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## Need for Achievement (n Ach) and Occupation

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if students have a higher Need for Achievement (n Ach) than people who are not in school and in part-time employment. Need for achievement was converted into categories (achieved and not achieved) instead of individual scores in order to control for the non-normal distribution of the data. There was also a cue category, and each participant was placed in either a high cue category or a low cue category. The hypothesis was that students in the high cue category would have a high n Ach and students in the low cue would have a moderate n Ach. Employees were hypothesized to have a moderate n Ach level in the high cue category and little to no n Ach in the low cue category. Two chi-squared tests of independence were conducted: one for achieved and one for not achieved. The achieved chi-squared found no significant result  $\chi^2(1, N = 9) = 2.38, p > 0.05$  and the not achieved also found no significant result  $\chi^2(1, N = 21) = 0.38, p > 0.05$ . Coding was compared to another psychology student and a moderate inter-rater reliability of 73% was found.

*Keywords:* Need for achievement (n Ach), Occupation, Student, part-time employment

A motive is considered to be a desire to strive for a certain level of satisfaction (Atkinson and Feather, 1966). The achievement motive is present when a person sees high performance as a necessary tool for personal accomplishment (Atkinson and Feather, 1966). Therefore, a person believes they must have high performance in order to be satisfied. Need for Achievement (n Ach) is a level of desire towards achievement; this desire is created by what is called achievement imagery (Gorman, 2004). Achievement imagery is the ways in which attitudes towards achievement is portrayed to the person in their everyday lives, in stories, images, and videos (Gorman, 2004). A person who is surrounded by, and grew up around, images that are

highly motivating and full of achievements, are more likely to express high n Ach. For example people, who grew up around the idea of needing to perform hard work in order to succeed, will perform hard work. People with high n Ach tend have a desire to succeed with a standard that surpasses excellence and are ambitious with the tasks they seek out (Smith, et al., 1992).

People high in achievement motivation are most likely seeking out moderately difficult tasks, because they would like to improve themselves (Smith, et al., 1992). It is more likely to improve a task that is moderately difficult than it is to do something extremely difficult and therefore you have better chances at succeeding with a high standard of excellence. Many prestigious occupations that are highly rewarding in terms of money also have a higher difficulty level in terms of success (Atkinson and Feather, 1966). For example, being a medical doctor can be very rewarding in terms of money, but it is not easy to attain an M.D., it requires a lot of motivation and dedication to complete all that is required to become a doctor. Once in the prestigious field, achievement motivation is maintained, if not improved, due to upward mobility and increased performance in the field (Atkinson and Feather, 1966).

People in different environments seem to have different levels of n Ach. McClelland conducted a longitudinal study assessing the n Ach levels in sophomore students and found high n Ach ended in entrepreneurial jobs compared to low n Ach who were found to have non-entrepreneurial jobs (McClelland, 1965). People with high n Ach tend to be in professions requiring them to take initiatives and risks in their everyday schedules (McClelland, 1965). Although, achievement motivation, in regards to improving performance on something, seems to be the same regardless of culture because the effects of arousing motivation is the same, not the achievement itself (Smith, et al., 1992). People will show a high motivation to improve

themselves, across all cultures, regardless if they actually fulfill the goal of improving themselves.

High or low n Ach has been known to affect the ways in which a person creates and completes goals and therefore affecting overall performance (Bipp and Dam, 2014). Different goals are created due to different motivational needs a person has, and one motivation a person has can trigger other types of motivations (Bipp and Dam, 2014). For example a student may have a goal of receiving a particular grade in a class, which will motivate them to study harder, and if they succeed they may create a new goal of making the Dean's list and therefore surpassing a standard of excellence.

Motivational behaviour occurs when it matches the goals of the person (Bipp and Dam, 2014). Students in University have a goal of completing their degree, and possibly continuing after graduation, therefore there should be a high level of motivation to succeed. There is an assumption that school success can be predicted only if the environment is particularly challenging for the individual (Smith, et al., 1992). Students in a University setting should have a higher n Ach because they are in an environment involving constant challenges.

Men with high n Ach are interested in prestigious occupations, involving upward mobility and money (Smith, et al., 1992). Richard Steers (1975) conducted a study and found n Ach was related to job performance, and job attitude. Performance in a job represents an intrinsic reward for the person, and therefore a person with high n Ach will try and strive for the reward (Steers, 1975). People with high n Ach will have a better attitude and performance towards a job they are in because they will be in a field that is challenging and motivating them. People low in n Ach do not view performance as necessary for job satisfaction (Steers, 1975).

Need for achievement has been a successful predictor job proficiency, training success, educational success, admirable behaviour, and law-abiding behaviour (Amyx and Alford, 2005). When a salesperson has a possibility for mobility and independence in their field, they are more likely to stay in their position because they have the opportunity to improve (Amyx and Alford, 2005). If a person with high n Ach has no freedom to improve in their field they are more likely to leave in order to help them find new opportunities elsewhere.

The purpose of the following study is to determine whether or not students in a University will have higher n Ach than those who are not in school and in part-time employment. The theory is students are in University because they are trying to challenge themselves at a high standard of excellence, where part-time employees are at Canadian Tire not because of the achievement factor, but for some reason other than achievement motivation. McClelland and Atkinson found that people who are in conditions with high achievement cues showed higher n Ach than those in a neutral condition, although the findings were not significant (Smith, et al., 1992). Instead of a neutral condition, the following study will include a high achievement cue and a low achievement cue. The study is looking to find high n Ach in students in the high condition, moderate n Ach in students in the low condition, low n Ach in employees in the high condition, and next to no n Ach in the employee low condition.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

There were 30 participants who completed this study. Thirteen Canadian Tire, Hyde Park, employees and seventeen students of Western University, as well as the Huron, King's, and Brescia affiliates, were the participants of the study. All participants were between the ages 18 and 26.

**Materials**

The materials used for this study were: an iPhone timer, a variation on the widely used valid Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), a scoring system for the TAT written by McClelland and retrieved from (Cole, 2015) with an inter-rater reliability, a low and high achievement cue story written by the researcher, and a gender neutral sentence stub written by the researcher, along with instructions and a list of guidelines on how to complete the task in four minutes. The low cue story can be found in Appendix A, the high cue story can be found in Appendix B, and the instructions; guidelines; and sentence stub can be found in Appendix C.

**Procedure**

Most participants were directly asked in person, by the researcher, to participate in the study. Others had responded to a social media post on Facebook and volunteered to participate. Participants from the University conducted the study in a quiet location at the University. Participants from Canadian Tire participated in the quiet break room or Tim Horton's. Participants were asked to read a letter of information explaining the study included a projective test and therefore may reveal things about themselves they would not otherwise disclose if asked directly. A coin was flipped to determine which category the first participant was placed in. If heads appeared the first participant was placed in the low cue category and if tails appeared they were placed in the high cue category. Once placed into their respective categories they had to read a short story either containing low achievement cue motivation and high achievement cue motivation. They were then told they would have to write a story after reading a set of guidelines. The participants were given some time to think about the sentence stub and form an idea of what they were going to write about, they then had 4 minutes to complete the task.

Once the stories were collected, they were coded on the eleven-point achievement scale for the TAT. The data was then converted into categories; achieved or not achieved.

Each participant was also entered in a draw to win one of two \$25 gift cards. A professor, Dr. Cole of Huron University College, selected two winners from the draw. Once the winners were selected they were given the opportunity to choose where they would like their gift card to be from.

### Results

Need for achievement was measured on an eleven-point scale, retrieved from (Cole, 2015).

Figure 1 graph's the data collected from participants who showed n Ach and those who did not show any n Ach. The achieved portion of the graph demonstrates any participant who had an n Ach score higher than zero. The not achieved portion of the graph represents any participant who showed an n Ach that did not surpass zero. All coding materials used for this data can be found on page 178, of the book Theories of Motivation written by Bernard Weiner.

Figure 1 shows a small amount of participants demonstrating n Ach. There are no participants in the low cue school category who showed any need for achievement. Students in the high cue category did have a higher achievement rate than those in the workplace categories. In figure 1 there is more workplace participants who did not achieve anything than workplace participants who did achieve.

Two chi-squared tests of independence were conducted for those who showed achievement and those who did not show achievement. The achievement found no significant results  $\chi^2(1, N = 9) = 2.38, p > 0.05$ , and no achievement found no significant results  $\chi^2(1, N = 21) = 0.38, p > 0.05$ . Cramer's V was not calculated due to not having significant data. Another

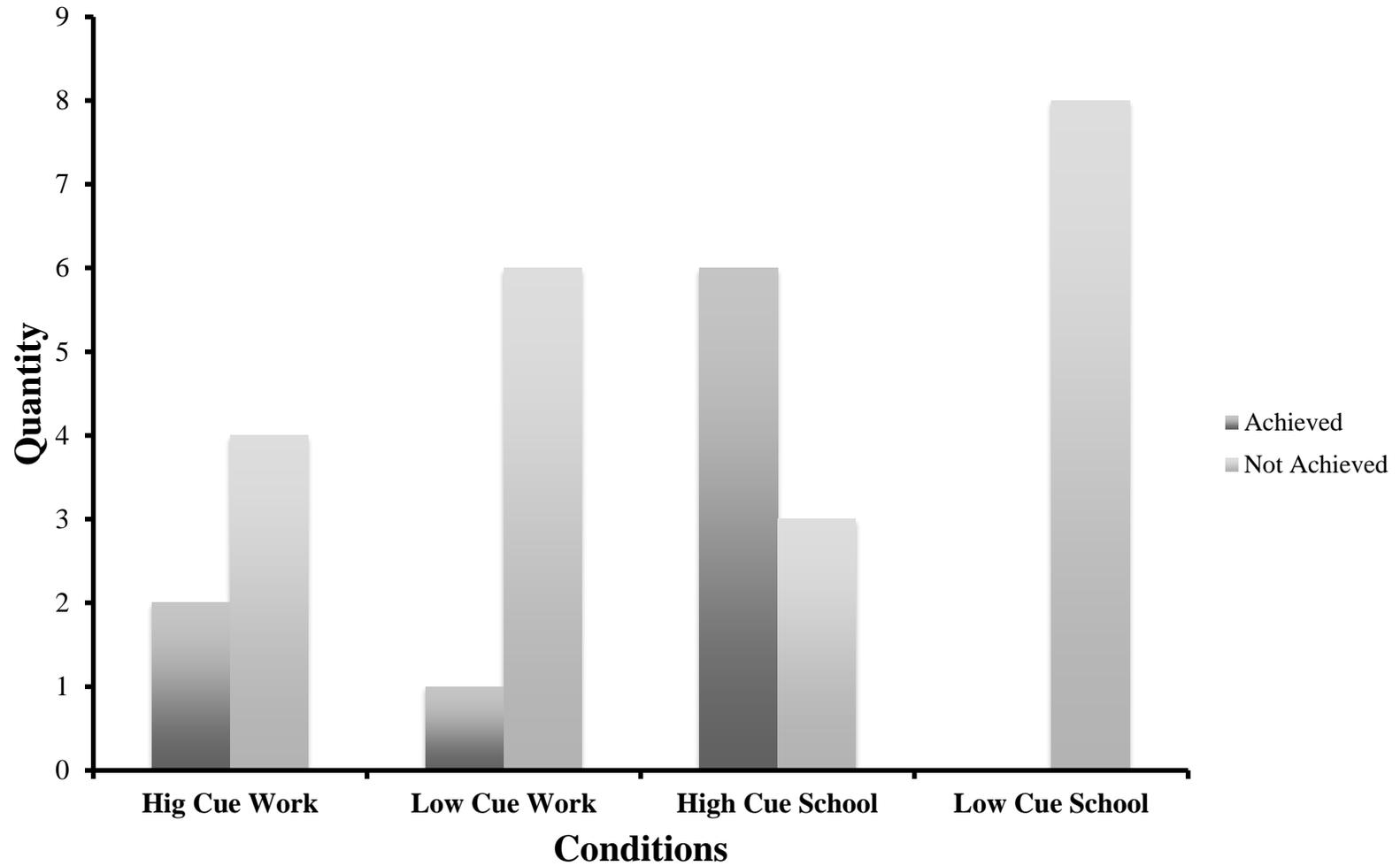


Figure 1 is a bar graph representing students and employees who either demonstrated or did not demonstrate need for achievement in a high or low cue condition.

third year Psychology student was asked to code the data and an inter-rater reliability measurement was performed and it was found to have a moderate reliability of 73%.

### **Discussion**

The goal of this experiment was to determine whether or not students had higher n Ach than non-student part-time employees at Canadian Tire and the results are disappointing. The chi-squared tests of independence both showed no significant effects of n Ach. A 2X2 ANOVA was originally going to be calculated, but the data was not a normal distribution when coded on an eleven-point scale. Therefore, the data had to be converted into categories where the participants either showed n Ach or they did not show any n Ach. Those who showed n Ach were given a point of 1 and those who did not were given a point of 0.

Even if the findings had been significant it would not have supported the hypothesis. High n Ach did not occur in any of the categories because they were all converted into either achieved or not achieved, but even before they were converted the highest score a person received was four. It was all hypothesized that students in the low cue category would perform at a moderate level, but not a single student in this category demonstrated any kind of need for achievement. The high cue category for both student and employees had a higher number of people who achieved than the low cue categories, but as previously mentioned this is not based on the level of n Ach it is purely on if they demonstrated any n Ach.

There were many limitations to this study. Finding participants from Canadian Tire was difficult, many people did not want to take time out of their day to complete the task. Some of the employees agreed to participate and set up a time, but never showed up for the scheduled

time. Having more time to gather participants would have created more time for the participants to take part in the study.

There was also a lot of potential bias in the coding of the stories. Many participants had asked the researcher if they could disclose what they wrote in their story and when they asked not to, in order to avoid bias, they disregarded these instructions and told the researcher what they wrote anyway. Therefore, when coding the researcher knew what story belonged to which participant. The researcher could make the rules of the study more clearly to the participants and explained in more detail why they could not disclose their stories. There was also one story that has two colours of pen on it, this occurred because the participant realized after writing it the researcher would not be able to read it and they corrected their unreadable words with a different coloured pen. Bias may have occurred in these scenarios because the researcher would have known the participants and judged the stories based on the participant not by the coding sheet. In order to prevent these errors participants could type their stories instead of writing them by hand and avoid any legibility issues in the future.

Another limitation to the study was background information on the participants. Employees should have been asked if they had any previous University experience, not just if they were currently in University. As well University students should have been asked if they also have a part-time job. As well, the position of the Canadian Tire employment may have affected the participant's scores some of the employees were managers, retail associates, customer service, or a cashier. Participants in a manager position may have affected the data in terms of showing n Ach when it was expected they would not.

Students should have been asked which program they were in, there were only four participants the researcher knew the program they were in and these participants were in

psychology, two of which were in the 2280E class. It is possible students who are in programs requiring higher education have a higher n Ach, than those who are in programs that do not have an end goal. The two participants in the 2280E class did not participate until after a lecture on n Ach was presented, and therefore they knew how to perform the TAT in a way that would demonstrate a higher n Ach.

Another limitation to the study was the relationship between the participants and the researcher. The researcher knew the participants on a personal level and some of the participants did not take the study seriously because of the biased relationship they had with the researcher. In the future to correct this problem the researcher could use the SONA system, which provides first year students in the 1100E class at Huron University College.

Having a sentence stub was supposed to eliminate the gender bias, but when participants read the cue stories it had gendered terms such as, he or she. These terms in the stories were unavoidable when writing the stories, but it did not seem to be an issue when participants were writing their stories. As well these stories were written by the researcher and they should have been written so they would score high on n Ach and low on n Ach, but instead the stories were written in terms of what the researcher wrote as having high achievement goals and low achievement goals

Another limitation was the researcher only used participants from Western University and Canadian Tire (the Hyde Park location). The study should be extended to students of other Universities as well as to either multiple Canadian Tires or different franchises. Different franchises are useful because it would have more variation in part-time employment instead of just one retail location.

There was also a limitation of a large age gap. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 26 because some of the employees at Canadian Tire were much older and had been working there for years, but it was difficult to eliminate them because there was a small amount of people who agreed to participate. This age gap may have affected n Ach scores that were much lower than people who were in part-time employment and were younger.

A future possibility for this study is to compare University students on n Ach with college students. There is a stigma that University is harder than College, and it would be interesting to see if this is reflected in people's n Ach scores. A second future possibility would be to test different faculties on their n Ach, for example an English major and a Psychology major.

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Appendix A

Low Cue Story

Jessie is fresh out of high school and has decided not to move towards higher education. Instead Jessie has decided to remain working at McDonalds and possibly take the year off. Jessie has no idea what to do for the rest of his life, but does not want to try and figure it out now. So Jessie remains living with his parents until he figures it out.

Appendix B

High Cue Story

Avery is in the middle of applying to medical school. Avery is so busy all of the time. Avery is also finishing his thesis, as well as volunteering at the local hospital. In his free time he enjoys reading medical journals that involve research on cancer. Avery has already decided that he would like to specialize in oncology once he has started his residency.

Appendix C

Guidelines and Sentence stubs

You have 4 minutes to write a story about the sentence to follow.

Here are some guiding questions for you to follow when creating your story

- 1) What is happening? Who are the persons?
- 2) What has led up to this situation; that is, what has happened in the past?
- 3) What is being thought? What is wanted; by whom?
- 4) What will happen? What will be done?

Jamie is sitting at a desk, staring at the floor.