



Machiavellianism, emotional manipulation, and friendship functions in women's friendships



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ABSTRACT

Machiavellianism and emotional manipulation has not been investigated in friendships. The current studies investigated Machiavellianism, emotional manipulation, and six friendship functions in women's same-sex friendships. For study 1, women ($N = 221$) completed the Mach IV, emotional manipulation measure (with reference to their own behaviour and their friend's behaviour), mood worsening and use of inauthentic displays from the managing emotions of others scale, and the friendship function measure. Machiavellianism predicted the self-perceived ability to employ emotional manipulation towards a same-sex friend and perceiving their friend to use emotional manipulation towards them. Machiavellianism predicted lower scores on all six friendship functions. For study 2, women ($N = 186$) completed the Mach IV, the modified emotional manipulation measure (with reference to their own behaviour and their friend's behaviour), and the friendship function measure. Women high on Machiavellianism reported using emotional manipulation more frequently towards their same-sex friend and perceived their same-sex friend to frequently use emotional manipulation towards them. Machiavellianism predicted lower scores on five of the friendship functions. These studies demonstrated that women higher on Machiavellianism employ emotional manipulation in their same-sex friendships. Women with higher Machiavellianism scores also perceived that they themselves were manipulated by their friend.

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1. Introduction

Men and women with high levels of Machiavellianism, characterised by emotional detachment, cynicism, and a manipulative interpersonal style (Christie & Geis, 1970), seek closeness from others in order to manipulate and exploit (Ináncsi, Láng, & Bereczkei, 2015). These individuals are low on empathy, not connected to their own or other peoples' emotions, and hold negative representations of others (Black, Woodworth, & Porter, 2014; Ináncsi et al., 2015; Wai & Tiliopoulos, 2012; Wastell & Booth, 2003), which may facilitate their use of manipulation. Machiavellianism influences a variety of adult relationships, and, given friendship is the most common form of social relationship (Blieszer & Adams, 1992), it is important to investigate Machiavellianism in this context. Men and women with high levels of Machiavellianism do engage in friendships, but report low friendship quality (Abell, Lyons, & Brewer, 2014; Lyons & Aitken, 2010). This is unsurprising given the high levels of suspicion, cynicism, and emotional detachment associated with Machiavellianism. Research also demonstrates that adults with high Machiavellianism levels select opposite-sex friends who are kind (Jonason & Schmitt, 2012). This may indicate a preference for friends that can be easily exploited. Furthermore, Machiavellianism is associated

with the self-reported manipulation of an opposite and same-sex friend through strategies such as the use of 'silent-treatment' and coercion (Jonason & Webster, 2012).

Women's friendships, in particular, may provide opportunities to exploit and manipulate. Women report a greater focus on interpersonal relationships (Su, Rounds, & Armstrong, 2009), which may in part reflect a greater reliance on female friends when faced with adaptive problems such as finding a mate (Jonason & Schmitt, 2012; Silverman & Choi, 2005). Women spend more time discussing feelings and personal information and their friendships tend to be dyadic in nature, which does not allow for substitute partners if relationships break down (Benenson & Christakos, 2003; David-Barrett et al., 2015; Vigil, 2007). This focus on exclusive friendships characterised by information sharing may provide a context for specific types of manipulation to take place.

Women tend to use relational aggression as a manipulation strategy and, overall, women's manipulation is reported to require more subtle methods (Wilson, Near, & Miller, 1996). This may be related to the risks of engaging in physical aggression (Campbell, 1999), but, also, it may be seen as a socially acceptable way for women to relate to each other and to build relationships (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2013). Relational aggression refers to behaviour that harms others through the manipulation of relationships using exclusion, gossip, and rumours (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Xie, Cairns, & Cairns, 2005). Relational aggression demands support from peers and/or friends because it requires them to

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listen to the gossip, help spread rumours, exclude the target individual(s), whilst also offering their own thoughts about the target (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2013). Therefore, it involves trust from others to participate and trust that they will not betray them to the target.

Although relational aggression is more subtle than direct aggression, it may be a problematic strategy for women with high levels of Machiavellianism to engage in. The use of relational aggression requires a level of trust and connection to others, and requires involvement from peers/friends. Machiavellianism is, however, characterised by distrust, suspicion, and cynicism (Christie & Geis, 1970), making relational aggression incompatible with Machiavellianism. The greater number of individuals that engage in relational aggression may also increase the likelihood of getting caught, which individuals (particularly those with high levels of Machiavellianism) wish to avoid. Although Machiavellianism is related to women's use of relational aggression towards friends online (Abell & Brewer, 2014), this may reflect the absence of face-to-face contact and the decreased reliance on others when engaging in relational aggression in this context.

It may be more beneficial to employ subtle manipulation tactics towards a close friend rather than relying on others to help employ manipulation tactics. One such tactic is emotional manipulation, which includes the use of strategies to manage the emotions of others (Austin, Farrelly, Black, & Moore, 2007; Austin & O'Donnell, 2013). Machiavellianism is associated with the use of emotional manipulation (Austin et al., 2007) and includes such tactics as strategically paying the other person a compliment and reassuring others so they will go along with what the individual wants. However, the use of emotional manipulation by people high on Machiavellianism has not been investigated in the context of friendship. Furthermore, Machiavellianism is associated with two particular strategies of emotional manipulation that are used when managing other people's emotions; worsening strategies (e.g., undermining another person's confidence, using criticism) and inauthentic strategies (e.g., eliciting sympathy, sulking to get own way). Emotional manipulation (including the use of emotion managing strategies of mood worsening and inauthentic strategies) only requires one target individual and the perpetrator, rather than the trust and connection of others that are needed during relational aggression; it is also covert, reducing the chance of detection both by the target and others. The use of emotional manipulation may reduce the likelihood of relationship breakdown, reputational damage, and the challenge of then finding a new same-sex friend.

In addition to Machiavellian women's self-reported ability to use emotional manipulation, there may also be a relationship between Machiavellianism and women's perception that their friend uses emotional manipulation directed towards them. For example, Machiavellianism is associated with viewing others as weak (e.g., Black et al., 2014), therefore, women with higher levels of Machiavellianism may view others (in particular their same-sex friend) as incapable of employing manipulation towards them. Machiavellianism is, however, also associated with distrust of others and the belief that people will try to exploit them (Christie & Geis, 1970). This may indicate that women with higher Machiavellianism scores will perceive their friend as trying to exploit them by employing emotional manipulation.

Previous research suggests that emotional manipulation is likely to be deployed by women with higher Machiavellianism scores in their close friendships with other women. These women may also report that they are targeted in this way by their close female friends. The relationship between emotional manipulation and Machiavellianism in friendship has not previously been investigated. Specifically, we report results from two studies which investigate women's perceived ability to manipulate a close same-sex friend and the perception that they themselves are manipulated (study 1) and women's self-reported frequency of employing emotional manipulation and their perception of the frequency that emotional manipulation is used towards them (study 2).

2. Study 1

Study 1 investigates whether Machiavellianism is associated with the use of emotional manipulation in friendship and the use of two specific emotional manipulation tactics (worsening and inauthentic strategies). Based on previous research (Austin et al., 2007; Austin & O'Donnell, 2013) and the potential benefits of using emotional manipulation (e.g., less reliance on others, reduced chance of getting caught), we predict that higher levels of Machiavellianism will be associated with the use of emotional manipulation (including the use of inauthentic and mood worsening strategies) towards a close female friend. In addition, this study explores the relationship between Machiavellianism and the perception of manipulation. Previous research has shown that Machiavellianism is related to poor friendship quality (Abell et al., 2014; Lyons & Aitken, 2010), but has not explored how individuals with higher levels of Machiavellianism view the functions of friendship. Therefore, the relationship between Machiavellianism and six functions of friendship will be considered. The six functions are companionship, help, intimacy, reliable alliance, self-validation, and emotional security. Although friendships may offer a number of advantages for individuals with higher Machiavellianism scores, such as help in achieving their own goals, we suggest that Machiavellianism will predict lower scores on all six friendship functions. The emotional detachment and cynicism that characterises Machiavellianism may result in women with higher scores reporting low levels of these functions because of the broad negative view they have of others.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Participants were 221 women aged 18 to 69 ($M_{age} = 27.55$, $SD = 11.17$) with an average friendship length of 123.58 months ($SD = 92.67$). The participants were a volunteer sample from online research websites and social networking sites and received no financial reward for participation.

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Machiavellianism

Machiavellianism was assessed with the 20-item Mach-IV scale (Christie & Geis, 1970), which measures morality, cynicism, and manipulative interpersonal style. Example items from the scale include "The best way to handle people is to tell them what they want to hear" and "It is wise to flatter important people". Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). Ten items were reverse scored, such that higher scores represent higher Machiavellianism, with total scores used in the analysis. The scale demonstrated good reliability $\alpha = .73$.

3.2.2. Emotional manipulation

Emotional manipulation was measured with the 10-item Emotional Manipulation measure (Austin et al., 2007) that describes general emotional manipulation strategies. Items include "I know how to embarrass someone to stop them behaving in a particular way" and "I can use my emotional skills to make others feel guilty". Participants responded on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). In this study the statements were altered slightly to reflect emotional manipulation specifically towards a friend. For example "I know how to embarrass my friend to stop them behaving in a particular way". Items were then summed to generate an emotional manipulation score. The scale demonstrated excellent reliability $\alpha = .87$. Participants then completed the scale for a second time with reference to their friend's manipulative behaviour towards them. For example "My friend knows how to embarrass me to stop me behaving in a particular way". The scale demonstrated excellent reliability $\alpha = .88$.

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