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Basic Social Motives and Social Psychological Service System Construction

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Abstract

The fundamental social motivational system constitutes an intrinsic driving force that, by managing threats, challenges, and opportunities in social life to achieve the ultimate goals of survival and reproduction, motivates and regulates behavior, thereby postulating core needs and motivations in human social existence from an evolutionary psychology perspective. Extensive research demonstrates that it not only exerts broad influence on social behavior, but also continuously affects the psychology and behavior of individuals and regional populations when activation conditions persist. Consequently, fundamental social motivation can serve as a crucial psychological indicator for assessing the stability of socioeconomic order and individuals' sense of gain, happiness, and security. Currently, relevant domestic research remains limited. Future research should take fundamental social motivation as the entry point to explore the basic psychological needs indicator system for constructing a social psychological service system, investigate the interactions between fundamental social motivation and socioeconomic behavior as well as the social ecological environment within the Chinese cultural context, and provide a psychological basis for formulating social governance-related policies.

Full Text

Fundamental Social Motives and the Construction of Public Psychological Service Systems

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Abstract

The fundamental social motive system represents an intrinsic motivational framework that evolved to manage threats, challenges, and opportunities in social life in service of humanity's ultimate biological goals of survival and reproduction. From an evolutionary psychological perspective, this system identifies core human needs and motivations in social contexts. Extensive research demonstrates that fundamental social motives exert broad influences on social behavior, and when activation conditions persist, they continue to shape the psychology and behavior of both individuals and regional populations. Consequently, fundamental social motives can serve as crucial psychological indicators for assessing socioeconomic stability and people's sense of gain, happiness, and security. Currently, domestic research on this topic remains limited. Future studies should use fundamental social motives as an entry point to explore foundational psychological demand indicator systems for public psychological service construction, investigate the interactions between fundamental social motives and socioeconomic behavior within China's cultural context, and provide psychological evidence for social governance policy formulation.

Keywords: fundamental social motives; social behavior; social governance

Classification Number: B849:C91

The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China states that Chinese socialism has entered a new era, and the principal social contradiction has evolved into the tension between the people's ever-growing needs for a better life and unbalanced, inadequate development. These needs encompass both material and psychological dimensions. How can we measure and ultimately satisfy people's psychological needs? The Congress report proposes "strengthening the construction of public psychological service systems" to "ensure that people's sense of gain, happiness, and security are more substantiated, better guaranteed, and more sustainable" (19th Congress Report, 2017). This underscores that building robust public psychological service systems represents a vital pathway toward modernizing social governance and enhancing these three dimensions of people's well-being.

Public psychological service system construction constitutes a core component of social governance. It involves providing psychological services and guiding public sentiment through public policies and services at individual, organizational, societal, and cultural levels based on citizens' psychological needs, aiming to comprehensively strengthen psychological development. The ultimate goals are to improve individual mental health literacy, enhance organizational development effectiveness, and advance the modernization of social governance systems and capabilities. This endeavor represents a social governance practice grounded in accurate understanding of citizens' psychological needs. Needs generate motives, and motives determine behavior. Fundamental social motives—psychological forces underlying social behavior that serve humanity's ultimate biological goals of survival and reproduction—represent deep psychological factors driving

numerous social behaviors. The social behaviors elicited by fundamental social motives likely constitute important forces shaping social and economic order, while the degree of goal attainment in these motive systems probably functions as a root psychological factor influencing people' s comprehensive evaluations of life quality.

In recent years, the concept of fundamental social motives has attracted considerable attention from researchers in personality psychology, social psychology, economic psychology, and management psychology, accumulating rich empirical findings. This article introduces the structure of the fundamental social motive system, reviews research on activation conditions and the system' s influence on socioeconomic behaviors, and examines connections among fundamental social motives, social governance, and the three dimensions of people' s well-being. Through this analysis, we explore the significance of fundamental social motives for public psychological service system construction and discuss future research directions.

The Structure of Fundamental Social Motives

As highly social group-living animals, humans face the biological imperative of survival and reproduction. To achieve this ultimate goal, humans must address fundamental, recurrent, and core threats, challenges, and opportunities in social group life, such as protecting oneself from enemies and predators, avoiding disease transmission, getting along with group members, acquiring social status to gain resources, securing quality mates, establishing relationships with mates, and cooperatively raising offspring. To manage these basic social threats, challenges, and opportunities, humans evolved a system that energizes, organizes, and selects behavior—the fundamental social motive system. We inherited this psychological strategy from our successfully reproducing ancestors. Based on evolutionary psychological theory, Kenrick, Griskevicius, Neuberg, and Schaller (2010) integrated and expanded Maslow' s hierarchy of needs by linking fundamental motives to threats and opportunities in group living, proposing the fundamental social motive system. This system comprises seven domains: Self-protection, Disease avoidance, Affiliation, Status seeking, Mate seeking, Mate retention, and Kin care (e.g., Kenrick et al.,2010; Ackerman & Kenrick, 2008; Kenrick, Li, & Butner, 2003).

Self-protection refers to the motive to protect oneself from harm by others. Disease avoidance involves avoiding infection. Affiliation encompasses forming friendships, alliances, or group/organizational belonging to gain allies, including three sub-dimensions: Group belonging, Exclusion concern, and Independence. Status seeking involves attaining higher status through success, power, and wealth, along with associated prestige, reputation, and authority. Mate seeking concerns finding partners who can help transmit one' s genes to the next generation, including romantic partners and spouses. Mate retention involves maintaining partner loyalty and preventing others from poaching one' s mate, comprising two sub-dimensions: Mate retention general (investing substantial

time, energy, and money to maintain the relationship and reduce poaching risk) and Breakup concern (worry about losing one's partner). Kin care involves caring for offspring (one's own and relatives') and family members, including Family care and Children sub-dimensions (Morse, Neel, Todd, & Funder, 2015).

Within the fundamental social motive system, the currently activated motive determines behavioral choices and guides behavioral direction. For instance, when status seeking is activated, people value connections with high-status individuals or status-displaying objects, may sever ties with low-status-related people or things, and invest more psychological resources (such as attention) along with time and money into status-acquisition behaviors (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008; DuBois, Rucker & Galinsky, 2012). Other currently inactive motives remain in the background.

Activation Conditions of Fundamental Social Motives

Many motivational theories address human behavior, yet fundamental social motive theory has attracted substantial researcher attention primarily because it describes how evolution shaped psychology and behavior based on human biological functions, and focuses on responding to different types of fundamental threats and opportunities in social life, directly connecting to numerous social behaviors. Both external and internal cues related to fundamental threats and opportunities in social life can trigger or activate corresponding fundamental social motives.

External cues that activate fundamental social motives fall into two categories. First, macro-environmental cues: Research shows that significant regional sex ratio differences chronically activate mate seeking motives (e.g., men prefer more women than men, women prefer more men than women) (e.g., Ackerman, Maner, & Carpenter, 2016; Griskevicius, et al., 2012); people in high-crime cities show stronger self-protection motives (Levine, Reysen, & Ganz, 2008); areas with high residential mobility exhibit lower group belonging motivation (Oishi, Ishii, & Lun, 2009). These findings demonstrate that features embedded in social ecology, economic conditions, and political environments can chronically activate certain motives, continuously influencing human behavior in those contexts. Second, specific situational cues: Studies show that directly experiencing/recalling, reading reports, or imagining relevant situations can activate corresponding motives. Hearing people sneeze or cough, smelling unpleasant odors, or seeing abnormal skin activates disease avoidance motives (Ackerman et al., 2009); seeing impoverished, hungry infants or being with close friends considered as kin activates kin care motives (Glocker, Langleben, Ruparel, Loughhead, & Sachser, 2009; Lieberman, Tooby, & Cosmides, 2007; Park, Schaller, & Van Vugt, 2008). Motive-related cues implicit in stereotypes and prejudices become activated when those stereotypes/prejudices are triggered. Research finds that Westerners' disease avoidance motives activate when thinking about Sri Lankans or Ethiopians (Ackerman et al., 2009; Miller & Maner, 2011); self-protection motives become immediately salient when encountering unfamiliar African or Arab

males (Maner et al., 2005; Becker et al., 2010).

Regarding internal activation cues, existing research primarily examines biological factors, such as how hormone secretion influences fundamental social motives. Studies show that women in ovulation with high progesterone levels exhibit stronger mate seeking motives and pay more attention to men (Gangestad & Thornhill, 2008; Anderson et al., 2010).

These studies demonstrate that some cues persist stably, such as regional sex ratios, wealth gaps, residential mobility, population density, and even specific policy implementations as external macro-environmental cues, or individual life environment cues embedded in family relationships, friend circles, and work environments. All these can chronically activate motives, continuously influencing motivation and related behaviors in certain regions or populations. Other cues are short-term and temporary, such as someone coughing or seeing unfamiliar outgroup males, and the activated motives influence behavior briefly without continuous stimulation.

How Fundamental Social Motives Drive Socioeconomic Behaviors

The fundamental social motive system energizes, organizes, and selects behavior, functioning as both proximal and distal causes of behavior.

The proximal influence of fundamental social motives on behavior is relatively straightforward. Research has validated various motive-related proximal behaviors. Self-protection makes people perceive the world as more dangerous and increases desire to avoid strangers; disease avoidance promotes seeking “cleanliness,” such as condom use, avoiding second-hand goods, and triggering social avoidance tendencies; affiliation strengthens existing friendships and encourages forming new ones; status seeking increases attention to one’s position in organizational hierarchies; mate seeking motivates efforts to enhance opposite-sex attractiveness; mate retention promotes love and care for partners while derogating potential rivals; kin care increases time spent with family and offspring (e.g., Tybur, Bryan, Magnan, & Caldwell Hooper, 2011; Maner, Nathan DeWall, Baumeister, & Schaller, 2007; Griskevicius & Kenrick, 2013; Schaller & Park, 2011).

As distal causes, fundamental social motives represent deep psychological forces behind numerous socioeconomic behaviors. Research shows they guide behavior across multiple domains including intergroup relations, prosocial behavior, conformity, aggression, risk and intertemporal decision-making, investment, and consumption.

Intergroup Behavior: Self-protection and disease avoidance motives stimulate intergroup hostility, making behavioral choices more dependent on stereotypes and prejudices. When self-protection is activated, people more readily feel potential danger, become more suspicious, and trigger hostility toward outgroups. In this state, encoding of outgroup members and threatening individuals

becomes more efficient; people more easily perceive neutral expressions on out-group males as angry and threatening (Maner et al., 2005; Becker et al., 2010). Under disease avoidance activation, people avoid and show hostility toward groups perceived as potentially carrying pathogens, such as poor, backward, or unfamiliar groups, displaying less tolerance toward foreigners. However, receiving flu vaccinations or washing hands with disinfectant reduces prejudice toward foreigners (Mortensen, Becker, Ackerman, Neuberg, & Kenrick, 2010; Huang, Sedlovskaya, Ackerman, & Bargh, 2011). Activating this motive makes women approach physically attractive men more quickly, prefer masculine-looking men, and perceive them as having healthier genes (Cantu, 2014).

Conformity: Both self-protection and affiliation motives increase conformity. When self-protection is activated, people become more cautious and suspicious, seeking information from others' behavior about correct actions and desiring social proof. In this state, people prefer being with others who share similar appearance, taste, or choices; favor brands chosen by the majority; and become more susceptible to others' opinions (Griskevicius, Goldstein, Mortensen, Cialdini, & Kenrick, 2006). Affiliation makes people more receptive to word-of-mouth information and more likely to accept others' views on interpersonal interaction issues such as acceptance, rejection, and deception (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Prosocial Behavior: Kin care motives significantly promote altruistic behavior. When activated, people not only sacrifice their own interests to help relatives and trust strangers similar to themselves, but also help non-kin—from caring for infants and children to providing social, economic, and safety support (Glocker et al., 2009; Burnstein, Crandall, & Kitayama, 1994; Kivett, 1985; Smith, Kish, & Crawford, 1987). Affiliation increases group-related behaviors (e.g., team sports, religious activities, volunteer work) and willingness to spend time with friends (Neel, Kenrick, White, & Neuberg, 2016), spend money on shared social experiences, give gifts, and even purchase identity-inconsistent gifts that will please recipients (Maner, Gailliot, Rouby, & Miller, 2007; Mead, Baumeister, Stillman, Rawn, & Vohs, 2011; Ward & Broniarczyk, 2011). Mate seeking motives make women more cooperative, helpful, and socially harmonious (Hill & Durante, 2011). Status seeking promotes self-interested altruism—competitive altruism where individuals sacrifice self-interest for the group to gain status (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Roberts, 1998; Van Vugt, Roberts, & Hardy, 2007). When status seeking is activated, people increase reputation and status by spending money on others or choosing environmentally friendly products (Rucker, DuBois, & Galinsky, 2011; Griskevicius, Tybur, & Van den Bergh, 2010).

Aggressive Behavior: The desire to acquire resources and protect oneself both lead to aggression. Griskevicius and Tybur's research (2009) found that status seeking increases aggressive behavior—men increase direct confrontational aggression, while women increase indirect aggression through social exclusion. Neel et al.'s study (2016) showed that self-protection activation increases ag-

gressive behaviors such as yelling at or pushing others.

Risk and Intertemporal Decision-Making: Mate seeking, status seeking, self-protection, and kin care motives influence risk and intertemporal choices. Mate seeking changes men's risk and intertemporal decision-making, affecting rational behavior by reducing loss aversion (Li, Kenrick, Griskevicius, & Neuberg, 2012), increasing risk-seeking and impulsivity (Baker & Maner, 2008; Knutson, Wimmer, Kuhnen, & Winkielman, 2008), decreasing savings, increasing credit card use for quick payments (Griskevicius et al., 2012), and preferring immediate small rewards over delayed large rewards (Griskevicius et al., 2007; Van den Bergh, Dewitte, & Warlop, 2008). Conversely, self-protection makes people seek safety, avoid risk, and intensify unpleasantness from losses (Lerner & Keltner, 2001; Li et al., 2012). Kin care also reduces risk-taking (Neel et al., 2016). Status seeking activation makes people more risk-seeking when high status is attainable but more conservative when status is threatened and needs defending (Maner, Gailliot, Butz, & Peruche, 2007).

Investment Behavior: Ackerman et al.'s research (2016) found that when mate seeking motives are activated and mating competition is intense, people prefer high-risk, high-return speculative investment products, concentrating money on single products—whether lottery tickets, stocks, or pension insurance—rather than diversifying assets to improve risk tolerance. Under such conditions, people believe that risk-taking and possessing more resources are necessary to succeed in competitive mating markets.

Consumption Behavior: Research primarily examines relationships between fundamental social motives and luxury consumption. Status seeking-driven consumption serves to enhance one's prestige. When activated, people prefer products that convey status and make impressive impressions, focusing on luxury goods and items displaying high status (DuBois, et al., 2012; Ivanic, Overbeck, & Nunes, 2011; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008). After important achievements, people are more willing to purchase goods that signal status elevation; when unable to obtain status-displaying luxury goods, they are more likely to buy counterfeits or imitations (Griskevicius, Shiota, & Nowlis, 2010; Wilcox, Kim, & Sen, 2009). When mate seeking is primed, men focus more on status-displaying items, choose more conspicuous and expensive brands, and spend more on luxury goods (e.g., Janssens et al., 2011; Sundie et al., 2011); women also spend more time, energy, and money on clothing, jewelry, cosmetics, weight loss, and cosmetic surgery (Hill & Durante, 2011). Mate retention motives make women more likely to purchase, wear, and own luxury goods to ward off competitor threats (Wang & Griskevicius, 2014).

Individual Differences in Fundamental Social Motives

Research reveals that personality, demographic, and life-history variables correlate with fundamental social motive levels. Zeigler-Hill and Hobbs (2017) examined relationships between negative personality traits and fundamental

social motives, finding that negative affectivity positively correlates with self-protection and disease avoidance; callousness positively correlates with disease avoidance and the independence dimension of affiliation, but negatively correlates with mate retention and kin care; hostility positively correlates with status seeking but negatively with kin care; and disinhibition negatively correlates with mate retention.

Neel, Kenrick, White, and Neuberg (2016) found that fundamental social motive levels vary by gender, age, relationship status, parental status, childhood stability, and resource availability. Gender differences show women score higher on self-protection, disease avoidance, exclusion concern, breakup concern, and kin care, while men score higher on mate seeking and general mate retention. Age differences reveal that older individuals show lower mate seeking, exclusion concern, child rearing, and breakup concern, but higher family care and general mate retention. Parental status differences indicate that people with children show higher self-protection, group belonging, and family care. Relationship status differences show partnered individuals have higher group belonging and family care, while unpartnered individuals have higher mate seeking and independence. Resource availability differences show that those with fewer childhood resources have higher status seeking, while those with more current resources have lower breakup concern and kin care. Childhood stability differences reveal that those with less stable childhoods have higher mate seeking and breakup concern, but lower mate retention and kin care.

These findings indicate that from a group perspective, populations differing in gender, age, relationship status, parental status, resources, and life stability exhibit different fundamental social motive levels and consequently different behavioral patterns. From a regional perspective, area-level indicators related to these variables—such as sex ratios, aging levels, and resource availability (economic development)—also vary. Beyond the sex ratio examined in existing research, regional socioeconomic characteristics like aging levels and economic development likely influence fundamental social motive levels, thereby affecting region-specific motive-related behaviors and quality-of-life perceptions.

Fundamental Social Motives in Relation to Social Governance and People' s Well-Being

The goal of public psychological service system construction is to tangibly enhance people' s sense of gain, happiness, and security. This social practice must respect citizens' psychological needs and the motives these needs activate. Fundamental social motives, with their biological foundations and close ties to complex social behaviors, represent important sensitive indicators for developing public psychological service initiatives and measuring their effectiveness.

Impact on Socioeconomic Order: As demonstrated above, fundamental social motives broadly influence social and economic psychology and behavior, energizing and regulating cognition and behavior across domains including inter-

group relations, conformity, prosocial behavior, aggression, risk/intertemporal decision-making, investment, and consumption. Prosocial behavior promotes social norm compliance; aggression and intergroup hostility directly relate to social conflict; conformity, risk/intertemporal decision-making, and speculative/singular investment preferences determine behavioral rationality. Particularly when conditions activating individual- or societal-level fundamental social motives persist chronically, they continuously influence relevant behaviors in individuals and regional populations, exerting sustained impact on socioeconomic order. Therefore, fundamental social motives serve as important psychological indicators for evaluating socioeconomic stability.

Impact on Comprehensive Life Quality Evaluations: Fundamental social motives reflect efforts to manage fundamental threats and opportunities in social life to satisfy basic needs. Motive intensity correlates with the degree of need satisfaction in social life. Thus, fundamental social motives relate to people's comprehensive evaluations of life quality—their sense of gain, happiness, and security.

Sense of gain refers to cognitive and emotional experiences arising when individuals achieve certain material and spiritual improvements, affirmation, and rewards through personal effort in a given social environment (Wang & Liu, 2019). People more easily perceive and feel gain when obtaining things they consider important and valuable. Fundamental social motives serve survival and reproduction, energizing and regulating behavior to satisfy important desires related to social life. Achieving these motive-directed goals is important and valuable to people, whether this perception of importance and value is implicit or explicit. Gains related to these motives consequently produce higher, more salient senses of gain.

Happiness represents individuals' comprehensive evaluations of their life quality according to their own standards (Diener, 1984). Research shows that health, self-esteem, and social support influence life evaluations and happiness (Davis, Morris, & Kraus, 1998; Kan & Ju, 2012). Four motives—affiliation, mate seeking, mate retention, and kin care—encompass obtaining, maintaining, providing, and fearing loss of social support. Disease avoidance clearly serves health, while status seeking's focus on hierarchy closely relates to self-esteem. Therefore, higher goal attainment in these six motives should increase happiness.

Sense of security reflects individuals' feelings about uncertainty and insecurity in a given social environment (Wang & Liu, 2019), permeating various aspects of social life including individual, economic, social (security), national, and environmental security (Vail, 1999), and influencing related uncertainty and safety perceptions. Research demonstrates that social support and resource availability can reduce threat appraisal (Eisenberger et al., 2011), buffer psychological and physiological stress responses (Epley, 1974), decrease fear (Jetten, Mols, Healy & Spears, 2017), and increase security (Bowlby, 1969; Hornstein & Eisenberger, 2018). When defensive motives like self-protection, disease avoidance, exclusion concern, breakup concern, and child-rearing are activated, people become more

sensitive to social threats—whether to their own/offspring’ s life and health or to intimate relationships—and experience higher uncertainty. When acquisition motives like status seeking and mate seeking are strong, people more easily feel their material and social resources are inadequate, resulting in lower security. Thus, the fundamental social motive system likely influences and regulates sense of security.

This analysis demonstrates that enhancing people’ s sense of gain, happiness, and security represents a key objective of public psychological services, making fundamental social motives important indicators for measuring service effectiveness and quality. The “public psychological service system” remains a developing framework. From the 17th Congress Report’ s call to “emphasize humanistic care and psychological guidance” to the 19th Congress Report’ s requirement to construct public psychological service systems, the focus has evolved from specific psychological service issues to systematic construction. Future social governance work should emphasize psychological development, genuinely start from people’ s psychological needs, apply psychological principles to innovate social governance, and truly enable people to feel enhanced gain, happiness, and security (Chen, 2018).

Summary and Recommendations

In summary, the fundamental social motive system is rooted in humanity’ s ultimate biological goals of survival and reproduction, serving as a foundational intrinsic force that energizes and regulates social behavior. This system focuses on how people manage challenges in interactions with others, groups, and society, effectively predicting social behavior. All motives in the system persist throughout life, though their salience and behavioral influence vary due to situational factors, developmental stages, or individual/group differences. Moreover, fundamental social motives exist at both individual and societal levels. Different communities and regions vary in socioeconomic factors such as aging levels, economic development, residential mobility, population density, wealth gaps, and crime rates. The most salient factors in a given area can chronically activate related fundamental social motives, creating region-specific group behavioral manifestations that become persistent intrinsic forces shaping different regional behavior patterns and quality-of-life perceptions.

Since its proposal, fundamental social motive theory has attracted widespread academic attention, though domestic research remains in its infancy. In response to national needs for public psychological service system construction, Chinese scholars should draw on this theory’ s insights to develop effective measurement tools for Chinese populations’ fundamental social motives and conduct large-scale surveys to establish norms for different groups. Using fundamental social motives as an entry point, researchers should construct indicators and measurement tools for assessing psychological service needs and quality. Simultaneously, they should deeply explore how fundamental social motives influence individual-, group-, and societal-level behaviors in contemporary Chinese soci-

ety, and investigate interactions between fundamental social motives and social-ecological/economic environments. This includes identifying relationships between fundamental social motives and regional factors such as birth rates, aging levels, economic development, residential mobility, population density, wealth gaps, and crime rates. Through basic and applied research on these patterns, mechanisms, interventions, and guidance, we can provide reliable psychological evidence for formulating and implementing social governance policies in China.

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Effects of Fundamental Social Motives on Social Behaviors and the System of Public Psychological Services

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Abstract: The effects of fundamental social motives in improving the system of public psychological services are examined in this work. Fundamental social motives are systems shaped by human evolutionary history to energize, organize, and select behaviors to manage recurrent social threats and opportunities for reproductive fitness. Such systems include self-protection, disease avoidance, affiliation, status seeking, mate seeking, mate retention, and kin care (Neel, Kenrick, White & Neuberg, 2015). Evidence on the priming of fundamental social motives and the influence of such motives on social and economic behaviors are reviewed. How and why these motives influence social and economic public order as well as well-being, feelings of security, and perceived gains are likewise explored. Moreover, the potentialities of fundamental social motives to become indicators of public order as well as those of the needs and quality of public psychological services are highlighted.

Keywords: fundamental social motives; social behaviors; social governance

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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