



## Short Communication

## Machiavellianism and early maladaptive schemas in adolescents

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## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 18 May 2015

Received in revised form 20 July 2015

Accepted 30 July 2015

Available online 14 August 2015

## Keywords:

Machiavellianism

Early maladaptive schemas

Adolescence

Maladaptive coping response

## ABSTRACT

Given the relationship between personality dysfunction and Machiavellianism, schema-approach and early maladaptive schemas (EMSs) in particular offer a promising approach to the better understanding of Machiavellianism. Using self-report measures of Machiavellianism and EMSs with 498 adolescents (354 girls), we tested which EMSs were associated with Machiavellianism. Results showed that Emotional deprivation, Mistrust/abuse, Entitlement/grandiosity, and Approval-seeking/Recognition-seeking EMSs were positively associated with Machiavellianism, while Enmeshment/Undeveloped self and Self-sacrifice EMSs were negatively related to Machiavellianism. Results are mostly discussed from developmental and relational perspectives. Machiavellianism is suggested to be the result of maladaptive coping responses to the EMSs listed above.

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## 1. Introduction

Machiavellianism has been an intensively studied topic among researchers in several fields of psychology (for a recent review see Jones & Paulhus, 2009). Nevertheless, the relationship between Machiavellianism and Early Maladaptive Schemas (EMSs; Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003) has never been investigated yet. Our study is the first to address this association.

According to a brief definition (Young et al., 2003, p. 7.), EMSs are “self-defeating emotional and cognitive patterns that begin early in our development and repeat throughout life”. EMSs are the result of the interplay between temperamental disposition, cultural influences, and toxic childhood experiences. Extension and classification of EMSs resulted in 18 EMSs and five higher order schema domains (SCDs; see Table 1). Each SCD develops in a typical dysfunctional family of origin, wherein core developmental needs are unmet (Young et al., 2003).

Disconnection and Rejection SCD contains expectations that needs for attachment won't be met in a predictable manner. This SCD is likely to develop in disengaged, unpredictable, or even abusive families. Impaired Autonomy and Performance SCD contains expectations that the individual is immature, incompetent, and unable to achieve on her own. Typical family of origin is enmeshed, overprotective with rigid outward boundaries. Expectations in Impaired Limits SCD suggest that the individual shouldn't respect others, cooperate or reciprocate, or pursue long-term goals. Typical parenting in these families lacks discipline, support, and guidance.

Individuals with EMSs from Other-directedness SCD focus almost exclusively on the desires and feelings of others in order to gain approval. They usually experience conditional acceptance in their families.

Needs of caregivers are often valued more than that of children. Overvigilance and inhibition SCD includes EMSs with an emphasis on meeting rigid internalized rules instead of the spontaneous expression of own inclinations. Typical family of origin is demanding, punitive, and pessimistic.

Christie and Geis (1970) described Machiavellianism as a personality trait with manipulative and deceitful interpersonal tactics, cynical world-view, and utilitarian morality. Machiavellianism has been repeatedly found to be associated with mental diseases, especially with personality dysfunctions (Láng, 2015; McHoskey, 2001). It might be important because the original goal of the schema-approach was to understand and treat personality disorders (Young et al., 2003). Relationship between personality pathology and EMSs has also been empirically evidenced (Jovev & Jackson, 2004; Petrocelli, Glaser, Calhoun, & Campbell, 2001). Thus, schema-approach might be fruitful in understanding Machiavellianism. Accordingly, as a research aim, we wanted to reveal which specific EMSs are related to Machiavellianism.

Machiavellian individuals have repeatedly reported cold, neglecting, chaotic, and overindulgent parental bonding (Láng & Birkás, 2014; Láng & Lénárd, 2015). Being unable to provide realistic limits and secure attachments, these families create a toxic environment favorable for the development of EMSs in children. Based on the above line of reasoning, we hypothesized that Machiavellianism would be related to EMSs from Disconnection and Rejection and Impaired Limits SCDs.

## 2. Method

## 2.1. Sample and procedure

After parents' informed consent, 498 Hungarian secondary school students (354 girls;  $M_{age} = 16.03$  years;  $SD_{age} = .93$ ) filled

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**Table 1**

List and descriptions of early maladaptive schemas (based on Young et al., 2003, pp. 14–17).

Schema domain	Early maladaptive schema	Description with sample items in parentheses
Disconnection and rejection	Emotional deprivation	Expectation that one's desire for a normal degree of emotional support will not be met by others ("I haven't felt that I am special to someone.").
	Abandonment/instability	Sense that others, available for support and connection are emotionally unstable and unreliable ("I worry that people I feel close to will leave me or abandon me.").
	Mistrust/abuse	Expectation that others will hurt, abuse, humiliate, cheat, lie, manipulate or take advantage ("It is only a matter of time before someone betrays me.").
	Social isolation/alienation	Feeling that one is isolated from the rest of the world, different from other people, and/or not part of any group ("I don't fit in.").
	Defectiveness/shame	Feeling that one is defective, unwanted, or invalid in important respects or that one would be unlovable to significant others if exposed ("I'm unworthy of the love, attention, and respect of others.").
Impaired autonomy and performance	Failure	Belief that one has failed, will fail, or is fundamentally inadequate in areas of achievement ("I'm incompetent when it comes to achievement.").
	Dependence/incompetence	Belief that one is unable to handle one's everyday responsibilities in a competent manner without considerable help from others ("I lack common sense.").
	Vulnerability to harm or illness	Exaggerated fear that imminent catastrophe will strike at any time and that one will be unable to prevent it ("I worry about being attacked.").
	Enmeshment/undeveloped self	Excessive emotional involvement and closeness with significant others at the expense of full individuation or normal social development ("My parent(s) and I tend to be over involved in each other's lives and problems.").
Impaired limits	Entitlement/grandiosity	Belief that one is superior to other people or not bound by the rules of reciprocity that guide normal social interaction ("I hate to be constrained or kept from doing what I want.").
	Insufficient self-control/self-discipline	Pervasive difficulty or refusal to exercise sufficient self-control and frustration tolerance to achieve one's personal goals or to restrain the excessive expression of one's emotions and impulses ("I have rarely been able to stick to my resolutions.").
Other-directedness	Subjugation	Excessive surrendering of control to others because one feels coerced – submitting in order to avoid anger, retaliation, or abandonment ("In relationships, I let the other person have the upper hand.").
	Self-sacrifice	Excessive focus on voluntarily meeting the needs of others at the expense of one's own gratification ("I've always been the one who listens to everyone else's problems.").
	Approval-seeking/recognition-seeking	Excessive emphasis on gaining approval, recognition, or attention from other people or on fitting in at the expense of developing a secure and true sense of self ("Having money and knowing important people make me feel worthwhile.").
Overvigilance and inhibition	Negativity/pessimism	Pervasive, lifelong focus on the negative aspects of life while minimizing the positive aspects ("You can't be too careful, something will almost always go wrong.").
	Emotional inhibition	Excessive inhibition of spontaneous action, feeling, or communication, usually to avoid disapproval by others, feelings of shame, or losing control of one's impulses ("I find it embarrassing to express my feelings to others.").
	Unrelenting standards/hypercriticalness	Underlying belief that one must strive to meet very high internalized standards of behavior and performance, usually to avoid criticism ("I must meet all my responsibilities.").
	Punitiveness	Belief that people should be punished for making mistakes ("I am a bad person who deserves to be punished.").

the questionnaires anonymously in groups. No reward in any form was offered for participants. Group size ranged between 15 and 35 depending on the size of the class. Questionnaires were administered with the help of research assistants in paper–pencil format. Data collection was sample size governed and lasted until research assistants collected data from the volunteering members of at least three classes.

## 2.2. Measures

### 2.2.1. Machiavellianism

Machiavellianism was measured by the Mach-IV scale (Christie & Geis, 1970). Mach-IV is a 20-item self-report measure aimed at the assessment of deceitful, amoral and exploitative attitudes. Participants indicated their agreement with the statements (e.g., "Anyone who completely trusts anyone else is asking for trouble") on a 7-point Likert scale. For clarity and brevity, we used only total Mach-IV scores in this study. Internal reliability of the scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .61$ ) was historically satisfactory (Christie & Geis, 1970).

### 2.2.2. Early maladaptive schemas

We used Young Schema Questionnaire Short Form – 3rd Edition (YSQ-S3; Young, 2005) to measure EMSs. YSQ-S3 is a 90-item self-report measure of 18 EMSs (for description and sample items see Table 1). All of the 18 scales and total score had acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ s ranged from .62 to .96) except for Enmeshment/Undeveloped Self (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .49$ ).

## 2.3. Statistical analyses

Statistical analyses were run with SPSS for Windows 19.0. ANOVAs were used to test gender differences on the measured variables. Pearson's correlations and hierarchical multiple regressions controlling for the effects of gender and the shared variance of EMSs were used to test associations between Machiavellianism and EMSs while controlling for the effects of gender.

## 3. Results

ANOVAs revealed gender differences on the measured variables (Table 2). Boys showed more pronounced Machiavellian attitudes, while girls scored higher on all EMS scales where gender differences emerged. These gender differences are in line with previous research (e.g., Shorey, Anderson, & Stuart, 2012; Láng & Birkás, 2014).

Results of Pearson's correlations and multiple regressions showed that several EMSs were associated with Machiavellianism (Table 3). Higher levels of Machiavellianism were associated with expectations of emotionally unsupportive (Emotional Deprivation), manipulative, and harmful others (Mistrust/Abuse), an excessive emphasis on gaining approval (Approval-seeking/Recognition-seeking), and a belief in one's own superiority (Entitlement/Grandiosity). On the other hand, excessive emotional involvement with significant others (Enmeshment/Undeveloped Self) and a more pronounced focus on voluntarily meeting the needs of others (Self-sacrifice) were associated with lower levels of Machiavellianism. No harmful multicollinearity effects were detected in the linear regression analysis ( $VIF < 3.1$  for each predictor).

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