



# Machiavellianism, pretending orgasm, and sexual intimacy



Gayle Brewer<sup>a,\*</sup>, Loren Abell<sup>a</sup>, Minna Lyons<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Psychology, University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK

<sup>b</sup> School of Psychology, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK

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## ABSTRACT

Machiavellianism is characterised by distrust, manipulation, and a willingness to exploit others. Previous research indicates that Machiavellianism is associated with a preference for short-term sexual relationships and low levels of relationship commitment. The present study investigated the relationships between Machiavellianism, pretending orgasm, and need for sexual intimacy. Heterosexual women ( $N = 226$ ) aged 17–57 years ( $M = 27.06$ ,  $SD = 8.63$ ) completed the Mach IV (Christie & Geis, 1970), Reasons for Pretending Orgasm Inventory (McCoy, Welling, & Shackelford, 2015), and Need for Sexual Intimacy Scale (Marelich & Lundquist, 2008). Machiavellianism predicted the deception and manipulation but not improving partner's sexual experience or hiding sexual disinterest reasons for pretending to experience orgasm. The influence of Machiavellianism on deception and manipulation was moderated by relationship length. Women with high levels of Machiavellianism were more likely to pretend to experience orgasm in order to deceive or manipulate their partner. Machiavellianism also predicted the sex, affiliation, and dominance needs for sexual intimacy. Those with high levels of Machiavellianism reported a greater need for sex and for dominance but a lower need for affiliation as motivations for sexual intimacy.

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## 1. Introduction

Machiavellianism is characterised by distrust, manipulative behaviour, and a willingness to exploit others (Christie & Geis, 1970; Vecchio & Sussman, 1991). Previous research indicates that Machiavellianism is associated with a preference for short-term sexual relationships (Jonason, Luevano, & Adams, 2012), low levels of relationship commitment (Jonason & Buss, 2012), and intentions to engage in sexual infidelity (Brewer & Abell, 2015a). Those with high levels of Machiavellianism are motivated to engage in sexual behaviour for physical reasons (e.g. experience seeking), to attain goals (e.g. to obtain resources or social status) or in response to insecurity (e.g. mate guarding) (Brewer & Abell, 2015a). The present study further investigates the relationship between Machiavellianism and sexual behaviour. Specifically, we consider the relationships between Machiavellianism, pretending orgasm, and sexual intimacy.

### 1.1. Pretending orgasm

A substantial number of women (75–90%) do not consistently orgasm during sexual activity (Bancroft, Loftus, & Long, 2003) and a substantial minority (5–10%) do not experience orgasm at all (Lloyd, 2005). Despite this, men place considerable importance on their

partner's orgasm (McKibbin, Bates, Shackelford, Hafen, & LaMunyon, 2010) and women whose partners ask if they have experienced orgasm may suffer guilt (Darling & Davidson, 1986). Therefore, women may explicitly signal sexual enjoyment or orgasm when this is not experienced. For example, Brewer and Hendrie (2011) reported that a large proportion of women vocalise (e.g. moan, scream) even when they are not experiencing orgasm. Pretending orgasm is common, deceptive copulatory behaviour, warranting further consideration. The relationship between manipulative personalities (e.g., Machiavellianism) and motivations to pretend orgasm has not been investigated in previous research, something that we will address in the present study.

Pretending orgasm may serve a range of functions. For example, women may pretend orgasm in order to maintain a partner's sexual interest, avoid partner distress, and enhance mate retention (Kaighobadi, Shackelford, & Weekes-Shackelford, 2012; Muehlenhard & Shippee, 2010). This seems to be an effective strategy, as men whose partners appear to frequently orgasm report higher relationship satisfaction (Kaighobadi et al., 2012). In particular, pretending orgasm may facilitate a dual strategy, whereby women maintain a long-term committed relationship and engage in short-term sexual relationships. Women are most likely to pretend orgasm and thus display satisfaction with their partner if they have previously engaged in sexual infidelity and if they anticipate that they will engage in future infidelity (Ellsworth & Bailey, 2013). Frequency of pretending orgasm is also associated with the use of direct guarding, negative inducements, positive inducements, public signals of possession, and intrasexual negative inducement to retain a partner (Kaighobadi et al., 2012).

\* Corresponding author at: School of Psychology, University of Central Lancashire, Preston, Lancashire PR1 2HE, UK.

E-mail address: [GBrewer@UCLan.ac.uk](mailto:GBrewer@UCLan.ac.uk) (G. Brewer).

The increased sexual infidelity (Brewer & Abell, 2015a; Jones & Weiser, 2014) and mate retention (Brewer & Abell, 2015b) displayed by those with high levels of Machiavellianism are suggestive of more frequent pretending orgasm. Pretending orgasm would also be consistent with previous research indicating that Machiavellianism is associated with deceptive mating strategies (Dussault, Hojjat, & Boone, 2013), blatant lying in order to engage in sexual behaviour with a current or prospective partner, the use of self-serving deception (i.e., to obtain specific rewards) and avoiding confrontation with a partner (Brewer & Abell, 2015a). Based on previous evidence and the extent to which Machiavellianism is associated with manipulation, we predicted that Machiavellianism would be most closely associated with pretending orgasm in order to deceive or manipulate a partner. Those with high levels of Machiavellianism are less committed and more emotionally distant to their romantic partners (Ali & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010). Therefore we predict that women with high levels of Machiavellianism would not be more likely to pretend orgasm in order to improve their partner's sexual experience or hide sexual disinterest.

### 1.2. Sexual intimacy

Sexual intimacy is an important part of romantic relationships. It is positively associated with relationship quality (Birnie-Porter & Lydon, 2013), and may even be a causal factor in developing emotional intimacy (Yoo, Bartle-Haring, Day, & Gangamma, 2014). There are different motivations for sexual intimacy, such as the need for sex, need for dominance, and need for affiliation (Marelich & Lundquist, 2008). We expect Machiavellianism to play a role in need for sex, as Machiavellianism is associated with higher number of sexual partners and "one night stands" (Koladich & Atkinson, 2016). Further, individuals high in Machiavellianism desire power over others (McHoskey, 1999) and display a dominance rather than affiliation orientation (Locke & Christensen, 2007), therefore women with higher levels of Machiavellianism may report a greater need for dominance. Machiavellianism is associated with emotional detachment, distrust and suspicion of others as well as a lack of connection to their own and others emotions (Christie & Geis, 1970; Wastell & Booth, 2003). Those with higher levels of Machiavellianism strive for independence and will only seek closeness in order to manipulate others (Ináncsi, Láng, & Bereczkei, 2015). Therefore, it would be expected that women with higher Machiavellianism will not report a greater need for affiliation, instead their sexual intimacy needs will be motivated by need for sex and dominance.

In summary, the present study adds to the existing literature on personality and sexual strategies by investigating the relationship between Machiavellianism, reasons for pretending orgasm, and sexual intimacy in women. We expect that individuals high in Machiavellianism pretend orgasm in order to deceive and manipulate a sexual partner. Furthermore we expect the desire for sexual intimacy to be motivated by dominance and sex rather than affiliation.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

Heterosexual women ( $N = 226$ ) aged 17–57 years ( $M = 27.06$ ,  $SD = 8.63$ ) were recruited via online research websites and social networking sites. All participants were in an exclusive romantic relationship of at least six months duration at the time of the study. Relationship lengths ranged from 6 months – 33 years ( $M = 4.61$  years,  $SD = 5.98$  years).

### 2.2. Materials and procedure

Each participant completed a series of measures including the Mach IV (Christie & Geis, 1970), Reasons for Pretending Orgasm Inventory

(McCoy et al., 2015), and Need for Sexual Intimacy Scale (Marelich & Lundquist, 2008).

The Mach IV (Christie & Geis, 1970) contains 20 items rated on a seven 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". Ten items were reverse scored such that higher scores indicate higher Machiavellianism.

The Reasons for Pretending Orgasm Inventory (McCoy et al., 2015) is a 63 item measure of the reasons women pretend to experience orgasm. Participants report the extent to which they agree or disagree with a series of statements such as "I don't want my partner to know that the sex is not pleasurable" and "I enjoy tricking my partner into thinking that I am having an orgasm" from 0 (*never*) to 9 (*every time we had sex*). The measure contains three subscales: improve partner's experience e.g., enhancing the sexual and emotional experience for the partner (29 items); deception and manipulation e.g., enabling revenge or infidelity (21 items); and hiding sexual disinterest e.g., concealing a desire to end the sexual act and lack of interest (12 items).

The Need for Sexual Intimacy Scale (Marelich & Lundquist, 2008) is a 22 item measure of motivations for sexual intimacy. Participants indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with a series of statements on a five point scale from 1 (*disagree definitely*) to 5 (*agree definitely*). Example statements include "I need companionship" and "I need control over my partner". The measure contains three subscales: need for sex (8 items); need for affiliation (9 items); and need for dominance (5 items). One item was reverse coded such that higher scores indicate higher motivations.

Cronbach's alphas were acceptable for each measure: Machiavellianism ( $\alpha = .73$ ); Improving Partner's Sexual Experience: ( $\alpha = .98$ ); Deception and Manipulation ( $\alpha = .91$ ); Hiding Sexual Disinterest ( $\alpha = .93$ ); Need for Sex ( $\alpha = .84$ ); Need for Affiliation ( $\alpha = .79$ ); Need for Dominance ( $\alpha = .80$ ).

## 3. Results

Participants completed standardised Machiavellianism, reasons for pretending to experience orgasm, and motivations for sexual intimacy measures. Descriptive statistics and correlations for all variables are presented in Table 1.

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to investigate the extent to which Machiavellianism predicted reasons for pretending to experience orgasm and need for sexual intimacy. The influence of relationship length was also investigated, both as an individual predictor and as a moderator of the relationships between Machiavellianism, pretending orgasm, and need for sexual intimacy. To represent the interaction between Machiavellianism and relationship length, these

**Table 1**

Descriptive statistics and correlations for Machiavellianism, reasons for pretending orgasm, and need for sexual intimacy.

	MA	PE	DM	HD	NS	NA	ND
MA							
PE		.04	.16*	.12	.24**	-.28**	.38**
DM			.69**	.45**	.31**	.21**	.30**
HD				.68**	.37**	.11	.42**
NS					.14	-.03	.16*
NA						.20**	.47**
ND							.17*
M	67.40	108.04	36.82	22.15	23.12	39.20	8.89
SD	13.00	70.29	23.34	16.58	7.02	5.37	4.20

MA = Machiavellianism, PE = improve partner's sexual experience, DM = deception and manipulation, HD = hiding sexual disinterest, NS = need for sex, NA = need for affiliation, ND = need for dominance.

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

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