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# Need for Power

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## Need for Power

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### Synonyms

nPower; Power motivation; Power motive

### Definition

The need for power is a motivational disposition to take pleasure out of having impact on others or the environment in general and to feel aversion to others' influence on oneself.

### Introduction

According to McClelland (1961) the need for power (nPower) is one of three basic types of human motivation (along with the need for achievement and the need for affiliation). Power motivation can be conceptualized as two distinguishable motives: personalized (pPower) and socialized (sPower; e.g., McClelland 1970, 1975, Winter 1973). Personalized power and socialized power are convergent in the desire to have influence on others but divergent in their final consequences.

## Personalized and Socialized Power

The need for power can be expressed in many different ways. Primarily it has been associated with aggressive and antisocial behaviors. Therefore, this type of nPower has a negative connotation in society and is not socially desirable motivation. However, one can also express power motives through more benevolent and prosocial actions like providing help or advice. The former is labeled as “personalized power” and the latter as “socialized power” (McClelland 1970, 1975; Winter 1973).

Personalized power is a desire for direct control or dominance for self-serving and even anti-social ends. Individuals particularly motivated by pPower both see life as a “zero-sum game” and also have a “me-against-the-world” attitude (McClelland 1975). They often pay little attention to the needs and thoughts of others. Personalized pPower has been associated with the acquisition of prestigious possessions (Winter 1973) and vertical individualism (Torelli and Shavitt 2010).

Socialized power, on the other hand, is manifested indirectly by helping others through guiding or supporting them (McAdams 1985) which is a more acceptable form of power. Individuals high in sPower have a one-with-the-world outlook (McClelland 1987). Socialized nPower is positively related to prosocial decision-making (Magee and Langner 2008) and horizontal collectivism (Torelli and Shavitt 2010).

## Gender Differences in the Expression of nPower

Aggressive power expression, associated with pPower, is often described as higher in men than women. Moreover, men more frequently than women choose careers that involve leadership. Women, on the other hand, manifest their power motive through offering unsolicited help to others. As a consequence, women high in nPower prefer occupations related to helping rather than centered on personal dominance (e.g., teachers). It can be explained by the fact that during socialization men become more oriented to personal dominance than women and women are more focused on others (e.g., McClelland 1975; Winter 1988).

## Explicit and Implicit Measures of the Need for Power

As other basic motivational constructs, the power motive can operate implicitly or explicitly. The implicit and explicit needs for power are measured differently and are highly independent of each other (Köllner and Schultheiss 2014).

The implicit power motivation is not consciously accessible and must be measured indirectly, usually with an adapted form of the Thematic Apperception Test or other written responses to a motive-eliciting stimulus or situation (for instance, Picture Story Exercise – PSE). The implicit nPower usually predicts task performance.

In contrast, explicit power motivation is assessed by self-reports and is more likely to predict judgements and conscious decision-making than performance.

## Individual and Biological Correlates of the Need for Power

There is evidence that the need for power is positively correlated with baseline testosterone – power-motivated individuals have higher testosterone (cf. Stanton and Schultheiss 2009). Nevertheless, the correlation is rather low, which

implies that there are also other factors shaping individuals' nPower like heritability, parenting styles, and life experience (McClelland 1987). Yet, the relationship between nPower and testosterone seems to be more complex. For instance, research has shown that, when individuals engage in dominance situations, the changes in their testosterone levels depend not only on their nPower but also on whether they win or lose. Testosterone increases after a victory and decreases after a defeat and these changes are more significant in power-motivated individuals (cf. Stanton and Schultheiss 2009).

Much as the link between testosterone and the power motive in men is clear, the relationship between testosterone in women and nPower in women is inconsistent (see Stanton and Edelstein 2009 for a review). Potential explanation of this incoherence can be provided by studies on relationship between estradiol and power motive in women. Yet, there are just a few studies concerning the topic; their findings suggest that estradiol may play a similar role in women's nPower to that of testosterone in men (Stanton and Edelstein 2009; Stanton and Schultheiss 2009).

## Conclusion

The need for power is a complex disposition which is related to a number of diverse behaviors, from physical or psychological aggression through gaining a reputation of an important person to, finally, providing advice or help.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [McClelland, David C.](#)
- ▶ [Need for Achievement](#)
- ▶ [Need for Affiliation](#)
- ▶ [Needs](#)
- ▶ [Thematic Apperception Test](#)

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