

Americans more focused on achievement, less power-hungry

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Today's U.S. college students are more focused on achievement than power, an attitude that could help them be more innovative and successful than foreign rivals, according to University of Michigan psychology research.

In a study published in the current *Journal of Personality Assessment*, U-M psychologists Joyce Pang and Oliver Schultheiss compared the motivations of more than 700 American and German college students.

Using an indirect measure that taps into individuals' non-conscious needs for achievement, affiliation and power, Pang and Schultheiss found that U.S. students scored higher in achievement motivation and lower in power motivation than German students. The two student populations did not differ in their need for affiliation.

In past research, the need for achievement has been linked to innovation, small business success, and economic growth. The need for power, on the other hand, has been linked to successful leadership, but also to sex and aggression.

So do these findings suggest that educated Americans are more entrepreneurial and less imperial than educated Germans?

"The difference in achievement motivation is very consistent with the fact that the U.S. currently has a stronger economy than Germany does," Pang said.

She believes that the difference in achievement motivation may be at the core of these economic differences.

"The design of our study does not allow us to draw a direct causal inference," she said. "But past research clearly shows that increases in people's achievement motivation boost productivity through increased self-reliance and a willingness to take calculated risks."

Oliver Schultheiss, a U-M associate professor of psychology, points out that historically, Germans have always been higher than U.S. Americans in their need for power.

This was the case even after World War II, and Germany's collective concern with power may have contributed back then to the Wirtschaftswunder, Germany's post-war effort to regain respectability through building a strong economy.

"What helped us then may hamper us now," Schultheiss, a German expatriate, said.

He speculated that the high levels of power motivation observed in German students may reflect a collective concern with status, a concern that may make Germans less willing to compromise and give up privileges for the sake of reforms that would help Germany's economy to get back on track.

Source: University of Michigan

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