Machiavellianism and Perfectionism as Predictors of life satisfaction

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This study examined the relationship between the predictive variables of Machiavellianism and perfectionism, and the criterion variable of life satisfaction through a sample of 472 university students (230 men and 242 women). Three instruments were used: Machiavellianism Scale, Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale and The Satisfaction with Life Scale. According to the results, Both Machiavellianism and Perfectionism were negatively correlated with life satisfaction. Furthermore, the multiple regression analyses showed that for students the socially prescribed perfectionism, Machiavellianism and other–oriented perfectionism were the best predictors of life satisfaction. The results of this study support previous findings suggesting that Machiavellianism and perfectionism are associated with life satisfaction. In addition, it is specified that Machiavellianism and perfectionism are the factors that significantly predict reported levels of life satisfaction.

Keywords: personality, machiavellianism, perfectionism, life satisfaction

Personality is not a single trait existing in isolation, rather an interrelated constellation of traits. Certain traits are likely to co–occur and to form an identifiable personality configuration wherein one trait influences another. In this study, we made an attempt to demonstrate that

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Machiavellianism (MAC) and dimensions of perfectionism form a theoretically appreciable and empirically demonstrable personality configuration (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), that correlates with life satisfaction.

Machiavellianism involves aloof manipulation of others, disdain for conventional morality, and viewing humankind with cynicism (Christie & Geis, 1970). Machiavellian individuals may be described as domineering, impersonal, suspicious, practical, cold, deceitful, impervious, and exploitative (McHoskey, Worzel & Szyarto, 1998). In an emotionally charged situation involving face–to–face contact and permitting latitude for improvisation, Machiavellian individuals “manipulate more, win more, are persuaded less, and persuade others more” (Christie & Geis, 1970, p. 312).

Machiavellian individuals believe that powerful others control valued resources (Hunter, Gerbing, & Boster, 1982), perceive that their lives are governed by external forces (Mudrack, 1990), think that they are powerless (McHoskey & Hicks, 1999), and feel that others are hostile (Duffy, Shiflett, & Downey, 1977).

It seems that MAC is related to life satisfaction. The correlations between MAC and empathy have been found to be negative (Andrew, Cooke & Muncer, 2008; Austin, Farrelly, Black & Moore, 2007; Wastell & Booth, 2003; Watson, Biderman & Sawrie, 1994). MAC has also been found to be related negatively to the ability to read the emotions of others and positively to alexithymia (Simon, Francis & Lombardo, 1990; Wastell & Booth, 2003). The most robust MAC/personality associations are negative correlations with agreeableness and conscientiousness (Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006; Lee & Ashton, 2005; Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

One personality variable that has become the focus of research in adults is perfectionism (Flett and Hewitt, 1999). Perfectionism involves the requirement that oneself or others must be perfect, and centers on dispositions and attitudes associated with perfectionism (e.g., rigid self–expectations). Hewitt and Flett (1991) described perfectionism as multidimensional (Frost, Marten, Lahart & Rosenblate, 1990) and as encompassing both intra–individual and interpersonal trait components.
There are three distinct and stable dimensions of perfectionism (Hewitt & Flett, 1991): (1) self-oriented perfectionism, which involves requirements for the self to be perfect (i.e., inflexibly and ceaselessly demanding perfection of oneself); (2) other-oriented perfectionism, which involves requirements for others to be perfect (i.e., harshly and unrelentingly demanding perfection of others); and (3) socially prescribed perfectionism, which involves perceptions that others require the self to be perfect (i.e., perceiving that others are rigidly and unrealistically demanding perfection of oneself). These trait dimensions are differentially associated with life satisfaction, and research is generally supportive of this position.

Although extant findings have effectively challenged the view that perfectionism is unilaterally pathological, the majority of research continues to focus on maladaptive cognitions (Slaney, Rice & Ashby, 2002). Very little research has investigated how the dimensions of perfectionism may contribute to positive psychological well-being or life satisfaction (Beling, Israeli & Antony, 2004; Chang, 2000). Life satisfaction is defined as an individual’s conscious, cognitive appraisal of the quality of his or her life (Headey & Wearing, 1992) and may reflect a global (i.e., overall) appraisal as well as appraisals within specific life domains (e.g., family, self). Given that multidimensional life satisfaction reports are differentially related to a number of important psychological states and behaviors, including depression (Lewinsohn, Redner & Seeley, 1991), self-esteem (Arrindell, Heesink & Feij, 1999), and hope (Chang, 2003), the construct is considered to be a key indicator of an individual's successful adaptation to changes in life circumstances (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). Chang, Watkins, and Banks (2004) found that college students identified as adaptive perfectionists reported significantly higher global life satisfaction than maladaptive perfectionists. Parker, Portesova and Stumpf (2001), Park, Huebner, Laughlin, Valois and Gilman (2004), Besser, Hewitt, McGee and Flett (2004), and Stoeber and Stoeber (2009) showed a significant negative correlation between perfectionism and life satisfaction.
Also, some studies have found that perfectionism has a positive relationship with Machiavellianism. Hewitt & Flett (2003) found that perfectionism was linked with assertive self–presentational tactics (e.g., enhancement) typical of Machiavellian individuals. Sherry, Hewitt, Besser, Flett and Klein (2006) showed that Machiavellian perfectionists (a) perceive others as demanding, controlling, punitive, and hostile toward them, (b) promote an image of perfection, capability, and strength to others, and (c) conceal any hint of imperfection, vulnerability, and weakness from others. When Machiavellian individuals perceive perfectionistic demands from significant others, perfectionistic self–presentation is likely to emerge from their chameleon–like repertoire of self–presentational behaviors. Gilman, Ashby, Sverko, Florell and Varjas (2005) found that differential predictive values of personal standards and discrepancy across satisfaction domains for both groups. Further, adaptive perfectionists reported significantly higher satisfaction across many life domains for both groups than maladaptive perfectionists and non–perfectionists.

In view of the above, the present study attempted to extend or improve upon the previous research in one way. Due to the relative neglect in psychology, the research that examines the relationship of both MAC and perfectionism with life satisfaction could prove useful.

To begin the study, we first anticipated that MAC would correlate with life satisfaction since Machiavellian individuals’ cognitions and perceptions are generally inefficient. We also anticipated that perfectionism would correlate with life satisfaction because harshly demanding perfection of others seems congruent with the quality of life. Finally, we hypothesized that MAC and perfectionism would predict life satisfaction.

Method

Participants

A sample of 472 university students (230 men and 242 women) registered in psychology courses at the University of Mohaghegh Ardabili
and Islamic Azad University (Ardabil Branch) completed the measures. Men averaged 21.3 years of age (SD = 2.1) and 2.2 years of university education (SD = 0.9). Women averaged 20.8 years of age (SD = 2.5) and 2.4 years of university education (SD = 0.8).

**Instruments**

*Machiavellianism*: The MACH–IV (Christie & Geis, 1970) is a 20–item scale designed to capture a propensity toward interpersonal manipulation, a cynical view of humankind, and a disdain for conventional morality. Participants indicate their response on a five–point scale. Higher scores denote higher levels of MAC. The reliability and the validity of the MACH–IV are well documented (Christie & Geis, 1970). Mayer, Salovey & Caruso (2002) report a test–retest reliability of 0.73 over two–weeks (N=126). The correlation between their initial test scores and their scores nine months later was satisfactory (0.64) indicating Machiavellianism's temporal stability (Sherry, Hewitt, Besser, Flett & Klei, 2006). The internal consistency of the present study was calculated as 0.83.

*The Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale* (MPS; Hewitt & Flett, 1991) is a self–report measure consisting of 45 items, with 15 items per subscale. It was designed to assess three dimensions of perfectionism (self–oriented perfectionism, other–oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism). Items were assessed using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (disagree) to 7 (agree). Internal consistency reported by the authors for the self–oriented, other–oriented, and socially prescribed perfectionism subscales of the MPS are 0.86, 0.82, and 0.87, respectively (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). According to Besharat (2007), the internal consistency of the self–oriented, other–oriented, and socially prescribed perfectionism subscales of the MPS are 0.90, 0.91, and 0.81, respectively. The test–retest reliability reported for the three subscales after a three–month period were as follows: 0.88 for the self–oriented subscale, 0.82 for the other–oriented subscale, and 0.87 for the socially prescribed subscale (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). According to Besharat (2007), the test–retest reliability for the three
subscales after a three–month period was as follows: 0.85 for the self–
oriented subscale, 0.79 for the other–oriented subscale, and 0.84 for the
socially prescribed subscale. With regard to validity, the authors reported
that the three subscales of the MPS were positively correlated with the
following measures: the self–oriented scale with high standards, self–
criticism, and self–blame; the other–oriented scale with high standards and
self–criticism; and the socially prescribed scale with demand for approval
from others, fear of negative evaluation, and locus of control. The measure
as a whole was shown to correlate positively with clinical observations
(Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Besharat (2007) showed that the Mental Health
Inventory, and Neuroticism and Extraversion of the NEOPI-R were
correlated with perfectionism Scale (P<0.01).

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS: Diener, Emmons, Larsen &
Griffin, 1985) was used to assess global life satisfaction. The SWLS
consists of five items. The participants responded to these items using a 7–
point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The
internal consistency and test–retest reliability reported for the SWLS after a
two–month period were 0.82, and 0.87, respectively. According to Bayani,
Mohammadi Koochacky and Goodarzi (2007), the internal consistency and
test–retest reliability for the SWLS after a two–month period were 0.83,
and 0.69, respectively. Also, Bayani et al. (2007) showed that Oxford
Happiness Inventory (r=.79 to r=.62) and Beck Depression Inventory
(r=.60) were correlated with SWLS.

Procedure
Participants were selected from among the undergraduate students of the
Department of Psychology. Each subject completed the questionnaires and
returned them to the researcher. The questionnaires took approximately 25
minutes to complete. The study measures were administrated in the
following order: Machiavellianism Scale, Multidimensional Perfectionism
Scale and The Satisfaction with Life Scale.

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**Results**

Table 1 show the means and standard deviations for all the variables used in the analyses. The t–test results showed that there were no significant differences between the male and female students in any of the variables.

**Table 1**

*Means and standard deviations of Machiavellianism, perfectionism and life satisfaction in men and women*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Men M</th>
<th>Men SD</th>
<th>Women M</th>
<th>Women SD</th>
<th>Total M</th>
<th>Total SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LS</td>
<td>15.47</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>16.42</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>15.93</td>
<td>4.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAC</td>
<td>70.80</td>
<td>7.47</td>
<td>69.72</td>
<td>8.11</td>
<td>70.27</td>
<td>7.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOP</td>
<td>31.36</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>31.02</td>
<td>6.99</td>
<td>31.20</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OOP</td>
<td>35.21</td>
<td>5.59</td>
<td>35.28</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>35.25</td>
<td>5.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPP</td>
<td>32.11</td>
<td>6.62</td>
<td>31.73</td>
<td>6.45</td>
<td>31.93</td>
<td>6.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>98.69</td>
<td>12.26</td>
<td>98.04</td>
<td>15.37</td>
<td>98.37</td>
<td>13.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: LS= life satisfaction; MAC = Machiavellianism; SOP = self–oriented perfectionism; OOP = other oriented perfectionism; SPP = socially prescribed perfectionism; P= perfectionism

The Pearson correlation coefficients of Machiavellianism and perfectionism with life satisfaction are presented in Table 2 for undergraduate students. As appears from Table 2, Machiavellianism was negatively correlated with life satisfaction. As shown in Table 2, a significant negative correlation was observed between perfectionism and life satisfaction for undergraduate students (P<0.01).
The Pearson correlation coefficients of Machiavellianism with perfectionism are presented in Table 2 for the undergraduate students. Perfectionism was positively correlated with Machiavellianism. Also, significant positive correlations were observed between dimensions of perfectionism and Machiavellianism for the undergraduate students (P<0.01).

Table 3 shows the results of the stepwise multiple regression analysis of Machiavellianism and the dimensions of perfectionism, used to determine which variables best predicted life satisfaction in undergraduate students. A significant model was produced for the students. The RS of the linear combination of the three variables of SPP, MAC, and OOP with LS is 0.234, that is, more than 23% of the life satisfaction variance is accounted for by these three variables. The t-tests of the regression coefficients of SPP (B= –0.299), MAC (B= –0.138), and OOP (B= –0.128) indicate that they can meaningfully predict the students' life satisfaction variable.
Table 3
Stepwise multiple regression for the predictors of life satisfaction in undergraduate students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Ms</th>
<th>MR</th>
<th>RS</th>
<th>F(sig)</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t(sig)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SPP</td>
<td>1672.63</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1672.53</td>
<td>.400</td>
<td>.160</td>
<td>89.66</td>
<td>-.289</td>
<td>.985</td>
<td>-9.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8767.56</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>65.18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(&lt;0.001)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAC</td>
<td>18.2196</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1098.09</td>
<td>.459</td>
<td>.210</td>
<td>62.47</td>
<td>-.138</td>
<td>.840</td>
<td>-5.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8243.92</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>58.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(&lt;0.001)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OOP</td>
<td>2444.79</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>814.93</td>
<td>.484</td>
<td>.234</td>
<td>47.70</td>
<td>-.128</td>
<td>.959</td>
<td>-3.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7995.31</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>17.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(&lt;0.001)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

This study examined the relationship between MAC and dimensions of perfectionism with life satisfaction in undergraduate students. The results revealed a relationship between the dimensions of perfectionism and life satisfaction in the undergraduate students (P<0.01). This result is consistent with previous research findings (e.g., Besser et al. 2004; Chang et al. 2004; 2003; Hewitt et al. 2004; Parker et al. 2001; Park et al 2004; Slaney et al. 2002; Stoeber & Stoeber, 2009). The results revealed that perfectionists reported lower life satisfaction levels than non–perfectionists.

The results of this study also indicated that holding high personal standards was a positive and unique predictor of life satisfaction for undergraduate students, suggesting that students who maintain high standards perceive their school experiences in a more positive way. Considering that self–satisfaction closely parallels with self–esteem among the youth (Huebner, 1994), and the relationship between holding high standards and maintaining positive self–esteem has been documented (Benning, Tracz, Sparks, & Solomon, 1991), holding high standards appears to contribute to a positive sense of self for person. On the other
hand, holding high perfectionism was a significant predictor of self-satisfaction.

The results further revealed a relationship between MAC and life satisfaction in undergraduate students (P<0.01). This result is consistent with prior research findings (e.g., Andrew, Cooke & Muncer, 2008; Austin et al., 2007; Wastell & Booth, 2003; Watson et al., 1994). The results revealed that individuals with high MAC have lower life satisfaction levels. These results suggest that the subjects with higher MAC suffer from a lower life satisfaction.

Machiavellian individuals are reluctant to exhibit weaknesses to others. For example, Shepperd and Socherman (1997) demonstrated that Machiavellian individuals tend to portray themselves as high in ability and to resist presenting themselves as less competent than they actually are—even when such a display is potentially advantageous.

Also, we found that MAC was associated with perfectionism. It seems that actively promoting an image of strength, capability, and perfection to others and/or defensively concealing any hint of weakness, vulnerability, and imperfection from others (i.e., nondisclosure of imperfection and nondisplay of imperfection) is in keeping with Machiavellian individuals’ aloof, dominant, narcissistic, and mistrustful interpersonal style (Gurtman, 1992). Thus, Machiavellian individuals may use perfectionism as an interpersonal influence tactic to enhance, maintain, and reinforce a desired image of strength and dominance. Furthermore, a connection between MAC and perfectionism is further suggested by research on perfectionism and self-presentational tactics. This result is consistent with prior research findings (Gilman et al, 2005; Hewitt et al., 2003; Sherry et al, 2006).

The relationship between MAC and perfectionism is in line with Machiavellian individuals’ mistrustful, narcissistic, dominant, and aloof interpersonal style (McHoskey, 2001). Machiavellian individuals may utilize perfectionists in an effort to gain a competitive advantage over others, while Perfectionists may function as an interpersonal influence tactic through which Machiavellian individuals communicate their preferred image of dominance and strength to others. Moreover,
Machiavellian individuals are suspicious of and mistrustful toward others (Gurtman, 1992). This finding suggests that Machiavellian individuals tend to focus on appearing as perfect to others rather than actually striving to be perfect. To rephrase our opening quote, “It is not essential, then, that [Machiavellian individuals] should [actually strive to be perfect], but it is most essential that [they] should [appear as perfect to others]” (Machiavelli, 1999, p. 58).

The results also showed that SPP, MAC and OOP were the best predictors for life satisfaction in undergraduate subjects. The finding that perfectionism accounted for a significant portion of the variance in life satisfaction of subjects may have important implications for intervention. These results indicate that 77% of life satisfaction variance can be accounted for by other psychological and social variables.

Although the present study was the first to investigate the relationship between Machiavellianism, perfectionism, and life satisfaction in samples of undergraduate students, two limitations must be noted. First, the results reported here are based on a sample derived from two universities. Additional samples from various locations are needed to support external validity. Second, this study relied on cross-sectional and correlational data. Experimental research might be designed to extend correlational results and to establish causal relationship between MAC and perfectionism with life satisfaction.

In conclusion, the findings of this study are of interest to both theoretical and applied psychologists. Also, the present study provided support for most hypotheses. Specifically, the hypothesis that MAC and dimensions of perfectionism would predict life satisfaction was supported.

References


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