

# Machiavellianism and Competition in Friendship: is Self-disclosure used as a manipulation strategy?



Loren Abell & Dr Gayle Brewer

University of Central Lancashire, School of Psychology

## Introduction

Friendships are centred on communal values such as cooperation and equality of power. They are essential to our psychological wellbeing, for example they predict happiness (Demir & Weitekamp, 2007) and enhance self-esteem (Bagwell et al, 2005).

Personality has been found to be important with regard to friendship dynamics. Machiavellianism, a personality trait characterised by a manipulative interpersonal style, emotional detachment and a lack of concern with morality (Christie & Geis, 1970) has been under researched within the friendship literature. A previous study reported that Machiavellian individuals self-reported friendship to be of low importance and had low quality friendships (Lyons & Aitken, 2010).

Machiavellian individuals have been reported to use self-disclosure as a manipulation strategy. Jones, Nickel & Schmidt (1979) in an experimental study with strangers, reported that Machiavellian males disclosed more information in cooperative conditions and less information in competitive conditions.

This current study focuses on the influence that competitive and cooperative friendship has on Machiavellian individuals employing self-disclosure as a manipulation strategy. In particular, the research explores the amount of self-disclosure employed in a competitive or cooperative friendship.

## Method

### Participants:

175 participants (68 male) aged between 16 and 53 years were recruited through the University's Psychology participant pool, opportunity sampling on the University campus and through a web-link on a psychology research website.

### Procedure:

Participants completed the Mach IV, Self-disclosure, Friendship satisfaction and Friendship Competition measures regarding their close friend. Demographic details were also collected as well as their friend's gender and the length of the friendship.

**References:** Bagwell, C.L., Bender, S.E., Andreassi, C.L., Kinoshira, T. L., Montarello, S.A. & Muller, J.G. (2005). Friendship quality and perceived relationship changes predict psychosocial adjustment in early adulthood. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*. 22, 235-254.  
Christie, R. & Geis, F.L. (1970). *Studies in Machiavellianism*. London: Academic Press  
Demir, M. & Weitekamp, L.A. (2007). I am so Happy 'Cause Today I Found my Friend: Friendship and Personality as Predictors of Happiness. *Journal of Happiness Studies*. 8(2) 181-211  
Jones, W. H., Nickel, T. W. & Schmidt, A. (1979). Machiavellianism and Self-disclosure. *The Journal of Psychology*. 102, 33-41  
Lyons, M. & Aitken, S. (2010). Machiavellian Friends? The Role of Machiavellianism in Friendship Formation and Maintenance. *Journal of Social, Evolutionary and Cultural Psychology*. 4(3) 194-202

## Results

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and sex differences in Machiavellianism, Self-disclosure, Friendship Satisfaction and Competition

	Overall M(SD)	Males M(SD)	Females M(SD)
Mach IV	92.33(12.56)	95.49(13.30)	90.33(11.70)
Self-Disclosure	121.81(21.35)	121.10(22.77)	122.27(20.49)
Friendship Satisfaction	104.59(13.46)	101.22(14.34)	106.74(12.47)
Competition	14.81(5.86)	17.16(5.35)	13.30(5.70)

### Machiavellianism, Competition and Self-disclosure

Analysis revealed non-significant effects for Machiavellianism ( $F(1, 171) = 1.09, p = .30, \eta^2 = .006$ ), Competition ( $F(1, 171) = .47, p = .49, \eta^2 = .003$ ) and for the interaction between Machiavellianism and Competition ( $F(1, 171) = .06, p = .81, \eta^2 = .000$ ).

### Machiavellianism, Competition and Friendship Satisfaction

Machiavellianism was found to decrease friendship satisfaction for males ( $F(1, 64) = .71, p < .05, \eta^2 = .100$ ) but not for females ( $F(1, 103) = .01, p = .93, \eta^2 = .000$ ).

Competition was found to decrease friendship satisfaction for males ( $F(1, 64) = 4.8, p < .05, \eta^2 = .069$ ) and females ( $F(1, 103) = 22.9, p < .001, \eta^2 = .128$ ). The interaction between Machiavellianism and Competition was not significant for males ( $F(1, 64) = .41, p = .52, \eta^2 = .006$ ) or females ( $F(1, 103) = .71, p = .40, \eta^2 = .007$ ).

## Conclusions

The findings from this study suggest that Machiavellian individuals do not employ self-disclosure to manipulate their friends. Although, Machiavellianism was found to decrease friendship satisfaction for males, but not for females. An unexpected finding that has arisen from this study is that females were found to be more competitive in their friendships than males. This is surprising due to the competitive nature of males. However, friendship satisfaction decreased when friendships were deemed competitive for both males and females.