

Rosen B C. Race, ethnicity, and the achievement syndrome.
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[University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT]

A differential psychocultural orientation toward achievement helps explain why some ethnic and racial groups are more upwardly mobile than others. Achievement motivation, achievement values, and educational-occupational aspirations form an achievement syndrome that affects both the goals individuals set for themselves and their strivings to attain these goals. [The Science Citation Index® (SCI®) and the Social Sciences Citation Index® (SSCI®) indicate that this paper has been cited in over 205 publications since 1961.]

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"The Russian rocket *Sputnik* put this paper into orbit, in a manner of speaking, and it has been kept there by a recognition among social scientists that despite the melting pot, many Americans maintain their ethnic cultures and identities even after several generations in this country. The space competition with the Russians ignited the nation's interest in achievement, and the black liberation movement's struggle for equality and advancement evoked similar concerns among other racial and ethnic groups. Looking back, I can see that it was my good fortune to study the linkages between race, ethnicity, child-rearing, personality, and social mobility at a time when international and national forces converged to heighten interest in all these subjects. For an account of more recent research, see reference 1.

"My interest in ethnic cultures undoubtedly stemmed from personal factors and had already surfaced in a dissertation on

Jewish adolescents (later published as a book²) before I began work on achievement. The achievement research began when I joined a research project at Yale University in 1952 on the effects of ethnic culture on adolescent academic performance. At Yale, I encountered the new work on the achievement motivation and began to wonder if group differences in personality might not help explain class, racial, and ethnic differences in social mobility. It was only a short step from speculating about ethnicity and achievement to research on the subject, but it was a long haul before I completed the two projects that undergird this article. I had to acquire some skill in using the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), administer it to hundreds of adolescents in the northeastern US, and then interview their mothers—an exhausting job since I had no funds to hire help. Fortunately, students, a wife, and friends helped with the fieldwork and in scoring the TAT protocols. The data analysis was also time-consuming and tedious. In the pre-computer age, we had to depend on card sorters and desk calculators, and even doing a simple two-way analysis of variance took many hours, particularly when I would come up with a statistically impossible negative sum of squares—an easy mistake to make when working with a large sample.

"What particularly intrigued me about this study, apart from its confirmation of my hunches about ethnic effects on achievement, was the nice way achievement motivation, achievement values, and aspiration levels hung together, empirically and theoretically. But what was I to call this cluster? A complex? No, there were too many complexes around and besides that seemed too clinical. Syndrome seemed a better word. I remember turning to the dictionary for a precise meaning of the term. Syndrome seemed to suit, and I coined the term 'achievement syndrome' to describe this cluster of motives, values, and aspirations. To my surprise the term seems to have caught on."

1. **Fyans L F, Jr., ed.** *Achievement motivation: recent trends in theory and research.* New York: Plenum Press, 1980. 471 p.
2. **Rosen B C.** *Adolescence and religion: the Jewish teenager in American society.* Cambridge, MA: Schenlaman, 1965. 218 p.