

## The Relationship Between Perceived Parenting and Machiavellian Orientation in Young Adults

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### ABSTRACT

This study is done to investigate the relationship between perceived parenting and Machiavellian orientation in young adults. The participants are a sample of 150 (47 male and 103 female) English speaking subjects out of which 18% are from a psychology background. Perceived parenting is measured using the Parenting Scale (perceived) given by R. L. Bharadwaj and Behavior Orientation Scale (BOS) is used to measure the Machiavellian orientation. The relationship is obtained using Pearson correlation. The correlation of five out dichotomous dimensions of perceived parenting- rejection and acceptance of mother, carelessness and protection of mother, carelessness and protection of father, neglect and indulgence of mother and marital conflict and marital adjustment with Machiavellian orientation resulted as negative and statistically significant. All the other dimensions are negatively correlated but are not statistically significant. T- test is conducted to assess if there is any significant difference between the Machiavellianism of male and female participants are non-significant. Regression results show that only the dimension of carelessness vs protection of father is a significant predictor of Machiavellian orientation of the individual. Overall, the study indicates that more extensive research is required where other sociodemographic factors are also considered to understand how perception of parenting can influence the type of behaviors, attitudes and beliefs formed by an individual and carried into their adulthood. Maladaptive behaviors generated in childhood can transform into self-destructive or harmful behavior towards others in the future and an adequate parenting model seems to have the power to prevent this.

**Keywords:** Machiavellianism, Perceived Parenting, Rejection, Acceptance, Carelessness, Protection, Neglect, Indulgence, Expectations, Marital Conflict, Adjustment, Gender Difference

Niccolò Machiavelli said in his book 'The Prince'- "It is much safer to be feared than loved because ...love is preserved by the link of obligation which, owing to the baseness of men, is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear preserves you by a dread of punishment which never fails". Machiavellianism is a personality trait that is majorly marked by manipulative behavior, deceitfulness, and constant efforts to gain power (Christie & Geis, 2013). The term is derived from the political

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philosophy of Niccolò Machiavelli, an Italian Renaissance diplomat and writer. Machiavellianism is brothers with narcissism and psychopathy, who are together called the dark triad. Machiavellians have a cynical worldview and a lack of moral compass. This presents as unemotionality in relationships and a lack of commitment. What drives such people is self-interest and control. This belief is not based on any sadistic desires rather their belief that others think in the same manner (Jones, 2016). Some argue that it is not completely negative and it can also be seen as a pragmatic approach to navigating complex social and political environments (Cui et al., 2021), where individuals may need to be strategic and cunning to survive or succeed (Wilson et al., 1996). It can be considered as a type of social strategy which resembles the defect strategy addressed by evolutionary game theory. The connection between Machiavellianism and managing one's emotions is hotly contested. In Czibor et al., 2017, addresses the role of gender disparities. The study discovered that Machiavellianism in women was associated with damage avoidance, anxiety, vulnerability, and hypersensitivity, whereas Machiavellianism in men was connected with taking risks, an opportunistic worldview and confidence in self. Ryan & Deci, 2017 Talk about self-determination theory which highlights that the natural dark side of human beings can be inspired or brought forth by the presence of a dominating and controlling environment including coercion or undue pressure. Some of such negative behaviors can be malevolence, lack of cooperativeness, prejudice, discriminating, etc. which coincide with many of the Machiavellian behavior.

### ***Parenting and perceived parenting***

Parenting is the process that constitutes the responsibility of raising a child which includes looking after the child's physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual, spiritual and sociological development. This process goes on from infancy to adulthood with the aim of making the child competent enough to face challenges as an adult. This process is inclusive of enabling the child to make their own discoveries and find a sense of belongingness in this world. Early researchers on parenting focused solely on the role of mothers in the development and nurturance of the child (Belsky, 1984). Primary caregiving and organizing the child's life was prescribed to be the role of the mother, on the other hand, fathers were responsible for being the authority figures, instilling discipline, and being the breadwinners of the family. As time elapsed and changes came about in the social status of men and women, the role of a father has increased in the development of the child (Cabrera et al., 2000).

Perceived parenting refers to an individual's subjective perception of their parents' behaviors, attitudes, and parenting styles. It is based on the individual's interpretation of their parents' actions and interactions with them during their upbringing. Perceived parenting can shape an individual's beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and emotional well-being, and it can have a lasting impact on their development and relationships throughout their life. Studies over the years have been trying to determine which aspects and style of parenting contributes to the generation of certain behaviors in children. Such behaviors and attitudes are usually solidified as a part of their personality and hence taken forward into adulthood. This is focused on by developmental psychologists. A positive association between Machiavellianism and authoritarian and permissive parenting styles can be observed from the work of Rasheed et al., 2021. A positive relationship is also found between borderline tendencies and the above-mentioned negative parenting styles. More negative parenting style was reported by the male students. They also scored high on Machiavellianism and borderline tendencies in comparison to women. A reduction in the importance of extrinsic values was predicted by the authoritative parenting of fathers. A reduction was observed in

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intrinsic values when fathers had permissive parenting (Williams et al.2020). Self-assertion and regulation were observed in children with parents who exercise an authoritative parenting style (Sarwar, 2016). Perception of parental psychological control came out to be a positive predictor variable of all three dark triad traits (Li et al., 2020). Relationship between the parents can also have an effect since the children grow up watching and modeling their parents. Lang et al. 2018 found that there is an association between high Machiavellian attitude and low-quality coparenting and perception of interparental conflict. Contrary to the above studies some studies like Bali et al.,2016 studied the relationship between Machiavellianism and psychopathy traits in adults along with behavior of parents in childhood and found that no significant relationship was there between parental behavior and Machiavellianism and psychopathy.

### *Life History Theory*

An evolutionary paradigm that seeks to explain the diversity of life history strategies observed in different species is known as the Life History Theory. It proposes that organisms have limited resources, and must allocate them between competing demands such as growth, reproduction, and maintenance. Life history traits are those that influence the survival and reproductive success of an organism, including age at maturity, lifespan, fecundity, and reproductive effort. Different organisms allocate resources to these traits differently, based on various factors including conditions in the environment and the presence of predators and competitors. In some cases, organisms may choose to exhibit a life history strategy which is considered as fast. It can be distinguished by early onset of maturity, rich reproductive output, and short lifetime. In other cases, organisms may adopt a slow strategy, which can be distinguished by delayed maturity, poor reproductive output, and long lifetime. Chaos driven families are not just unpredictable but they can pressurize children to take up parental responsibilities (Boszormenyi-Nagy,2014). This parentification can force children to deal with family stress and issues at the same time forgoing their childhood needs like freedom and protection. This might be a reason for the controlling attitude in Machiavellians. Children growing up in chaotic environments and having a lack of realistic limits and inconsistency in discipline have difficulty developing self-control (Young et al., 2006). Such a family functioning can be a contributor to the development of maladaptive schemas from a domain called impaired limits schema. such individuals find it difficult to cooperate with others, delaying gratification, trusting others and being respectful. The presence of an insecure and unstable surrounding can be the incubator to fast life history strategies leading to psychopathologies similar to the dark triad traits. (B. Chen et al., 2017; Hurst & Kavanagh, 2017). According to Crittenden 2005 children learn to use the art of deception when parents or caregivers show unpredictable behavior. This unpredictability stops children from effectively using contingencies and resorting to strategies that have its basis on affective aspects. This childhood deprivation can also be the reason why Machiavellians feel the need to take advantage of others' vulnerabilities (Boszormenyi-Nagy,2013).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Objectives*

- The objective is to find whether there is any relationship between the perception of an individual about the parenting they received and the behavior orientation of that individual in their interpersonal relationships.
- Another objective is to find if there is any difference in the Machiavellianism of men and women.

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### *Hypothesis*

It is hypothesized that:

- H1: There is a significant relationship between rejection versus acceptance of mother and Machiavellian orientation.
- H2: There is a significant relationship between rejection versus acceptance of father and Machiavellian orientation.
- H3: There is a significant relationship between carelessness versus protection of mother and Machiavellian orientation.
- H4: There is a significant relationship between carelessness versus protection of father and Machiavellian orientation.
- H5: There is a significant relationship between neglect versus indulgence of mother and Machiavellian orientation.
- H6: There is a significant relationship between neglect versus indulgence of father and Machiavellian orientation.
- H7: There is a significant relationship between utopian expectations versus realism of mother and Machiavellian orientation.
- H8: There is a significant relationship between utopian expectations versus realism of father and Machiavellian orientation.
- H9: There is a significant relationship between lenient standard versus moralism of mother and Machiavellian orientation.
- H10: There is a significant relationship between lenient standard versus moralism of father and Machiavellian orientation.
- H11: There is a significant relationship between freedom versus discipline of mother and Machiavellian orientation.
- H12: There is a significant relationship between freedom versus discipline of father and Machiavellian orientation.
- H13: There is a significant relationship between faulty role expectations versus realistic role expectations of mother and Machiavellian orientation.
- H14: There is a significant relationship between faulty role expectations versus realistic role expectations of father and Machiavellian orientation.
- H15: There is a significant relationship between marital conflict versus marital adjustment and Machiavellian orientation
- H16: There is a significant difference between Machiavellian orientation of men and women.

### *Sample and its selection*

In this research convenience sampling technique is used. Data is collected from Students of Amity University Noida and from individuals in close contact to the author. 18 percent of the sample size have a psychology background. Out of the 150 participants, 47 are male and 103 are female.

- Sample size- 150
- Age range- 18-25

### *Materials*

#### *1. Parenting Scale by R L Bharadwaj*

This scale consists of 40 items. The scale measures perceptions of the individual (perceived parenting) about how one is brought up by one's parents on eight dichotomous modes of parenting—

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1. rejection vs. acceptance,
2. carelessness vs. protection,
3. neglect vs. indulgence,
4. utopian expectations vs. realism,
5. lenient standard vs. moralism,
6. freedom vs. discipline,
7. faulty role expectations vs. realistic role expectations, and
8. marital conflict vs. marital adjustment.

It assesses the function of mothering, fathering, and overall parenting. It is appropriate for people over the age of ten. The test can be given in groups or individually, and the time allotted is 20-25 minutes. The sten score is used to determine the status of adolescent perceptions of parenting models. The sten values vary from 1 to 10. The sten score 1-5 denotes a lower score and 6-10 shows a higher score; the lower score suggests an undesired and negative component of the parenting model, while the higher score indicates a desirable and positive feature.

### 2. Behavior Orientation Scale by Praveen Kumar Jha:

The BOS measures interpersonal behavior of an individual. It is a scale that measures individual's Machiavellian belief and attitude in interpersonal relationships. This five-point Likert type scale has 41 items and measures tactics, general opinions, and morality via three subscales. For every question one option has to be selected out of totally disagree, disagree, can't say, agree and totally agree. There are positively worded questions and negatively worded questions which score 5,4,3,2,1 or 1,2,3,4,5 respectively. The statement expresses your views and one or the other is right or wrong. There is no time limit for this test. The full-length split half reliability of Mach scale was found to be 0.63 ( $P < 0.01$ ). Validity was checked by 3 ways: judges validity, concurrent validity and internal validity.

### Procedure

To conduct the study, the Parenting Scale and Behavior Orientation Scale questionnaires were obtained via online purchase and from the college psychology lab respectively. The brief about the psychological test and reason for collecting this data will be clearly informed to the participants who are willing to participate. The participation is completely voluntary. These questionnaires were shared with individuals who fall in the age group of 18 to 25. Responses obtained were the data set of this research. This data was further analysed using statistical techniques in SPSS software.

## ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

*Table No. 1 Correlations between each dimension of parenting style (mother and father separately) and Behavior orientation scale scores*

Perceived parenting dimensions	N	r	Sig.
Rejection vs acceptance of mother	150	-.214**	.009
Rejection vs acceptance of father	150	-.144	.078
Carelessness vs protection of mother	150	-.194*	.017
Carelessness vs protection of father	150	-.355**	<.001
Neglect vs indulgence of mother	150	-.193*	.018
Neglect vs indulgence of father	150	-.124	.130
Utopian expectations vs realism of mother	150	-.058	.481
Utopian expectations vs realism of father	150	-.067	.416
Lenient standard vs moralism of mother	150	-.045	.586

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Perceived parenting dimensions	N	r	Sig.
Lenient standard vs moralism of father	150	-.086	.297
Freedom vs discipline of mother	150	-.068	.407
Freedom vs discipline of father	150	-.130	.113
Faulty role expectations vs realistic role expectations of mother	150	-.105	.202
Faulty role expectations vs realistic role expectations of father	150	-.046	.573
Marital conflict and adjustment	150	-.167*	.042

\*\* correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Pearson correlation is performed between the scores obtained on the 8 dimensions of the parenting scale, both mother and father separately, with the scores of behavior orientation scale (Table 1). Five variables show a significant correlation. Correlation between perceived rejection versus acceptance of mother and behavior orientation (-0.214). This indicates a negative relationship which means that the more an individual perceives their mother to be rejecting or less accepting the higher will be their Machiavellian orientation. Correlation between perceived carelessness versus protection of mother and behavior orientation (-0.194) indicating an inverse relationship. Correlation between perceived carelessness versus protection of father and behavior orientation gave a coefficient of -0.355 indicating a much stronger negative and significant relationship as compared to the mother. Correlation between perceived neglect versus indulgence of mother and behavior orientation (-0.193) indicating a negative relationship. Correlation between perceived marital conflict versus marital adjustment and behavior orientation (-0.167) is significant and indicates an inverse relationship. All the other variables are weakly but negatively correlated to Machiavellian orientation. These correlations are non-significant ( $p > 0.05$ ) which indicate they might have occurred by chance.

**Table No. 2 Independent samples T-test between Behavior Orientation Scale score of men and women**

		F	Sig.	T	df	95% confidence interval of the difference	
						Lower	Upper
BOS	Equal variance assumed	.068	.795	-1.297	148	-6.708	1.391
	Equal variance not assumed			-1.328	94.516	-6.632	1.315

The result of Table 2 came out to be non-significant, meaning there is no significant difference between the means of male and female participants.

**Table No. 3 Anova table of regression between independent variables (H, BF, CM, BM, AM) and Behavior orientation**

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2801.120	5	560.224	4.615	<.001
	Residual	17480.880	144	121.395		
	Total	20282.000	149			

**Table No. 4 Multiple linear regression between independent variables (H, BF, CM, BM, AM) and Behavior orientation**

Model		Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. error	t	Sig.	R	R square	Sig. of overall model
1	constant	136.368	6.973	19.557	<.001			
	AM	-.228	.402	-.570	.570			
	BM	.636	.524	1.214	.227	.372	.138	<.001
	BF	-1.586	.433	-3.666	<.001			
	CM	-.084	.405	-.208	.836			
	H	-.072	.291	-.249	.804			

Predictors: (constant), H, BF, CM, BM, AM

Multiple Linear regression was conducted with the variables that showed a significant correlation with behavior orientation. The R value of .372 indicates a weak linear relationship between the predictor and the dependent variable. The overall model fit is low since the R square value is .138 (<.3) as shown in Table 4. This indicates that the linear regression accounts for 13.8% of the variation in data. Table 3 shows the analysis of the variance in the model. As it is observed from this table that p-value is less than .001 which is lower than .05. This indicates that the null hypothesis is rejected and significance can be observed for the regression model. The results in table 4 show that only the dimension of carelessness versus protection of father was a significant predictor ( $p < 0.001$ ) of behavior orientation since p value is less than 0.05 in young adults. This indicates that the sample gives enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. The unstandardized coefficient is -1.586 meaning that 1 unit change (increase or decrease) in carelessness vs protection of father will bring a change of 1.586 in the opposite direction in behavior orientation. The other variables were not significant predictors.

## DISCUSSION

The primary focus of the present study is to examine whether there is a relationship between perception of parental behavior (8 dimensions) and Machiavellian orientation in young adults. Here individuals between the age of 18 to 25 were considered as young adults. The term 'Perceived parenting' indicates to an individual's subjective thinking about their parents' behaviors, attitudes, and parenting styles. Parenting is considered to have the ability to build the foundation of an individual (Baumrind 1971).

The results in this study show that five of the hypotheses are significant. The correlation of five variables namely, perceived rejection vs acceptance of mother, perceived carelessness versus protection of mother, perceived carelessness versus protection of father, perceived neglect vs indulgence of father and perceived marital conflict vs marital adjustment with Machiavellian orientation is negative and significant. The non significance of other variables can be due to the various other factors like gender, socio-economic status, education, age, cultural background, peers, etc which can have an impact on the behavior orientation as well as the perception. All the correlation coefficients have a negative sign indicating a negative relationship. Each dichotomous dimension has the first dimension which is considered as negative and the one that comes later as the positive one. A negative relationship means an increase in negative perception of parenting associated with an increase in Machiavellian orientation. Simultaneously an increase in positive perception of parenting is associated with a decrease in Machiavellian orientation. Correlation results show a stronger relationship of perceived maternal parenting and Machiavellian orientation though none of them resulted as a predictor. Maternal rejection, neglect and carelessness showing lack of love, warmth, closeness, concern, protection, interest, involvement, etc. can be the source of children

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engaging in maladaptive behavior (Lang 2015). This is also observed from prior literature. Lack of empathy for others, low levels of emotionality, external oriented thinking, etc. which are characteristic of Machiavellians can bud from such perception of parenting.

Interpersonal bond between parents is another area that is not widely researched when looking at Machiavellianism of children. Our results show a negative and significant relationship between marital conflict versus marital adjustment meaning that an increase in marital conflict is associated with an increase in Machiavellianism and an increase in marital adjustment is associated with a decrease in Machiavellianism. It is in agreement with one of the reviews of literature which say that high Machiavellianism was found in boys who perceived interparental conflict (Lang et al., 2018).

Contrary to previous research which says that male participants are likely to have higher Machiavellian orientation than female (Lang, 2015), results of this study indicate an absence of difference in the means of both genders. Again, this result can be affected by socio-demographic factors. The level of Machiavellianism in men and women might differ since women perceive parenting slightly differently and the dimensions of parenting that contribute to emergence of Machiavellian attitude differ in women. Female adolescents valued maternal warmth while male adolescents were affected by the extent of parental verbal communication. According to the distinct pathways model, stressful and adverse issues affect boys and girls in the same way in quantitative terms but differ in terms of quality meaning that girls express internalizing problems whereas boys express externalizing problems.

The dimension of carelessness versus protection of father has the ability to predict the value of Machiavellianism of the young adult as indicated by the results of multiple linear regression. A high level of carelessness by the father can predict a high level of Machiavellianism. The same outcome can be observed in case of a reduction in protection. Yendell et al., 2022 showed that Machiavellianism and overprotection from both parents had a positive relationship. This could be indicating that there are two forces acting here where overprotection can be seen as lack of freedom or control over the individual and less protection or carelessness can indicate ignorance, both of which are seen as negative perceptions of parenting.

Limitations in the study are that the sample is focused in a small geographical area and convenience based, narrow socio-economic class, and a higher proportion of female participants than male (more than double). 18 percent of the participants were psychology students which might have impacted the way they answered the questionnaire since they are aware of the intricacies of such a psychological scale. Future research should investigate more about the different dimensions of perception of parenting and the negative behavior problems it induces in children which they carry forward into their adult life and interpersonal relationships. The lack of a considerable difference between the Machiavellian orientation of male and female participants might be possibly due to the increasing equality in status, education, lifestyle, opportunities, exposure, etc. between men and women especially in the urban setting. The gender difference or lack of a difference can also be a result of dynamic factors of a household. Future research can also see if the results are different for urban and rural settings where many other social factors differ.



## CONCLUSION

Understanding how human beings develop a certain behavior, attitude or belief especially maladaptive ones, has always been an area that fascinates psychologists. Machiavellianism being one of those maladaptive traits that is seen in a wide percentage of population and the most prevent dark triad trait (Satornoni, 2023). Such traits have the ability to cause harm to others and the individuals themselves than good. There can be many factors affecting its development but early interaction with parents or more specifically perception of the kind of parenting a person experienced can be one of the driving factors since parents are a child's first environment. Results of this study shows that all the Dimension of perceived parenting showed a negative correlation with behavior orientation score (Machiavellianism). This negative relationship in all the variables can be understood to be conveying that any kind of negatively perceived parental behavior can maybe be a contributor to the maladaptive behavior of the child keeping in mind the other external factors which can affect the behavior. Such a link even though not all are statistically significant, can be further researched and understood so that the developmental process of an individual will be much more improved and delinquent behavior can be avoided or reduced.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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