselves to explain their behavior. Different textbooks and different courses have been organized around these different areas of investigation. In this book we will draw on all these sources of information and attempt to provide an integrated view of the field by narrowing somewhat the focus of attention.

The book emphasizes how motives differ from other determinants of action and how they relate to other motivation-type variables such as emotions, incentives, values, causal explanations, and conscious and unconscious intents. It examines how motives are acquired, where they come from, and on what they are based. Biological sources of human motives are reviewed, and this review introduces the topic of natural incentives, or what is sometimes called *intrinsic motivation*. Some selectivity is necessary in reviewing the large field of animal research on motivation in order to focus on biological sources of individual differences in human motive strength. Social sources of differences in motive strength are also considered, including everything from the way parents rear their children to educational interventions designed to change peoples' motives. Such studies contribute not only practical information on how to develop motives, but also theoretical information on the nature of motives and how they differ from other characteristics.

A major focus of the book is on how individual differences in the strength of human motives are to be measured. The emphasis is on measuring motives in associative thought or fantasy, a method that combines the sensitivity of Freud's clinical analyses of motivation with the rigor of experimental psychology, since the coding systems for human motives are derived from the effects on associative thought of experimental arousal of the motives in question. However, alternative methods of measuring human motive strength are also reviewed, and all methods are evaluated carefully in terms of acknowledged criteria for good measurement. What comes out of this analysis is the importance of distinguishing

between more or less unconscious motives and conscious values as different determinants of behavior.

Four major motive systems—the achievement motive, the power motive, the affiliative motives, and the avoidance motives are examined in detail. The large body of research that has accumulated on how these motive systems affect behavior is carefully reviewed and evaluated. The text illuminates not only how motives serve to energize and orient behavior and to promote relevant types of learning; it also contains factual answers to such large questions as, Why do great civilizations rise and then decline? or, in motivational terms, What is the difference between the reasons for the commercial success of ancient Greece and the organizational triumph of the Roman Empire? Why are some kinds of people successful in business as managers while others are not? What have been the motivational characteristics of U.S. presidents, and how are those characteristics related to how they behaved in office? Why do nations make war? Can love really heal in the physical sense? The research that has been done on these motive systems not only provides information of theoretical importance; it also answers questions of great practical and social significance.

Since motives are treated as only one of the determinants of action, some of the usual topics in the field of motivation are discussed not in their own right, but as part of other matters. Take, for example, aggression or the aggressive drive or instinct, which is often a topic heading in books on motivation. In this book the usual subject matter for the topic of aggression is dealt with in two places—as a type of action characteristic of certain kinds of power-motivated people (Chapter 8) and as a type of action that suggests the existence of a natural incentive that yields pleasure from having impact (Chapter 5). Other such behavioral trends suggesting the presence of a motive, like pro-social or altruistic behavior, are similarly treated. Pro-social behavior appears as characteristic of people with a certain type of power motive (Chapter 8), and as indicating the presence of a natural incentive to get pleasure from being with people based on contact gratifications (Chapter 5) or from some kind of interpersonal exchange (Chapter 9).

I have benefited greatly not only from the contributions of generations of students and fellow workers in the field of motivation, but also from the specific advice of Charles Cofer, Dan McAdams, and Thomas Srull, who read and commented in detail on an early version of the manuscript. In addition, John W. Atkinson, David G. Winter, Abigail Stewart, David Buss, and Richard Patten have given me very useful feedback on particular chapters. Of course, none of these people should be held responsible for my mistakes. I also owe a special debt to the National Science Foundation, which provided me with the funds not only to complete parts of the research reported here, but also to spend a year free of other academic duties to concentrate on completing the manuscript. Finally, the book could never have been completed without the devoted, patient, and conscientious secretarial assistance of Kathleen McPherson and Samantha George, for which I am very grateful.

David C. McClelland

## *Foreword*

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More than most textbooks in psychology, this book reflects the work, the life, and the personality of its author. After forty prolific years of boldly original research and theorizing on the topic of human motivation, David McClelland has not produced a conservative, homogenized, and middle-of-the-road review of the literature. Like *Personality*, McClelland's classic textbook on personality psychology written over thirty years ago, this text takes some risks. First, the book does not aim to review all of the important literature on human motivation; rather, it seeks to explore in some detail a selected set of critical and intriguing motivational issues. Second, the book does not merely summarize theories, methods, and research findings pertaining to the scientific study of human motivation; rather, it attempts a theoretical synthesis of its own based on the author's particular perspective on human motivation—a perspective that has developed through a number of stages during the last forty years.

David Winter (1982)—a student and colleague of McClelland—has recently traced McClelland's intellectual biography as a psychologist through six stages. From his rigorous training within the behaviorist tradition of Clark Hull at Yale and his early research on verbal discrimination learning, McClelland moved to the study of thematic measurement of psychological motives (such as the achievement motive) in the late 1940s. The mid-1950s found him immersed in the almost audacious investigation of how human motives—reflected in such unlikely sources as children's readers and ancient urns—shape the economic development of entire cultures. By the mid-1960s McClelland and his colleagues were designing programs to facilitate the development of achievement motivation in businesspeople; whereas the late 1960s and 1970s witnessed a shift away from achievement to the study of the power motive and its myriad manifestations in such phenomena as risk-taking behavior, patterns of leadership in groups, alcohol consumption, and war. In the most recent stage, McClelland's work has moved into yet a new area: the relationship of psychological motives to physiological functioning, especially with respect to the body's immune systems and thus sickness and health.

Over the shifting course of McClelland's intellectual journey, a number of

## Foreword

salient themes have been expressed again and again. As a student and colleague of McClelland for only a short while, I have come to perceive eight recurrent themes that aptly characterize his patented perspective on human motivation. The careful reader should discern these eight in the pages that follow:

1. *A fascination with Freud and the unconscious.* For McClelland, like Freud, the really important motives in human lives reside beneath the surface of everyday awareness. To understand motivation, therefore, the psychologist must tap into its subterranean source.
2. *A commitment to measurement and quantification of human motives.* Like Clark Hull and the behaviorists of his day, McClelland has little patience for things that cannot be measured and transformed into numbers. Given the well-known difficulties psychologists have encountered in measuring Freudian constructs, Themes 1 and 2 often exist in a dynamic tension in McClelland's work as he attempts to devise methods to measure what some psychologists have claimed is unmeasurable.
3. *An adherence to the measurement methodology of content analysis applied to open-ended responses such as the stories that people tell.* McClelland is a pioneer in the development of ways of interpreting the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) so as to quantify motive trends that exist beneath the level of awareness. He has repeatedly argued that open-ended measures such as the TAT, dream analysis, and the coding of myths and stories are significantly more sensitive to unconscious motive trends than are self-report measures such as questionnaires and rating scales.
4. *An implied dimensional view of people.* McClelland is a "trait theorist" in the best sense of the term. He studies enduring and underlying dimensions of the personality which motivate (energize, direct, and select) behavior and experience. The three fundamental motive systems which he has identified and measured in human lives concern (a) achievement/success, (b) power/impact, and (c) affiliation/intimacy.
5. *An interest in individual differences.* McClelland tends to ask the question, 'How do people differ?' more often than do most motivational psychologists. Motivational differences are measured via thematic coding of open-ended responses, and the differences are often understood in terms of the three major motive systems.
6. *A preoccupation with major questions of human adaptation.* In his research and his theorizing, McClelland does not shy away from the big questions about human adaptation: Why do nations make war? Why are some people successful and others not? Can love really heal? This leads him into controversial, but fascinating, studies of healing, history, and mythology.
7. *A belief that motives can be changed.* McClelland and his colleagues have developed systematic programs for altering people's motivational profiles. The programs are seen as creative and cost-effective ways to help people

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change the internal psychological needs which energize, direct, and select, their behavior. McClelland's methods have implications for psychological interventions in business, industry, government, and therapy.

8. *A concern about the welfare of society.* Like B. F. Skinner and Erik Erikson, McClelland has shown a keen appreciation for the intricate interplay of science and society through history. Laboratory findings are often couched in terms of their meanings for contemporary society and the imminent prospects of human happiness and misery, peace and war. In addressing the future welfare of humans living on earth, McClelland does not hesitate to scrutinize the motive patterns of entire nations and entire historical epochs.

McClelland's perspective on human motivation distinguishes this text from all others in the field. The author's creative blend of tough-minded empiricism and tender-minded humanism has given birth to a textbook on human motivation that should challenge, stimulate, and indeed motivate the student and the instructor alike.

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