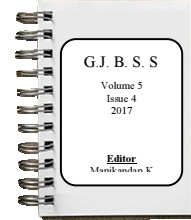




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Parental Socialization Goals and Machiavellianism in Adolescence: Same-sex Parents as Role Models

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Abstract

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The developmental aspect of Machiavellianism has been scarcely researched. Machiavellian adolescents have an emotionally detached stance with high competitiveness and an antagonistic attitude. According to Life History Theory, Machiavellianism represents a strategy in face of resource unpredictability signalled by family stress. Parental socialization goals are signals as well. They transform cultural milieu into ideas about and goals of parenting. In this study we investigated the relationship between adolescent Machiavellianism and parental socialization goals. Results showed that girls' level of Machiavellianism correlated positively with maternal independent socialization goals, while boys' level of Machiavellianism was negatively related to paternal emphasis of interdependence. The possible bidirectional causal pathway between adolescent Machiavellianism and parental socialization goals is discussed. Same-sex parents as role models are emphasized.

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Machiavellianism has been a widely studied construct in personality psychology since the 1970s (see Jones & Paulhus, 2009 for an extensive review). However, relatively little is known about the developmental origins of Machiavellianism. In this study, we investigated the potential relationship between parental socialization goals and level of Machiavellianism in adolescents.

Machiavellianism is a personality trait characterized by emotional detachment, manipulative interpersonal tactics, a cynical view of human nature, and utilitarian morality (Christie & Geis, 1970). Machiavellian individuals focus on their own personal goals rather than on other people's needs (Czibor & Bereczkei, 2012; Jonason, Li, & Teicher, 2010) and prefer material success over intrinsic motivations like community and family (McHoskey, 1999). Considering the developmental origins of Machiavellianism, there are two main lines of reasoning currently available in literature. On the one hand, the modelling hypothesis (Kraut & Price, 1976) suggests that children learn Machiavellian attitudes from their parents via social learning. Thus, children who have parents with more pronounced Machiavellian traits are more Machiavellian themselves. This hypothesis received empirical support from several studies (e.g., Ojha, 2007; Siwy-Hudowska & Pilch, 2014) that showed significant positive correlations between the levels of parents' and offspring's Machiavellianism. On the other hand, Machiavellianism can be conceived of as an expression of fast life history strategy (Figueredo et al., 2005; Jonason et al., 2012). According to Life History Theory (Del Giudice, Simpson, & Gangestad, 2015) and Belsky's (Belsky, Steinberg, & Draper, 1991) evolutionary theory of socialization, developing individuals perceive parental care and family climate as indicators of available resources (i.e., circumstances essential for survival and mating) and form their life history strategies accordingly. Unresponsive parenting and family stress – as indicators of resource unpredictability – lead to a fast life history strategy that includes Machiavellianism (Figueredo et al., 2005; Jonason et al., 2012).

Socialization goals are assumed to be indicators as well. They are markers of the ecosocial context, since they transform the abstract level of cultural milieu – that itself has

evolved as an adaptation to a specific ecosocial context – to ideas about parenting. Socialization goals are ideas about goals that parents believe to render the most success for their offspring in the prevailing ecosocial context (Keller & Kärtner, 2013). Models of cultural milieu are based on two independent dimensions: (i) interpersonal distance and (ii) agency (Keller et al, 2006).

Based on these two dimensions Kağıtçıbaşı (2005) defined three cultural models: (i) The model of independence considers the individual as separate and autonomous, therefore parenting strategies support self-enhancement and self-maximization. (ii) The model of interdependence represents the individual as interrelated with others and parents emphasize loyalty, acceptance of norms, and reciprocity. (iii) The model of autonomous relatedness combines interpersonal relatedness with autonomous functioning. Thus, the third model of Kağıtçıbaşı's theory (2005) shows that the dimensions of interdependent and independent functioning are not the antithesis of each other but two orthogonal dimensions.

Based on the above review we formulated the following hypotheses. Given the fact that Machiavellianism is positively associated with agentic and negatively with communal orientation, we expected that adolescents' level of Machiavellianism would be positively associated with independent and negatively associated with interdependent parental socialization goals. Moreover, based on the modelling hypothesis of Machiavellianism (Kraut & Price, 1976), we expected that paternal socialization goals would be more strongly associated with boys' levels of Machiavellianism– compared to the Machiavellianism levels of girls – and maternal socialization goals would be more strongly associated with girls' levels of Machiavellianism, as compared to the Machiavellianism levels of boys.

Method

Participants

Ninety-eight cohabiting Hungarian families raising at least one 14-18 years old adolescent (target adolescent) participated in a study entitled 'Personality traits of adolescents in a family system perspective'. The relationship of parents lasted 21.59 years on average (SD = 3.83) and 96 parents were married. Mothers and fathers were 43.79 (SD = 3.57) and 46.54 (SD = 4.29) years old on average, respectively. The majority of parents had at least 12 years of education (55.1 and 66.3 per cent for mothers and for fathers, respectively). Target adolescents (47 females) were all enrolled in formal education and were 16 years old (SD = 1.29) on average. Target adolescents had 1.29 siblings (SD = .92) on average.

Participants were recruited from the relational network of undergraduate psychology students. We had one inclusion criterion for the study. Only families composed of adolescents and two cohabiting biological parents were included. Inclusion was independent of the amount of siblings. These were done in order to obtain a relatively homogeneous sample with regard to family structure. After giving their informed consent, family members participated voluntarily and anonymously in the study. Families received no reward in any form for participation. The study received ethical approval from the United Ethical Review Committee for Research in Psychology (Ref. No.: 2016/063).

Instrument

1. Mach-IV Scale: To measure the level of Machiavellianism in adolescents, we used the Mach-IV Scale (Christie & Geis, 1970). Respondents indicated their agreement with 20 items (e.g. "The best way to handle people is to tell them what they want to hear") on a 7-point Likert-scale. Internal reliability of Machiavellianism as a unidimensional construct was excellent in this study (Table 1.).

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and internal reliability indices of the measured variables

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Cronbach's α
Adolescent Machiavellianism		95.14	95.14	.82
Maternal socialization goals	Independent	12.92	1.93	.71
	Interdependent	10.71	2.20	.62
Paternal socialization goals	Independent	12.95	2.07	.75
	Interdependent	10.38	2.53	.68

2. Socialization Goals Scale: To measure parental socialization goals, both mothers and fathers completed the Socialization Goals Scale (Keller et al., 2006). The scale consists of 10 items. Five items refer to independent socialization goals (i.e., emphasizing autonomy and individual goals; e.g., "To develop a sense of self") and 5 items refer to interdependent socialization goals (i.e., emphasizing relatedness and collectivistic values; e.g., "Learn to care for the well-being of others"). Respondents indicated the importance of these socialization goals for their parenting practice on a 4-point Likert-scale. Internal reliability indices for both maternal and paternal independent and interdependent socialization goals were acceptable to good (Table 1.).

Results

Descriptive statistics for the measured variables are reported in Table 1. Potential gender differences on all measured variables were tested with ANOVAs. None of the ANOVAs revealed significant difference between adolescent girls and boys on any of the measured variables (all $F_s < 3.01$; all $p_s > .085$). Potential differences between paternal and maternal independent and interdependent socialization goals were tested with a 2x2 (parent x socialization goal) repeated measures ANOVA. Results indicated neither significant parent x socialization goal interaction ($F_{(1,97)} = 1.170$; $p = .282$; partial $\eta^2 = .012$) nor significant main effect for parent ($F_{(1,97)} = .679$; $p = .412$; partial $\eta^2 = .007$). However, the analysis revealed a significant main effect of socialization goal ($F_{(1,97)} = 131.622$; $p < .001$; partial $\eta^2 = .576$). Independent socialization goals were reported as more important both by mothers and fathers than interdependent socialization goals (estimated $M_s = 12.93$ and 10.55 ; $SE_s = .16$ and $.21$ for independent and interdependent socialization goals, respectively).

Based on the modelling hypothesis of Machiavellianism (Kraut & Price, 1976), we run Pearson's correlations separately for girls and boys. Results of these analyses are presented in Table 2. According to the results, girls' level of Machiavellianism was significantly and positively correlated with the importance of independent socialization goals for mothers, whereas boys' level of Machiavellianism was significantly and negatively correlated with the importance of interdependent socialization goals for fathers. Thus, daughters of mothers who endorsed more independent socialization goals and sons of fathers who endorsed less interdependent socialization goals showed relatively elevated levels of Machiavellianism.



Table 2

Zero-order correlations between the measured variables. Correlation coefficients (*rs*) for girls (*n* = 47) and boys (*n* = 51) are presented above and below the diagonal, respectively

Variables		Adolescent Machiavellianism	Maternal socialization goals		Paternal socialization goals	
			Independent	Interdependent	Independent	Interdependent
Adolescent Machiavellianism		--	.372*	-.050	.251	-.020
Maternal socialization goals	Independent	-.205	--	.154	.237	.060
	Interdependent	-.084	.473**	--	.271	.470**
Paternal socialization goals	Independent	-.015	.117	.007	--	.118
	Interdependent	-.445**	.520**	.498**	.394**	--

p* < .05. *p* < .01



Further, the moderating effect of adolescents' gender on the relationship between parental socialization goals and adolescents' levels of Machiavellianism was tested with the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013). Results revealed that the relationship between maternal independent socialization goals and Machiavellianism for girls differed significantly from the relationship between the same variables for boys (ΔR^2 due to interaction=.082; $F_{(1,94)}=8.720$; $p<.005$). Likewise, the relationship between paternal interdependent socialization goals and Machiavellianism for boys differed from the relationship between the same variables for girls (ΔR^2 due to interaction=.039; $F_{(1,94)}=4.162$; $p<.05$). Adolescents' gender had no significant moderation effect on the relationship between maternal interdependent (ΔR^2 due to interaction<.001; $F_{(1,94)}=.036$; $p=.849$) or paternal independent (ΔR^2 due to interaction=.025; $F_{(1,94)}=2.508$; $p=.117$) socialization goals and adolescents' levels of Machiavellianism.

Discussion

Results partially supported the hypotheses. Girls' levels of Machiavellianism were positively associated with mothers' endorsement of independent socialization, while boys' levels of Machiavellianism were negatively associated with fathers' endorsement of interdependent socialization goals. Machiavellian adolescents' individualistic, agentic, and materialistic motivations (McHoskey, 1999) seem to be in harmony with their same-sex parent's socialization goals. The importance of same-sex parents can be supported both by Life History Theory (Del Giudice et al., 2015) and the modelling hypothesis of Machiavellianism's development (Kraut & Price, 1976). On the one hand, male and female adolescents face different challenges in calibrating their optimal life history strategy (Trivers, 1972), thus, the same-sex parent might serve as the best model. On the other hand, similarity with the model (e.g., being of the same sex) is well-known to facilitate social learning (Bandura, 1977) - including the acquisition of individualistic (in the case of girls) and anti-communal values (in the case of boys) that are typical of Machiavellian individuals (Christie & Geis, 1970).

Considering the relative importance of interdependence for father-son dyads and the relative importance of independence for mother-daughter dyads, we speculate as follows. Stereotypically, women are described as communal and men as agentic (Abele, 2003). Based on these stereotypes, the cultural milieu calibrates the level of dependence for women and the level of independence for men more strictly than gender-atypical dimensions (i.e., dependence for men and independence for women). Thus, parental beliefs about and socialization goals regarding gender-atypical dimensions can be more flexibly calibrated to more ephemeral characteristics of the prevailing ecosocial context. In ecosocial contexts with unpredictability and high levels of competition, individuals can profit from Machiavellian traits (Jonason, Duineveld, & Middleton, 2015). Because of its stereotypical nature (Abele, 2003), fathers' elevated levels of fostering independence might not carry enough information to help their sons calibrate their attitudes to the prevailing ecosocial context. Therefore, fathers might signal the potentially benefiting nature of manipulative strategies with endorsing less interdependence and orientation towards others. For women, overt rejection of the stereotypically feminine value of interdependence might lead to social exclusion. This would prevent them from using Machiavellian manipulation because this strategy is highly dependent on exploitable others (Ináncsi, Láng, & Bereczkei, 2015). This hypothetical line of reasoning should be further investigated in forthcoming studies.

Our study is limited in several ways. First, we believe that our findings should be very cautiously generalized beyond adolescence, because the negotiation of interpersonal distance and agency is age-dependent (Diehl, Owen & Youngblade, 2004). Second, data were collected from a convenience sample of limited size with self-report measures. Third, this was a cross-sectional study with correlational design. Therefore, no matter how tentative the

results, we are reluctant to suggest – even hypothetically – a single direction in the causal pathway between parental socialization goals and adolescents' Machiavellianism. On the one hand, we suggest that parental socialization goals can inform adolescents about whether it is independence or interdependence that parents render the potentially more successful in the prevailing ecosocial context. Parents' endorsement of independence and the rejection of interdependent values – especially by same-sex parents as role models – might lead to a higher chance that the adolescent offspring becomes Machiavellian. This line of reasoning has been presented in a more elaborated manner in the previous paragraphs. However, on the other hand, actual parental socialization goals – emphasizing relational distance and an agentic attitude in our case – might be responses to the antagonistic nature of Machiavellian adolescents (Muris, Meesters, & Timmermans, 2013).

To conclude, our study was the first to show that parental socialization goals are related to adolescent offspring's levels of Machiavellianism. Indeed, this relationship was gender-specific with daughters' levels of Machiavellianism being connected to maternal endorsement of independence and sons' levels of Machiavellianism to parental rejection of interdependence. With these results, our study is amongst the few (Czibor et al., 2017; Láng & Abell, 2018) that emphasize the gendered nature of Machiavellianism and its development.

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