

## MACHIAVELLIANISM AND DATING: DECEPTION AND INTIMACY

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We explored the relationship between Machiavellian personality, mate attraction strategies, and intimacy. Participants filled out the Mach IV and self-report questionnaires about the use of deceptive tactics in attracting potential dating partners, level of intimacy, and previous dating history. Higher scores on Machiavellianism were associated with greater likelihood of using deceptive tactics and lower levels of relationship intimacy. However, for women the relationship between Machiavellianism and deceptive strategies was moderated by the history of intimate behaviors. Implications and future directions are discussed.

*Keywords:* Machiavellianism, dating, mating strategies, deception, intimacy.

Machiavellianism, together with narcissism and psychopathy, is considered a member of the “Dark Triad of Personalities,” yet a distinctive construct in its own right (Paulhus & Williams, 2002, p. 556). Machiavellian personality (Christie & Geis, 1970) is associated with social manipulation and a lack of concern with traditional morality in interpersonal interactions (Skinner, 1988). Researchers have consistently shown that Machiavellianism relates negatively to both agreeableness and conscientiousness (Lee & Ashton, 2005). Understanding this Dark personality is complicated by the fact that individuals scoring high on the Machiavellian scale (high Machs) are generally regarded by others as socially attractive and charismatic leaders (Wilson, Near, & Miller, 1998). Clearly, highly Machiavellian individuals need to be smooth social operators in disguising their true intentions if they are to be successful in achieving their goals. Recently,

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researchers have suggested that individuals with Machiavellian personalities may be experts in emotional manipulation of others (Austin, Farrelly, Black, & Moore, 2007). Romantic relationships are fertile grounds for such manipulation.

Attracting desirable romantic partners is often a socially intricate endeavor. Use of mate attraction strategies is well documented in the close relationship literature (Keenan, Gallup, Goulet, & Kulkarni, 1997; Rowatt, Cunningham, & Druen, 1998). These strategies may include deception to enhance the chances of obtaining the desirable potential mate. Both males and females are prone to lying about their personal characteristics in order to attract a potential mate (Bleske-Rechek & Buss, 2006). Whereas males may deceive by portraying themselves as accomplished and trustworthy, females may use deceptive ploys that emphasize their physical attributes (Tooke & Camire, 1991). Although there is little research on Machiavellians in the context of intimate relationships in general, and their mate attraction strategies in particular, in two studies of sexual behaviors Machs have been shown to use deceptive tactics to secure sex (Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt, 2009; McHoskey, 2001). Moreover, McHoskey (2001) found gender differences such that Machiavellian men were more likely than women to engage in deceptive tactics to secure sex. Because deception can have devastating effects on intimate relationships, this line of research represents a compelling rationale for further study. In line with the reviewed literature, we expected that individuals with higher levels of Machiavellianism would be especially skillful at using a variety of manipulative mate attraction tactics to initiate dating relationships.

Beyond the initial attraction, the maintenance of a successful romantic relationship is a lengthy process that requires the development of intimacy and commitment between the partners (Sternberg, 1986). Intimacy, as construed by Sternberg (1986), entails mutual feelings of trust and connectedness. Consistent with the findings of past researchers who suggested that high Machs are characterized by a tendency to manipulate emotionally and deceive others in favor of their own personal agendas, we expected that Machiavellianism would relate negatively to intimacy in romantic relationships. Moreover, researchers have shown that Machiavellian personality is characterized by sexually promiscuous behaviors and an unwillingness to commit (Ali, Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010). It can be argued that individuals high in Machiavellianism would be less invested in their romantic relationships, both because of their lower level of intimacy and because of the long-term impact of their use of manipulative strategies. As suggested by Wilson, Near, and Miller (1996), manipulative strategies may be more effective in short-term relationships than in long-term ones. Hence, we hypothesized that high scoring Machs would have frequent, but short dating relationships.

Several critics have argued that the study of Machs has been devoid of a specific social context and have called for more context specific investigations (Kessler et al., 2010). It is clear that the social situation greatly impacts individuals' thoughts and behaviors. The goal in the present study was to examine Machiavellianism in the context of romantic relationships generally, and mate attraction behaviors specifically. We hypothesized that high- versus low-scoring Machiavellians would be more likely to engage in deceptive mate attraction strategies. High scoring Mach individuals would also report lower levels of intimacy, as well as romantic relationships that were more frequent but of shorter duration.

## Method

### Participants

Participants in this study were 123 undergraduate students (37 males and 86 females) enrolled in a general psychology course at a university in the northeast region of the United States. All participants were given one credit hour for their participation in the study. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 29 ( $M_{\text{age}} = 19.20$  years,  $SD = 1.35$ ).

### Measures

**Machiavellian Scale.** The Machiavellian IV Scale was created by Christie and Geis (1970) in order to evaluate agreement with Machiavellian beliefs. The 20-item scale is structured to measure a willingness to employ manipulative strategies, a distrustful perception of others, and a lack of traditional moral concern. Questions are answered on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. This scale has demonstrated high internal consistency, with alpha coefficients ranging from .70 to .80 (Christie & Geis, 1970). Test-retest reliability has also been shown to be high ( $r > .75$ ; Zook, 1985).

**Intimate Relationship Questionnaire.** The Intimate Relationship Questionnaire was developed by Dr. Judith Sims-Knight (personal communication, March 27, 2007) to measure the history of both intimate behaviors and perceptions of intimacy in close relationships as a subcomponent of the Multidimensional Inventory of Development, Sex, and Aggression (MIDSA Clinical Manual, 2008). Designed to assess these two distinct aspects of romantic relationships, the two-part, self-report questionnaire utilized in this study reflects 26 relationship questions.

The first section, relabeled for the present study as *perceptions of intimacy* (PI) evaluates the respondent's perceptions of intimacy with regard to his/her most important romantic relationship, and provides 22 statements concerning characteristics associated with relationship intimacy (e.g., "I feel/felt free to talk

with him/her about almost everything”). Responses are based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *definitely false* to 5 = *definitely true*. In the developmental sample of 343 undergraduates, Sims-Knight (personal communication, July 19, 2010) found that the PI subsection had a Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of .91 (for both genders).

The second section, relabeled for the present study as *history of intimate behaviors* (HIB), evaluates past relationship behaviors, and represents four questions related to the frequency, duration, and nature of experienced intimate relationships (e.g., level of intimate relationship interests, longest duration of past relationships, number of intimate relationships, frequency of general interactions, frequency of sexual interactions, and incidence of sexual interactions with others). In the developmental sample, Sims-Knight (personal communication, July 19, 2010) found a Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of .79 for women and .72 for men.

**Modified Relationship Strategies Questionnaire.** Based on an act frequency method (Buss & Craik, 1983), Tooke and Camire (1991) created a Taxonomy of Deceptive Mating Acts and Tactics as an assessment of potential individual differences in deceptive mate selection and attraction strategies. This 41-item self-report scale measures the use of deceptive and self-presentation tactics within intrasexual and intersexual interpersonal situations. Tooke and Camire (1991) reported good psychometric properties for their instrument (Cronbach’s  $\alpha > .93$ ).

In the current study, we used a structurally equivalent format to identify the use and frequency of deceptive and self-presentation strategies in an intersexual context. The intersexual acts represent a total of eight categories (dominance/resources, enhanced appearance (body), enhanced appearance (clothing), sincerity/trust/kindness, sexual intentions, feigned involvement, deception involving third parties, and positive self-presentation), but for the purposes of the present study we did not include deceptive acts related to deception involving third parties. Further, gender specific strategies were omitted from the respective categories. Thus, from the original 53 intersexual tactics listed in Tooke and Camire (1991, pp. 349-350), we used 41 items. Respondents were asked to rate the deceptive behaviors they had employed in the past two years on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 = *never* to 7 = *very frequently*.

## Procedure

Participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to evaluate mating behaviors. They were tested in a group setting and completed the following scales in about 40 minutes: Intimate Relationships Questionnaire, Machiavellian IV Scale, and the modified Relationship Strategies Questionnaire.

## Results

### Machiavellianism and Deception in Mating Strategies

The responses to questions in the seven categories within the Relationship Strategies Questionnaire (dominance/resources, enhanced appearance (body), enhanced appearance (clothing), sincerity/trust/kindness, sexual intentions, feigned involvement, and positive self-presentation) were combined to form one composite variable. A reliability analysis was performed to measure the internal consistency of the 41 items used (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .90$ ). Reliability analyses of both the HIB and the PI using data from our sample suggested adequate internal consistency for these measures as well (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .68$  and  $.68$ , respectively), especially in light of the sample size and the consistency of these findings with that reported by Sims-Knight (personal communication, July 19, 2010).

In order to assess which variables predicted deceptive mating strategies (DMS), a hierarchical regression was performed. Gender was entered as block one; Machiavellian tendencies (Mach) as block two; perceptions of intimacy (PI) and history of intimate behaviors (HIB) as block three; the interactions of gender by PI, gender by HIB, and gender by Mach as block four; the interactions of Mach by HIB and Mach by PI as block 5; and the three-way interactions of gender by Mach by HIB and gender by Mach by PI in block 6. The means and standard deviations of these variables, as well as the zero-order correlations are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-Order Correlations for Sex, Machiavellianism, History of Intimate Behaviors, Perceptions of Intimacy, and Deceptive Mating Strategies

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
DMS	2.65	.72	-.01	.33***	-.08	-.18*
<b>Predictor Variable</b>						
1. Sex	69% <i>F</i>		--	-.24**	.03	.04
2. Mach	3.55	.62		--	-.07	-.24**
3. HIB	4.63	.99			--	.48***
4. PI	4.28	.54				--

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

The overall model was significant ( $F(11, 108) = 3.78$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $R^2 = .28$ ). However, despite a significant zero-order relationship between DMS and PI, neither the main effect for PI nor any of the interactions involving a PI term was significant in the regression analysis. Overlap between the HIB and PI constructs removed any unique contributions of PI subscale. Therefore, we dropped PI and all the interaction terms with PI from this level of the analysis, leaving the following trimmed model including main effects for gender, Mach, HIB, and all

the associated interaction terms. The overall trimmed model was also significant, ( $F(7, 112) = 5.36, p < .01, R^2 = .25$ ).

Breaking the analysis down by steps, there was no main effect for gender alone,  $\Delta F(1, 118) = .01, p = .94$ . However, there was a strong main effect for Machiavellianism in predicting deceptive mating strategies ( $\Delta F(1, 117) = 15.18, p < .01$ ). High-scoring Machiavellian individuals were more likely than those who did not score high for Machiavellianism to report engaging in deceptive strategies. In the third block, the initial introduction of HIB as a main was not significant ( $\Delta F(1, 116) = .64, p = .43$ ). However, the next step with the two-way interaction terms involving gender by Mach, gender by HIB, and HIB by Mach yielded a significant effect ( $\Delta F(2, 114) = 5.23, p = .01$ ). There was a strong interaction effect for gender by history ( $t(112) = -3.54, p < .01$ ). As shown in Table 2, males with higher incidences of past relationships (HIB Scale) were associated with higher levels of deceptive mating strategies, and those with lower incidences were associated with lower levels of deceptive mating strategies. For females, the opposite pattern was true: higher incidences of past relationships were associated with lower levels of deceptive mating strategies, and lower incidences were associated with higher levels of deceptive mating strategies. The fifth step involving the two interactions between HIB by Mach was also significant ( $\Delta F(1, 113) = 4.32, p = .04$ ), but this finding was impacted by the three-way interaction in the final step. Lastly, the three-way interaction of gender, HIB, and Mach was significant, ( $\Delta F(1, 112) = 3.91, p = .05$ ). As shown in Figure 1, for males, the interaction between HIB and Mach was not significant, but for females the two-way interaction was significant. This interaction manifested that there was a negative relationship between deceptive mating strategies and HIB scores for females who scored higher than others on the Mach scale, and there was a slightly positive relationship between deceptive mating strategies and HIB scores for females who scored lower on the Mach scale.

Table 2. *Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Deceptive Mating Strategies as a Function of Sex, Intimacy, and Machiavellianism Variables*

Step and predictor variable	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$sr^2$	$\beta$
Step 1	.00	.00		
Sex			.08	.08
Step 2	.12***	.12***		
Mach			.23	.40**
Step 3	.12**	.01		
HIB†			.17	.31*
Step 4	.20***	.08*		
Interaction between sex and HIB			-.26	-.48**

Table 2 continued

Step and predictor variable	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$sr^2$	$\beta$
Interaction between sex and Mach				
Step 5	.23***	.03*	-.03	-.05
Interaction between HIB and Mach				
Step 6	.25***	.03*	-.01	-.01
Interaction among HIB, Mach, and sex			-.16	-.23*

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

† In the final step, HIB becomes a significant predictor,  $t(112) = 2.33$ ,  $p = .021$ .

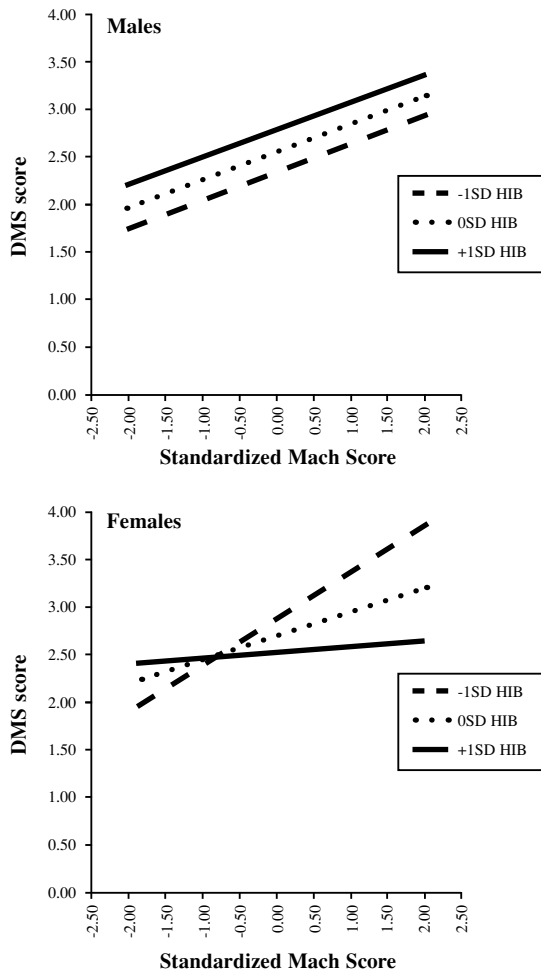


Figure 1. Three-way Interaction Between Mach, HIB, and Sex on Deceptive Mating Strategies.

### **Machiavellianism, Intimacy, and Commitment**

In our final two hypotheses we predicted that individuals who scored high on Machiavellianism would report a different pattern of relationships from that of individuals who scored low on Machiavellianism. Specifically, we expected individuals who self-reported higher levels of Machiavellianism to have lower levels of perceived intimacy in their past relationships and to have more frequent relationships of shorter duration as measured by the history of intimate behaviors, compared to individuals who self-reported lower levels of Machiavellianism. Additionally, the history of intimate behavior and perception of intimacy sections were moderately correlated with each other for the entire sample ( $r(118) = .48, p < .01$ ).

We conducted two hierarchical multiple regressions: one with PI as the criterion variable, the other with HIB as the criterion variable. To control for sex effects, we entered the gender of the respondent in the first block, followed by the Mach score, and finally the interaction of gender and the Mach score in the third block for both regressions. As predicted, the regression involving perceived intimacy did yield an overall significant finding ( $F(3, 116) = 2.74, p = .047, R^2 = .07$ ). Machiavellianism was the only significant predictor in the model ( $t(117) = -2.76, p < .01$ ). Indeed, the correlation between Machiavellianism and perceived intimacy was significant  $r(118) = -.24, p < .01$ , and people who scored higher on Machiavellianism reported lower levels of perceived intimacy in their former relationships. However, the regression involving the history of intimate behaviors was not significant ( $F(3, 116) = .37, p = .77, R^2 = .01$ ).

### **Discussion**

Consistent with our prediction, and regardless of gender, we found a strong association between Machiavellian tendencies, and the use of deceptive mating strategies. Individuals scoring high on the Machiavellian scale were willing to engage more freely in deceptive behaviors than individuals scoring lower on the scale as predicted by Wilson et al. (1996). Whether or not these manipulative behaviors may promote the attributes that are perceived as attractive or desirable, and/or whether or not the use of deceptive tactics indirectly (e.g., particularly, in how they are perceived by others) leads to more effective mating outcomes has yet to be demonstrated.

Further, an interesting pattern of results emerged regarding gender differences in the way in which Machiavellianism relates to mating behavior. Overall, there was no difference between men and women for the use of DMS, but higher order interactions suggested a more complex relationship. For men, there was a consistent relationship between Mach and DMS. Furthermore, there was an independent effect for HIB on DMS, so that the higher the score on the



Machiavellian scale and the greater the number of past relationships, the more deceptive strategies were likely to be reported. In contrast, for women, the relationship between Mach and deceptive strategies was moderated by history of intimate behaviors. Among women, lower levels of HIB (fewer past relationships) yielded a stronger association between Mach and deceptive strategies. However, at higher levels of HIB (more past relationships), there was less of an association between Mach and DMS. In other words, among women who scored high on the Machiavellian scale, those with fewer past relationships were more likely to use deceptive strategies than were those with more past relationships. It appears as though for women, prior relationship experience dampened the tendency of a woman with a Machiavellian personality to use deception in mating behaviors.

Perhaps high-scoring Mach women with some experience in dating and romantic relationships recognize that the impact of deceptive strategies is somewhat short-lived (Wilson et al., 1996). Such individuals may have learned other mating strategies that have proven more effective than deception in the long run. This interpretation makes sense given the evolutionary perspective suggesting that women are more interested in long- versus short-term mating goals owing to their greater parental investment (Buss, 1988). In this study, we have amended the findings of previous researchers (Jonason et al., 2009; McHoskey, 2001), who suggested that the positive association between Machiavellianism and deceptive mating tactics is generally stronger for men than for women. Although it appears to be true that stronger effects favor males in the case of individuals who have had a greater number of romantic relationships than others, the pattern seems to be reversed when the relational history is sparse. We have added to the literature with our study by indicating that prior dating experience may be an important factor in understanding gender differences in how high-scoring Machiavellian individuals approach deceptive mating behaviors.

In support of our second hypothesis, we found that individuals with higher Mach scores reported lower levels of relationship intimacy than did individuals with lower Mach scores. This finding may indicate that high Machiavellian individuals are characterized by low levels of emotional attachment in their close relationships, as also suggested by other researchers (Ali & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010; Christie & Geis, 1970). Being less invested in their partner and more interested in satisfying their own social goals, Machiavellians may not be able, or may be less willing, to forge highly intimate relationships. Alternatively, Machiavellians' propensity to engage in manipulative and deceptive behaviors may interfere with being able to develop an intimate bond. The previously discussed finding that females who score high on Machiavellianism but who have had a large number of previous romantic relationships show less of a propensity to engage in DMS than those whose relationship history is sparse, points to a motivational explanation rather than a lack of ability.

Our findings for the third hypothesis did not reveal a pattern of shorter or more frequent romantic relationships as a function of self-reported Machiavellianism. Contrary to the traditional view that portrays high-scoring Machs as incapable of relating to others emotionally (Wastell & Booth, 2003), researchers have recently suggested that high Machs may in fact be quite skillful at emotional manipulation to achieve their goals (Austin et al., 2007). It has also been argued that most of the research on Machiavellian personality has been conducted without due attention to the social context in which the behavior occurs (Kessler et al., 2010). Clearly, the social situation impacts the way in which individuals think and behave (Schmitt & Buss, 1996). Perhaps in the context of romantic relationships it is possible for Machiavellian individuals to maintain successful long-term relationships if they and their partners pursue similar goals (Sternberg, Hojjat, & Barnes, 2001). One possibility is that individuals with high levels of Machiavellianism may be considered desirable long-term romantic partners by some, if they are perceived as capable of pursuing ambitious and rewarding goals that would require masterful social manipulation, for example, acquiring a high social status such as political office (Wilson et al., 1998). Achieving challenging social goals often requires a reliable long-term partner who shares one's ambitions. Whether or not high Machiavellians are perceived as desirable long-term partners, or they themselves are capable or they themselves are capable of, or desire, such relationships, needs to be examined in future research.

Several issues may have contributed to limitations in this study. First, participants were asked to report on intimacy of the romantic relationship that has meant the most to them. This could have been a past or present relationship. Clearly, reflecting on a current relationship is easier and less problematic from a methodological standpoint (Huston & Robins, 1982). Given this oversight, the intimacy findings should be interpreted with caution. Future researchers should address this issue by collecting more detailed information about intimacy within both past and present dating relationships of participants. Second, the cross-sectional nature of the study limits the type of conclusions that may be drawn from the findings. A longitudinal study of couples who are in long-term romantic relationships would allow for a more detailed and complete evaluation of mating behaviors and cognitions of highly Machiavellian individuals within different relationship phases and time frames. Moreover, by including both partners in the analyses, it would become possible to investigate how the thoughts and behaviors of Machiavellian individuals are perceived and responded to by their partners. Lastly, future researchers should investigate the mating behaviors of the Dark Triad, not just the Machiavellian personality, to find out if the present results are specific to any one trait or the larger cluster represented by the Dark Triad.

In this article we contribute to the literature by presenting one of the first studies on mate attraction behaviors of Machiavellian personality in the context

of romantic relationships (also see Jonason, Valentine, Li, & Harbeson, 2011). Our results suggest that both male and female Machiavellian individuals have the propensity to employ deceptive mating strategies to attract desirable partners. However, their tendency to deceive may also be shaped by gender-specific goals and society-wide norms. Our results point to important implications for understanding the complexities of the Machiavellian personality in a nonclinical sample. As Jonason and Kavanagh (2010) have pointed out, the Machiavellian personality (as a part of the Dark Triad) has traditionally been regarded as undesirable and dysfunctional. However, our findings in this study appear to be consistent with a new and growing trend in which Dark Triad traits such as Machiavellianism are viewed as “part of the normal variation in human personality” (Jonason & Kavanagh, 2010). According to this perspective, possession of such “Dark” traits could potentially be both costly and beneficial to individuals, at least as far as mating behavior is concerned (Jonason, Li, & Buss, 2010). We hope that studies such as ours shed some light on Machiavellian individuals as they maneuver the uncertain seas of romantic relationships.

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