



The role of Machiavellian views and tactics in psychopathology



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ABSTRACT

Machiavellianism represents a tendency to manipulate and exploit others in a social world perceived to be hostile. Research has been inconsistent regarding psychopathology associated with this aspect of personality. This has been partially due to focusing on Machiavellianism as a unidimensional, as opposed to multidimensional, construct. Thus, this study aimed to investigate associations between Machiavellianism and psychopathology from a multidimensional perspective. The participants were 1478 US undergraduates aged between 18 and 53 years ($M = 19.55$, $SD = 3.22$; 39% male) and 218 Australian undergraduates aged between 17 and 60 ($M = 20.09$, $SD = 4.56$; 33% male). To address psychometric issues in the Mach-IV scale, item analysis and confirmatory factor analyses were used to derive its multidimensional structure. Structural equation modelling tested unique associations of Machiavellian views and tactics with six psychopathological constructs: depression, fear, anxiety, impulsivity, externalising psychopathology, and thought dysfunction. Results from the US and Australian samples suggest that Machiavellianism is best viewed as a two-dimensional construct consisting of views and tactics. Furthermore, the US study showed that Machiavellian views uniquely predicted all areas of psychopathology, whereas tactics predicted only externalising domains. These findings demonstrate the multidimensional nature of Machiavellianism and highlight its distinctive psychopathological implications.

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Machiavellianism captures a tendency to exploit, deceive, and distrust others (Christie & Geis, 1970). Christie and Geis (1970) reasoned that Machiavellians must be free of psychopathology to manipulate others effectively. Several studies, however, have not supported this hypothesis (e.g. Ain, Carre, Fantini-Hauwel, Baudouin, & Besche-Richard, 2013, McHoskey, 2001). Research has largely overlooked the psychopathology concomitant with Machiavellianism by treating the construct as unitary despite evidence of multidimensionality (Fehr, Samsom, & Paulhus, 1992; Rauthmann & Will, 2011). As a result, a unitary approach may have lacked the nuances required to identify the complex nature of relationships between dimensions of Machiavellianism and psychopathology. We incorporate a psychometrically sound multidimensional adaptation of the Mach-IV, the most commonly employed measure of Machiavellianism, to understand the relationship between Machiavellianism and psychopathology. In doing so, we elucidate the psychopathology associated with perpetrating exploitative behaviours and holding a cynical view of others.

1. Machiavellianism and psychopathology

Niccolo Machiavelli (1469–1527) was an Italian diplomat and political philosopher. His treatise *The Prince* and *Discourses* argued that cruelty and exploitation are valid tools for achieving one's goals because human nature is to lie and deceive. He further argued that one should never employ these tactics for their own sake as the end must justify the means (Machiavelli, 1513/1950). Christie and Geis (1970) conceptualised the personality construct of Machiavellianism based on themes and extracts from Machiavelli's work that were consistent with the teachings of influential power theorists, such as Sun Tzu and Chanakya. Machiavellianism is a continuum of normal personality variation, with studies most consistently placing it in the domain of low Agreeableness and Conscientiousness across a range of measures (Furnham, Richards, Rangel, & Jones, 2014). Individuals who are higher in Machiavellianism tend to engage in interpersonal exploitation (tactics component), hold a cynical view of human nature (views component), and lack the conventional morality that would condemn their actions (morality component).

Christie and Geis (1970) developed the Mach-IV to capture individuals' Machiavellian dispositions. The Mach-IV is a 20-item scale that consists of statements from Machiavelli's work along with statements theorised to capture the same construct. During scale construction, items were selected to capture the breadth of the construct while discriminating between participants high and low in Machiavellianism.

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The final measure tapped the three proposed components of Machiavellianism: tactics (e.g., “It is wise to flatter important people”), views (e.g., “Most men are brave” — reverse-scored), and morality (e.g., “All in all, it is better to be humble and honest than important and dishonest” — reverse-scored). The Mach-IV has become the gold-standard in measuring Machiavellianism, and most studies on the construct have used the Mach-IV (all items are in Supplementary Material A).

Individuals high in Machiavellianism behave opportunistically and exploitatively (e.g. Austin, Farrelly, Black, & Moore, 2007, Christie & Geis, 1970; Sakalaki, Richardson, & Thepaut, 2007). Consequently, their ability and willingness to manipulate others translates often into outperforming peers when interpersonal manipulation is advantageous (Christie & Geis, 1970; DePaulo & Rosenthal, 1979; Geis & Moon, 1981; Jones & Paulhus, 2009). This advantage occurs in situations that are unstructured enough for manipulation to be possible, as opposed to fully structured and unalterable environments where those high in Machiavellianism tend to perform worse than those low on Machiavellianism (Shultz, 1993). Yet, Machiavellianism involves interpersonal manipulation for achieving one's goals, regardless of whether this is exploitation or cooperation. Hence, Machiavellians will cooperate with others if it is in their own self-interest, but congruent with the words of Machiavelli (Machiavelli, 1513/1950), they will readily break from these alliances when defecting is the better strategy (Gunthorsdottir, McCabe, & Smith, 2002; Sakalaki et al., 2007).

The original work on Machiavellianism (Christie & Geis, 1970) has inspired interest in the construct with over 550 citations, according to Google Scholar, by the middle of 2015; this includes over 200 citations since 2010. There has also been considerable interest in organisational Machiavellianism (e.g., Dahling, Whitaker, & Levy, 2009; cited over 130 times by mid-2015) and Machiavellianism has a central place, alongside narcissism and psychopathy, within the influential Dark Triad of personality (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; cited over 885 times by mid-2015). To provide a robust foundation for the ongoing research on Machiavellianism, it is important to investigate the original assumptions that it was constructed upon, such as the absence of psychopathology among Machiavellians.

Christie and Geis (1970) postulated that Machiavellians must be free of psychopathology to manipulate others successfully. These researchers' initial investigation into this relationship did not support their *a priori* assumption, as Machiavellianism (measured by the Mach-IV) correlated significantly with anxiety. When the Mach-V (their forced choice version of the Mach-IV; Christie & Geis, 1970) was used to account for socially desirable responding in two later studies, associations with social and emotional adjustment, anxiety, depression, and neuroticism were weak to non-existent (Christie & Geis, 1970; Skinner, 1982). However, the validity of the Mach-V has been disputed in the literature because it has serious psychometric problems, such as poor reliability, often producing low correlations with the Mach-IV, and may not appropriately adjust for socially desirable responding (e.g. Fehr et al., 1992; Kraut & Price, 1976; Williams, Hazleton, & Renshaw, 1975).

Despite contradictions in the literature, there are arguments for why Machiavellianism would relate to key domains of psychopathology, namely internalising, externalising, and thought dysfunction. Elevations in neuroticism underlie major components of the internalising dimension (Barlow, Sauer-Zavala, Carl, Bullis, & Ellard, 2014), the spectrum of disorder aligned with fear and distress (Clark & Watson, 2006; Krueger & Markon, 2006). The moderate associations between the Mach-IV and neuroticism (e.g. Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006; Rauthmann, 2012b; Stead, Cynthia, Alexandra, & Kate, 2012, Vernon, Villani, Vickers, & Harris, 2008) suggest that Machiavellians have a propensity to experience negative emotions and stress. McHoskey (2001) found that borderline personality disorder, a disorder marked by emotional instability, was the personality disorder with the strongest unique association with Machiavellianism. Additionally, Machiavellians' deficits with emotional expression,

management, and intelligence (Austin et al., 2007; Szijarto & Bereczkei, 2014; Wastell & Booth, 2003) may affect their capacity to cope with negative emotions.

Machiavellian cynicism and peer exploitation may also result in their rejection and alienation from social networks. This is not surprising given that peers tend to perceive those high on Machiavellianism as antisocial, distant, and strongly non-nurturing (i.e., ruthless, hardhearted, and unsympathetic; Rauthmann, 2012a). Furthermore, Machiavellians' low levels of trait Agreeableness and Conscientiousness (e.g. Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006; Stead et al., 2012) may also impair relationships and reduce peers' acceptance of their antisocial behaviour. As a result, peers are less willing to enter into relationships with Machiavellians except under specific situations, such as when the Machiavellians' exploitation of a third party may benefit the peers (Wilson, Near, & Miller, 1998). Nevertheless, Machiavellianism under most circumstances facilitates alienation, higher levels of interpersonal conflict, and deficits in reliable social support.

Those predisposed to exploit and manipulate others are also likely to exemplify disorders classified as externalising, which involve directing distress outwards (Krueger & Markon, 2006). Machiavellianism is related to the externalising and delinquent behaviour constructs and to callous-unemotional traits in adolescents (Lau & Marsee, 2013; Loftus & Glenwick, 2001), and to higher rates of bullying and lower pro-victim attitudes in school-age children (Sutton & Keogh, 2000). Importantly, a Machiavellian's externalisation manifests as goal-focused social manipulation as opposed to the direct use of verbal, physical, or reactive/impulsive aggression (Kerig & Stellwagen, 2010; Loftus & Glenwick, 2001). A Machiavellian's distrust for others and willingness to exploit manifests in elevated interpersonal antagonism and social-norms violations.

Finally, Machiavellian cynicism describes a hypervigilance to being manipulated, with the worldview that others cannot be trusted. It is therefore not surprising that Machiavellianism is associated with paranoia (Christoffersen & Stamp, 1995) and the DSM-IV-TR's odd/eccentric cluster of personality disorders (e.g., paranoid and schizotypal) in adults (McHoskey, 2001). Machiavellianism is also associated with thought problems (strange or atypical cognitions) in adolescents (Loftus & Glenwick, 2001). These findings suggest that this cynical view of humanity, overestimation of threat, and hypervigilance may, at its extreme, be delusional.

2. Multidimensional Machiavellianism

Researchers have largely studied Machiavellianism as unidimensional despite the growing number of studies demonstrating multidimensionality (e.g. Fehr et al., 1992; McIlwain, 2003; Panitz, 1989; Rauthmann & Will, 2011; Williams et al., 1975). Indeed, multidimensionality could explain why estimates of internal consistency for the Mach-IV, which rely on the assumption of unidimensionality are often poor and varied (Fehr et al., 1992). Christie and Geis (1970) hypothesised a purely conceptual three-dimensional structure (views, tactics, and morality). Subsequently, a dearth of empirical support for this structure in the Mach-IV has resulted in the wider research community primarily studying Machiavellianism as a unidimensional construct rather than focusing on its potential dimensions. As a result, the number of dimensions underlying Mach-IV remains unclear. For example, researchers have identified two (Kline & Cooper, 1984), three (Christie & Geis, 1970), four (e.g. Calvete & Corral, 2000; Williams et al., 1975), five (Ahmed & Stewart, 1981), and even seven and eight (Panitz, 1989) factors within the Mach-IV. Difficulties with treating Machiavellianism as multidimensional are not surprising given the variation in factor analytic procedures used by researchers, the content overlap between Mach-IV items measuring each subscale, poor representation of the morality subscale with only two items, and substituting factor

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