

Machiavellianism, trait perfectionism, and perfectionistic self-presentation

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Received 10 January 2005; received in revised form 1 August 2005; accepted 1 September 2005

Available online 2 November 2005

Abstract

This study examined Machiavellianism, trait perfectionism, and perfectionistic self-presentation in a sample of 483 university students (134 men; 349 women). Socially prescribed perfectionism mediated the association between Machiavellianism and perfectionistic self-presentation for both genders. Thus, the connection between Machiavellianism and perfectionistic self-presentation operated through socially prescribed perfectionism. Overall, Machiavellianism and components of perfectionism appeared to form a theoretically appreciable and an empirically demonstrable personality configuration. Machiavellian perfectionists (a) perceive others as demanding, controlling, punitive, and hostile toward them, (b) promote an image of perfection, capability, and strength to others, and (c) conceal any hint of imperfection, vulnerability, and weakness from others. When Machiavellian individuals perceive perfectionistic demands from significant others, perfectionistic self-presentation is likely to emerge from their chameleon-like repertoire of self-presentational behaviors.

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Keywords: Machiavellianism; Perfectionism; Personality; Self-presentation; Interpersonal interaction; Impression management

1. Introduction

It is not essential, then, that a Prince should have all the good qualities which I have enumerated [e.g., uprightness, mercifulness, religiousness], but it is most essential that he should seem to have them; I will even venture to affirm that if he has and invariably practises them all, they are hurtful, whereas the appearance of having them is useful (Machiavelli, 1513/1999, p. 58).

Personality is an interrelated constellation of traits, not a single trait existing in isolation. Certain traits are likely to co-occur and to form an identifiable personality configuration wherein one trait influences another. In this study, we argue and demonstrate that Machiavellianism (MAC) and components of perfectionism form a theoretically appreciable and an empirically demonstrable personality configuration. Although it has been noted that perfectionism and narcissism and perfectionism and obsessiveness co-occur (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), researchers have not studied whether MAC and perfectionism overlap with one another.

1.1. Definitions of constructs

MAC involves aloof manipulation of others, disdain for conventional morality, and viewing humankind with cynicism (Christie & Geis, 1970). Machiavellian individuals may be described as domineering, impersonal, suspicious, practical, cold, deceitful, impervious, and exploitative (McHoskey, Worzel, & Szyarto, 1998). In an emotionally charged situation involving face-to-face contact and permitting latitude for improvisation, Machiavellian individuals “manipulate more, win more, are persuaded less, [and] persuade others more” (Christie & Geis, p. 312).

Trait perfectionism involves the requirement that oneself or others must be perfect. There are three distinct and stable dimensions of trait perfectionism (Hewitt & Flett, 1991): self-oriented perfectionism (i.e., inflexibly and ceaselessly demanding perfection of oneself), other-oriented perfectionism (i.e., harshly and unrelentingly demanding perfection of others), and socially prescribed perfectionism (i.e., perceiving that others are rigidly and unrealistically demanding perfection of oneself).

Perfectionistic self-presentation focuses on the expressive features of perfectionism and involves promoting one's supposed perfection to others and/or concealing one's perceived imperfections from others (Hewitt et al., 2003). There are three separate and enduring facets of perfectionistic self-presentation (Hewitt et al.): perfectionistic self-promotion (i.e., pridefully and assertively promoting one's supposed perfection to others), nondisclosure of imperfection (i.e., avoiding verbal disclosures of one's perceived imperfections to others), and nondisplay of imperfection (i.e., concealing behavioral displays of one's perceived imperfections from others).

Although trait perfectionism and perfectionistic self-presentation overlap, they are empirically and conceptually distinct (Hewitt et al., 2003). Trait perfectionism centers on dispositions and attitudes associated with perfectionism (e.g., rigid self-expectations); whereas perfectionistic

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