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## MACHIAVELLIANISM, BELIEF IN A JUST WORLD, AND THE TENDENCY TO WORSHIP CELEBRITIES

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### ABSTRACT

*In a continuing effort to understand why some people "worship" celebrities, scales to measure celebrity worship (Celebrity Attitude Scale), societal fairness (Just World Scale), and Machiavellianism (Allsopp Mach & Mach IV) were administered to 119 college students. The hypothesis that Machiavellianism is inversely related to celebrity worship was not supported. The hypothesis that those who believe that the world is a fair and just place to live is positively related to celebrity worship was supported. Someone who believes that the world is "just" is likely to believe that the major components of society are fair, and the celebrity system is a major component of contemporary society.*

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Who among us has never tried to run, sing, dance, jump, or act? It seems quite reasonable to admire the skills of those who can do these things better than we can. For some, however, the admiration goes well beyond that which is reasonable. For some, this means standing in line for hours in order to pay an outrageous sum of money for tickets - tickets to hear a famous someone who sings a little better than the best kid in the local high school chorus. For others it means risking complete humiliation if that famous stranger walking out of an NBA locker room says "no" to their sexual advances. For still others it might mean countless hours on the internet trying to find out what foods she likes, where she gets her hair done, and where she lives, so they can go there and keep an eye on her. For these people, admiration has turned to obsession; consideration has been converted into celebrity worship. Not all of the parishioners who attend the chapel of celebrity worship are quite so devout, but all of them tend to idolize famous persons whose accomplishments fall considerably short of the miraculous.

Why should we care about celebrity worshippers? For one thing, a few of them become stalkers, taking or threatening to take the lives of the celebrities on whom they have become fixated (Dietz, P. E., Matthews, D. B., VanDuyne, C., Martell, D. A., Parry, C. D. H., Stewart, T.,

Warren, J., & Crowder, J. D., 1991). Secondly, many of the most worshipped celebrities are poor role models for impressionable young people. It is not difficult to find movie stars who moonlight as shoplifters, gun-toting professional athletes (Bianchi, 2002) who double as deadbeat dads, and celebrities who are generally rude or downright abusive (see Giles, pp. 142-143). Is it possible that some of the poor sportsmanship exhibited by high school athletes has been learned by observing the rude behavior of professional athletes? A third reason is that celebrity worshippers are probably more susceptible than non-worshippers to the claims made by celebrities in commercials, and the inexpert advice they freely offer on talk shows. Most celebrities probably know little more than the average person does about the products they endorse or about knowledge in general. Many celebrities are not college graduates, yet their advice on medical and psychological matters is widely sought by star-struck fans. One can only guess how much money is wasted and how many lives are harmed each year by inexpert advice doled out freely by celebrities.

Recently there has been considerable interest in trying to understand why some people "worship" celebrities. (Maltby & McCutcheon, 2001; Maltby, McCutcheon, Ashe, & Houran, 2001; McCutcheon, Lange, & Houran, 2002). This worshipful attitude seems somewhat puzzling, inasmuch as many celebrities appear to be ordinary people who sing, dance, run or jump a little better than most humans do (see Giles, 2000, p. 25, ff).

A reliable and valid instrument, the *Celebrity Attitude Scale* (CAS), has been developed for the purpose of measuring attitudes toward one's favorite celebrity (McCutcheon, Lange & Houran, 2002). Thus far we have learned that female adolescents who worship celebrities tend to have a poor body image (Maltby, Giles, Barber, & McCutcheon, submitted). Celebrity-worshippers generally tend to score lower on measures of creativity, crystallized intelligence, and critical thinking (McCutcheon, Ashe, Houran, & Maltby, in press). They tend to adopt game-playing and dependent love styles, especially if their favorite celebrity is a fantasy love attraction (McCutcheon, 2002). Furthermore, as measured by the *General Health Questionnaire* (Goldberg & Williams, 1991), celebrity-worshippers tend to have poorer psychological well-being (Maltby, McCutcheon, Ashe, & Houran, 2001).

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There is still much that we do not know about the personalities of celebrity-worshippers. For example, we do not know how the strength of attitudes toward celebrities relates to beliefs in a just world (BJW). The BJW concept is that of a personality continuum with persons at one pole who believe that the world is filled with injustice, and people at the other who believe that the world is just, and that fairness ultimately prevails (Lerner, 1965). The BJW person believes that good things happen to good people and bad people always get punished (Furnham, 2002). If the world is fair and just for the BJW person, this implies a certain degree of satisfaction with society and its institutions. One of those societal institutions is the system that produces celebrities. The celebrity system gradually emerged from the need to market radio, motion pictures, television, and musical recordings. This system has become firmly entrenched in Western civilization over the last century, gradually replacing the tendency to value persons of substantial achievement. As Boorstin put it, time was "...when a great man appeared, people looked for God's purpose in him; today we look for his press agent" (1961, p. 45). While the

celebrity system might seem unfair to Boorstin and other social critics, a BJW person is likely to endorse the system as part of the status quo. Thus it seems reasonable to think that BJWs would be more strongly attached to a favorite celebrity than would non-BJWs.

We also know little about the relationship between celebrity worship and Machiavellianism. Niccolo Machiavelli was a sixteenth century politician whose political philosophy advocated self-interest, deception, manipulation of the public, and a high level of cynicism in dealing with the public. A growing concern about contemporary persons who shared these views prompted Christie and Geis (1970) to develop a scale to measure Machiavellianism. The initial scale underwent various refinements, resulting in *Mach IV*. This version has enjoyed wide usage in spite of its less than satisfactory correlation with social desirability (Christie & Geis, 1970).

More recently, a 10-item alternative to *Mach IV* has been developed by Allsopp, Eysenck, and Eysenck (1991). The "*Allsopp Mach*" appears to measure such aspects of Machiavellianism as being ruthless, getting even with others, the need to be powerful, and the desire to manipulate others. According to a reviewer, the Allsopp Mach has good psychometric properties, but the reviewer recommends converting the "yes – no" response format to Likert-type declarative statements and a "strongly disagree – strongly agree" response format (Mudrack, 2000).

There is some reason to believe that Machiavellianism, however measured, might correlate significantly with scores on the CAS. Machiavellians tend to value power, and devalue interpersonal relationships, preferring to view other people as objects to be manipulated. Machiavellians often have cynical and negative views about other people (Christie & Geis, 1970).

Celebrity-worshippers, by contrast, get involved in parasocial relationships over which they have little control. Their favorite celebrity may not even be aware that they exist. Celebrity-worshippers not only have a high regard for their favorite celebrity, but they often express considerable admiration for other celebrities as well (Maltby, Houran, Lange, Ashe, & McCutcheon, 2002; McCutcheon, 2002). Those who greatly admire celebrities are not in a position to manipulate the object of their admiration. Instead, they are vulnerable to the promoters who attempt to market anything related to their favorite celebrity. It is difficult to imagine the Machiavellian, a person described as one who does not accept domination comfortably, a person who endorses statements like "It is safer to trust nobody," trapped in such a vulnerable position (Christie & Geis, 1970, p. 48).

To summarize, I predict that BJWs will tend to express greater amounts of admiration for celebrities than non-BJWs. However, I expect Machiavellians to be less strongly attached to their favorite celebrities than non-Machiavellians.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

The participants were 75 males ( $M$  age = 22.55 years,  $SD$  = 6.4) and 44 females ( $M$  age = 25.27 years,  $SD$  = 7.5) from the author's classes at a small, technologically oriented university in

Orlando. Their favorite celebrities were likely to be actors (33%), singers (29%), or athletes (27%). Approximately 75% were single, 16% were married, and 8% were divorced. About 55% were currently employed, 28% were unemployed but seeking work, and 14% were unemployed. Participants were awarded five extra credit points for their participation.

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## Measures

The *Celebrity Attitude Scale* (CAS) is a 23-item, five-choice, Likert-type scale that has "strongly agree" as a five-point choice and "strongly disagree" as the one-point anchor. All items (examples: "My friends and I like to discuss what my favorite celebrity has done," "I am obsessed by details of my favorite celebrity's life," and "I have frequent thoughts about my favorite celebrity, even when I don't want to") are worded in the positive direction and high scores indicate that the respondent is a celebrity worshipper. The CAS appeared in its entirety as an appendix to a recent article in *Current Research in Social Psychology* (McCutcheon & Maltby, 2002). Previous studies have shown high internal reliability, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha (Maltby, McCutcheon, Ashe, & Houran, 2001; McCutcheon & Maltby, 2002), as well as correlations between the CAS and several other measures that testify to the validity of the CAS (Maltby, Houran, Lange, Ashe, & McCutcheon, 2001; McCutcheon, 2002).

The *Just World Scale* (JWS) is a 20-item, six-choice, Likert-type scale that has "strongly agree" (5 points) at one pole and "strongly disagree" (zero points) at the other (Rubin & Peplau, 1975). Nine of the items are reverse-scored (examples: "Many people suffer through absolutely no fault of their own," and "It is often impossible for a person to receive a fair trial in the USA"); the others are scored in the positive direction (examples: "Crime doesn't pay," and "People who meet with misfortune have often brought it on themselves"). High scorers (BJWs) are those who believe that the world is basically fair and just. Some studies have confirmed that the JWS has marginal (Couch, 1998) to adequate (Rubin & Peplau, 1975) internal reliability. Scores on JWS have been shown to correlate negatively with the number of times one had experienced age, sex, and religious discrimination, as predicted (Lipkus & Siegler, 1993). Also, men who scored high on the JWS were more negative toward rape victims than men who had low JWS scores (Kleinke & Meyer, 1990).

The *Mach IV* is a 20-item, six-choice, Likert-type scale with "agree strongly" anchoring the upper end and "disagree strongly" at the lower end. Half of the items are reverse-scored (examples: "Most people are basically good and kind," and "Most people who get ahead in the world lead clean, moral lives"). The others are scored in the positive direction (examples: "It is wise to flatter important people," and "Never tell anyone the real reason you did something unless it is useful to do so"). High scores suggest that the respondent agrees with the Machiavellian philosophy of deception, manipulation, and cool detachment from others. Split-half reliabilities based on several samples averaged .79 (Wrightsman, 1991). There are numerous studies that provide validation for this instrument or for its first cousin, *Mach V*, which contains the same items in a forced-choice format. For example, young people who liked heavy metal music tended to score high on *Mach IV*, a finding consistent with heavy metal lyrical themes, which many would judge to be cynical, amoral, and manipulative (Hansen & Hansen, 1991).

Another study revealed that high scorers on *Mach V* tended to use deceit in their attempt to influence others more frequently than those who obtained low scores (Grams & Rogers, 1990).

The ten-item scale used to measure Machiavellianism emerged from factor analysis of a larger number of items (Allsopp, Eysenck, & Eysenck, 1991), and the suggestion to use a Likert-type format (Mudrack, 2000). "Strongly agree" (5 points) anchors the high end and "strongly disagree" (zero points) anchors the lower. One item is reverse-scored ("I would prefer to be humble and honest rather than important and dishonest"). The others are scored in the positive direction (examples: "I enjoy manipulating people," "I would be prepared to deceive someone completely if it was to my advantage to do so," and "I would be prepared to 'walk all over people' to get what I want"). High scores indicate a belief in a Machiavellian style. Internal reliability, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, is adequate (Mudrack & Mason, 1995a). High Machs, as measured by both *Mach IV* and the *Allsopp Mach*, were likely to endorse ethically dubious behaviors in the workplace (Mudrack & Mason, 1995b), and were more likely than low Machs to be "suspicious of the merits of corporate responsibility" (Mudrack & Mason, 1995a, p. 196).

## Procedure

The measures described above were presented to participants in a variety of orders to reduce the probability of a systematic order effect. Participants filled out the measures in a quiet environment supervised either by the author or personnel from the university testing center. No one who actually began to fill out the scales declined to participate, but about a dozen persons who had agreed to participate failed to show up at the designated time and place. Participants were debriefed by a written report explaining the purpose and results of the study.

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## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The means, standard deviations, and alpha coefficients for all measures used in the study can be found in Table 1. Table 2 presents the correlations between measures. The means and standard deviations for the CAS, JWS, and *Mach IV* are comparable to those obtained in previous studies. The mean score for the Allsopp Mach was lower than expected. *Allsopp Mach* scores for females (mean = 12.30, SD = 9.2) were significantly lower than scores (mean = 18.43, SD = 10.5) for males, using a *t* test for unequal variances ( $t_{100.28} = 3.33, p < .001$ ). Correlations comparing CAS with *Allsopp Mach* were done separately for males and females. Neither was significant at .05, with .22 for females being the stronger of the two. Means and standard deviations for males and females did not even approach significance on the other measures, so scores were collapsed for the analyses seen in Table 2. The correlation between the two measures of Machiavellianism (.55,  $p < .0001$ ) was comparable to the .60 obtained by Mudrack and Mason (1995b). The correlation between JWS and Mach IV ( $r = -.29$ ) was comparable to that ( $r = -.31$ ) obtained by Ahmed and Stewart (1985).

### Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Measures Used

Measure	Female Mean	Male Mean	Total Mean	SD	Alpha
CAS	50.86	52.33	51.79	13.92	.90
JWS	49.05	49.51	49.34	9.37	.60
Mach IV	69.32	72.95	71.61	13.88	.66
Allsopp Mach	12.30	18.43	16.16	10.44	.88

Parenthetically it should be noted that the *Allsopp Mach* performed well versus the *Mach IV*, at least as far as internal consistency is concerned. An analysis of the *Mach IV* items revealed that the removal of items 3, 8, and 13 would have improved the internal reliability of the scale somewhat

**Table 2. Zero-order Correlations Between All Measures Used**

	CAS	JWS	Mach IV	`Allsopp Mach
CAS	-	.23*	-.13	.12
JWS		-	-.29	-.05
Mach IV			-	.55
Allsopp Mach				-

\*  $p < .01$

Scores on the CAS did not correlate significantly with scores on either of the two Machiavellian measures. A set of post hoc correlations was computed between the CAS and each of the items on both of the two measures of Machiavellianism. Because of the large number (30) of correlations caution must be used in interpreting the results. The best single item was *Allsopp Mach* item seven, "I agree that the most important thing in life is winning" ( $r_{117} = .28, p < .002$ ). This suggests that future research might focus on the relationship between hypercompetitiveness and attitudes toward a favorite celebrity. Such a scale as the one developed by Ryckman, Hammer, Kaczor, and Gold (1990) might serve as a useful tool toward that end.

The prediction about the relationship between the CAS and the JWS was supported. Those who believed that the world is "just" did tend to have stronger positive feelings about their favorite celebrity; the correlation coefficient ( $.23, p < .01$ ) reached significance, although it did not account for a great deal of variance. It seems reasonable to think that those who believe that the society we live in is a fair place to live would also tend to believe that the major components of that society are reasonably fair, also. To a certain extent the endorsement of a celebrity is the endorsement of the fair and just society that produced that celebrity.

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An alternative explanation centers around the concept of fantasy. Are celebrity worshippers immersed in a fantasy world where the worshipper becomes joined with the celebrity? Giles (2000) has suggested that many worshippers have a strong desire (fantasy?) to become celebrities themselves. Is it possible that BJWs are fantasizing a little when they endorse statements suggesting that the world is fair and everyone gets what they deserve?

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