

MOTIVE TO AVOID SUCCESS AND FEAR OF APPEARING INCOMPETENT: AN ASSESSMENT OF SEX DIFFERENCES#

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230 male and 230 female adolescents were tested on two instruments Motive to Avoid Success (Horner, Tresemer, Berens, & Watsan, 1973), and a Fear of Appearing Incompetent (Good & Good, 1973a). Sex differences were investigated which showed that females were significantly higher on motive to avoid success and fear of appearing incompetent than males. A significant positive correlation was revealed between Motive to Avoid Success and Fear of Appearing Incompetent in females.

The concept of Motive to Avoid Success (MAS) proposed by Horner (1968) is described as a disposition to be anxious about achieving success because of expectations of negative consequences (such as, social rejection and feeling of being unfeminine) as a result of succeeding. This motive affects behaviour by inhibiting achievement striving and by causing anxiety when success is attained (Horner, 1972, 1973). Horner measured motive to avoid success with a TAT that had as its cue "After first term finals, Anne (John) finds herself (himself) at the top of her (his) medical school class" (p.101). Individual protocols were scored according to the presence or absence of anxious imagery related to the situation depicted by the cue. Her results showed the presence of MAS more in females. She remarked that the motive to avoid success is largely responsible for the conflict and inhibition women often experience in achievement situations. Her contention that females portray more imagery has been supported by researchers at various stages (Bhogle & Murthy, 1990; Singh & Kapoor, 1990). Despite the widespread acceptance of this construct different researches showed great inconsistencies, which researchers felt were due to insufficient attention to scoring procedures.

As a result of such inconsistencies several objective measures were designed to measure motive to avoid success, which showed

results different from what Horner had obtained (Cano, Solomon, & Holmes, 1984; Forbes & King, 1983).

However, Atkinson (1966) stated that self descriptive and projective measures are not measuring the same thing. Good and Good (1973b) devised an objective measure to measure motive to avoid success, on which results similar to Horner were achieved. Good and Good (1973a) further also constructed an objective measure of fear of appearing incompetent which showed that female students were significantly higher than males.

The present study was designed to check the findings of Good and Good in the Indian set up. Precisely the objectives are: (i) To study the sex differences on motive to avoid success and fear of appearing incompetent; (ii) to study the relationship between the projective measure of motive to avoid success and fear of appearing incompetent, in males and females; and (iii) to study the usefulness of the new measure of motive to avoid success as proposed by Horner, Tresemer, Berens, and Watson (1973).

METHOD

Sample

A total 460 adolescents (230 males and 230 females) with their age ranging from 18 to 23 years were taken as a sample.

Instruments

Motive to Avoid Success

It was developed by Horner et al. (1973). The subjects were asked to write a story around neutral cue sentences. They examined a written cue for 30 seconds followed by 5 minutes to write a story. There were four cues, suggested as appropriate, for measuring motive to avoid success presented in the following order: (i) Sita/Mohan is sitting in a chair with a smile on her/his face; (ii) After dinner Ram/Sheela went back to his/her desk; (iii) Radha/Aman is talking to an older person about something important; and (iv) Usha/Rahul learned that she/he received the highest score on the national merit examination.

Motive to avoid success was scored by detecting the presence of imagery in six content categories which yield values from -2 to +8 for each story (Horner et al., 1973). The motive to avoid success score was

the sum of all the scores obtained on all the stories, a higher score denoting higher motive to avoid success and vice versa.

Fear of Appearing Incompetent

Good and Good (1973a) have developed this scale. It consists of 36 items, which are to be answered in a Yes/No response dichotomy, indicative of the presence or absence of the fear.

Procedure

Both the tests were scored keeping in view the instructions provided by the authors. Before scoring the TAT protocols for Motive to Avoid Success a trainer reliability of .89 was established.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Means and standard deviations for males and females on the Motive to Avoid Success and Fear of Appearing Incompetent Scale are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Means and standard deviations on Fear of Success and Fear of Appearing Incompetent Scale

Variables	Males (n= 230)		Females (n= 230)		t
	M	SD	M	SD	
Fear of Success	13.72	4.36	15.57	3.68	4.91*
Fear of Appearing Incompetent	17.33	5.62	18.82	5.53	2.87

df = 458, **p* < .01

Univariate *t*-test was used to check the significance of difference between the males and the females. On the Motive to Avoid Success scale females had a mean score of 15.57, *SD* = 3.68; while the mean score of males is 13.72, *SD* = 4.36. The calculated *t*-value

[$t(458) = 4.91, p < .01$] suggests a significant difference between the males and females on the construct of motive to avoid success.

On the fear of appearing incompetent scale the females had a mean score of 18.82, $SD = 5.53$ and the males had a mean score of 17.33, $SD = 5.62$. The calculated t -value [$t(458) = 2.87, p < .01$] suggests a significant difference between the males and the females, supporting the results of Good and Good (1973a).

A positive correlation between the scores of Fear of Success scale and Fear of Appearing Incompetent scale appeared. Scores for males correlated $r = .18$ ($p < .01$), and scores for females correlated $r = .30$ ($p < .01$). The moderate significant positive correlation for females indicate that females naturally experience greater fear of many things. Though males have also shown a positive and significant correlation the relationship is not highly significant.

It is evident that females are higher on fear of success and fear of appearing incompetent as well. They are significantly different from the males on these constructs though sex role stereotypes expect the males to achieve, a condition which might lead one to expect greater fear of incompetence in males. At the same time, we should not overlook the idea that achievement situations are even seen as a challenge to show their worth for females in the fast developing set up.

But it is the fear of a number of things which distance them from the achievement situations reflecting upon the socialization practices commonly used with females in India. They have always been considered to be more incompetent than males despite their competencies. Thus to avoid situations which would in some way reflect their incompetence they tend to avoid all achievement situations.

The results support Horner's (1968, 1972) contention pertaining to motive to avoid success, and Good and Good (1973a) assessment relating to fear of appearing incompetent.

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