



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Personality and Individual Differences

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/paid

Machiavellianism and sexual behavior: Motivations, deception and infidelity



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 3 September 2014
 Received in revised form 18 October 2014
 Accepted 20 October 2014
 Available online 11 November 2014

Keywords:

Machiavellianism
 Sexual behavior
 Motivation
 Deception
 Infidelity
 Relationships

ABSTRACT

The current study investigated the influence of Machiavellianism, a personality trait characterized by a manipulative interpersonal style and willingness to exploit others (Christie & Geis, 1970), on three areas of sexual behavior. Men ($N = 90$) and women ($N = 192$) aged 18–81 years ($M = 25.82$, $SD = 9.85$) completed the Mach IV (Christie & Geis, 1970), YSEX Questionnaire (Meston & Buss, 2007), Sexual Deception Scale (Marelich, Lundquist, Painter, & Mechanic, 2008) and Intentions Towards Infidelity Scale (Jones, Olderbak, & Figueredo, 2011). Those with high levels of Machiavellianism were more likely to engage in sexual behavior for physical reasons, goal attainment and insecurity. In particular, Machiavellian men and women endorsed stress reduction, experience seeking, resources, social status, revenge, utilitarian reasons, boosting self-esteem, duty/pressure, and mate guarding as motivations for sexual behavior. Machiavellianism was also a significant predictor of each form of sexual deception investigated (blatant lying, self-serving and avoiding confrontation) and intentions to engage in infidelity. Sex did not moderate the influence of Machiavellianism on sexual behavior.

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1. Introduction

Machiavellianism is a personality trait associated with cynicism, distrust and a willingness to exploit others (Christie & Geis, 1970; Vecchio & Sussman, 1991). Previous research demonstrates that Machiavellianism is associated with a greater number of sexual partners (McHoskey, 2001) and the use of strategies intended to avoid or reduce relationship commitment (Jonason & Buss, 2012). Thus, it is often argued that the Machiavellian interpersonal style facilitates a short-term mating strategy and thus confers an evolutionary advantage (Buss, 2009; Jonason, Webster, Schmitt, Li, & Crysel, 2012). However, Machiavellianism influences a range of relationship types, suggesting that Machiavellian men and women are flexible and opportunistic (Fehr, Samsom, & Paulhus, 1992; Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013), and decisions to engage in short or long-term relationships are dependent on the specific rewards available. The current study extends our understanding of Machiavellianism in the context of sexual behavior, and investigates the relationships between Machiavellianism, motivations for sexual activity, sexual deception and infidelity.

1.1. Sexual motivation

Personality influences many aspects of sexual activity (e.g., Fink, Brewer, & Neave, 2007), including motivation to engage in sexual behavior. Whilst previous research has established a relationship between Machiavellianism and sexual activity (e.g., Baughman, Jonason, Veselka, & Vernon, 2014; Goncalves & Campbell, 2014; Veselka, Giammarco, & Vernon, 2014), specific motivations for sexual behavior have not been considered. According to Meston and Buss (2007), there are a range of reasons (categorized as physical reasons, goal attainment, emotional reasons and insecurity) for engaging in sexual behavior. Physical reasons include stress reduction, pleasure, physical desirability, and experience seeking. Goal attainment includes resources, social status, revenge and utilitarian reasons. Emotional motivations include love and commitment and expression and insecurity includes boosting self-esteem, duty/pressure and mate guarding. The exploitative, opportunistic nature of Machiavellianism (Christie & Geis, 1970; Jones & Paulhus, 2009) in which other people are viewed as a ‘means to an end’, suggests that men and women with high levels of Machiavellianism may be most motivated by individual reward. Specifically, we predict that Machiavellianism will be positively related to engaging in sexual behavior in order to achieve a particular goal such as the acquisition of social status or to guard a mate, but not related to those motivations (e.g., love and commitment) reflecting emotional closeness and intimacy.

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1.2. Sexual deception

Sexual deception is widespread and a substantial number of men and women routinely withhold or amend information relating to their sexual history. For example, Lucchetti (1999) demonstrates that over 25% of individuals lower their actual number of previous sexual partners before disclosing to a current mate. Individuals are also often dishonest in relation to the identity of previous sexual partners and previous incidence of infidelity (Williams, 2001). Previous research documents the manner in which personality influences the use (Riggio, Salinas, & Tucker, 1988; Seto, Khattar, Lalumiere, & Quinsey, 1997) and detection of deception (Lyons, Healy, & Bruno, 2013). Furthermore, the ability to deceive is an important aspect of the Machiavellian interpersonal style (Christie & Geis, 1970). In particular, individuals with high levels of Machiavellianism create more plausible lies and demonstrate confidence in their ability to deceive (Giammarco, Atkinson, Baughman, Veselka, & Vernon, 2013) which maintains the appearance of truthfulness (Exline, Thibaut, Hickey, & Gumpert, 1970). Machiavellian men and women also control the type and depth of personal information they reveal to others (within platonic relationships) (Abell & Brewer, 2014; Brewer, Abell, & Lyons, 2014) which facilitates manipulation and may hinder the detection of blatant lies by deceived relationship partners. Those with high levels of Machiavellianism also appear willing to deceive romantic/sexual partners. For example, men and women with high levels of Machiavellianism are more likely to employ deceptive mating strategies, though for women this relationship is moderated by previous sexual history (Dussault, Hojjat, & Boone, 2013). Therefore, the present study investigates the influence of Machiavellianism on sexual deception. We predict the greater use of each sexual deception type by those with higher levels of Machiavellianism.

1.3. Infidelity

Though infidelity (Saxe, 1991) threatens the stability of a romantic relationship (Betzig, 1989), approximately 20% of men and women report that they have engaged in a sexual affair during their current relationship (Mark, Janssen, & Milhausen, 2011). Furthermore, those that are unfaithful to a current partner are also likely to have been unfaithful in prior relationships (Adamopoulou, 2013). A range of personality traits including psychoticism (Buss & Shackelford, 1997) and sensation seeking (Lalasz & Weigel, 2011) are associated with extra-dyadic behaviors. In particular, those with high levels of Machiavellianism are more likely to 'poach' another person's partner or themselves be poached from a current relationship (Jonason, Li, & Buss, 2010). It is unclear however whether the relationship between Machiavellianism and infidelity reflects a lower commitment to the primary partner (i.e., willingness to remain faithful) or other factors such as increased attractiveness and subsequent greater opportunities for infidelity. Hence, the present study considers intended infidelity. We predict that Machiavellian men and women will be more willing to engage in infidelity than those with low levels of the trait.

In the present study, men and women were invited to complete a series of online questionnaires measuring Machiavellianism, motivations to engage in sexual behavior, sexual deception and willingness to engage in infidelity. We predict that Machiavellian men and women will report a greater motivation to engage in sexual behavior in order to achieve a particular goal such as the acquisition of resources or social status. Men and women with higher levels of Machiavellianism are also predicted to use greater sexual deception and report a higher intention to engage in infidelity. Based on previous research reporting sex differences in Machiavellianism (McHoskey, 2001), sexual motivation (e.g., Meston & Buss, 2007), deception (Keenan, Gallup, Goulet, & Kulkarni, 1997;

Rowatt, Cunningham, & Druen, 1998), infidelity (e.g., Wiederman, 1997), and the extent to which Machiavellianism influences behavior (Brewer et al., 2014), the moderating role of gender is also considered.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Men ($N = 90$) and women ($N = 192$) aged 18–81 years ($M = 25.82$, $SD = 9.85$) were recruited through research websites (e.g., onlinepsychresearch.co.uk) and social networking sites. The majority of participants were in a serious relationship (52.50%) at the time of the study, followed by those who were single (35.80%) and in a casual relationship (11.70%). For those in a relationship, length of relationship ranged from 1 month to 40 years ($M = 4.12$ months, $SD = 5.77$ months).

2.2. Materials and procedure

Participants completed a series of online questionnaires including the Mach IV (Christie & Geis, 1970), YSEX Questionnaire (Meston & Buss, 2007), Sexual Deception Scale (Marelich, Lundquist, Painter, & Mechanic, 2008) and Intentions Towards Infidelity Scale (Jones, Olderbak, & Figueredo, 2011). The Mach IV (Christie & Geis, 1970) contains 20 items rated on a 7 point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). The scale assesses interactions with others, morality and cynicism. Example items include "Anyone who completely trusts anyone else is asking for trouble" and "Never tell anyone the real reason you did something unless it is useful to do so". Higher scores indicate greater levels of Machiavellianism and the measure demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .78$).

The YSEX Questionnaire (Meston & Buss, 2007) contains 142 questions assessing an individual's reasons for having sex. Items are rated on a 5 point likert scale from 1 (*none of my sexual experiences*) to 5 (*all of my sexual experiences*). The questionnaire contains 13 subfactors: Stress Reduction; Pleasure; Physical Desirability; Experience Seeking; Resources; Social Status; Revenge; Utilitarian; Love and Commitment; Expression; Self-Esteem Boost; Duty/Pressure; and Mate Guarding. All subfactors demonstrated acceptable reliability: Stress Reduction ($\alpha = .89$); Pleasure ($\alpha = .95$); Physical Desirability ($\alpha = .93$); Experience Seeking ($\alpha = .95$); Resources ($\alpha = .95$); Social Status ($\alpha = .93$); Revenge ($\alpha = .90$); Utilitarian ($\alpha = .87$); Love and Commitment ($\alpha = .96$); Expression ($\alpha = .87$); Self-Esteem Boost ($\alpha = .94$); Duty/Pressure ($\alpha = .94$); and Mate Guarding ($\alpha = .95$). The YSEX subfactors may be combined to form 4 factors. Physical Reasons contains the Stress Reduction, Pleasure, Physical Desirability and Experience Seeking subfactors. Goal Attainment includes Resources, Social Status, Revenge and Utilitarian subfactors. Emotional contains Love and Commitment and Expression. Insecurity contains Self-Esteem Boost, Duty/Pressure and Mate Guarding. Examples include "I was mad at my partner so I had sex with someone else" and "I wanted to manipulate him/her into doing something for me". Factors demonstrated acceptable reliability: Physical Reasons ($\alpha = .97$); Goal Attainment ($\alpha = .95$); Emotional ($\alpha = .95$); and Insecurity ($\alpha = .97$). Higher scores indicate greater endorsement of the reason for engaging in sexual behavior.

The Sexual Deception Scale (Marelich et al., 2008) contains 15 items, each answered Yes or No. Responses are scored No = 0, Yes = 1, with higher scores indicating the greater use of sexual deception. The scale contains three subscales with 7, 3 and 5 items respectively: Blatant Lying (in order to engage in sexual activity with a current or prospective partner); Self-Serving (i.e., engaging in sexual behavior to obtain specific resources) and Avoiding

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