

*Extended Abstract*

**A Study of the Relationships between Empathy and Machiavellian Beliefs with social Competence and Social Uncompetence of 9 to 12 Years old Students in Shiraz**

**M. Arefi**

**Dr. M. Latifian**

Shiraz University

**Introduction**

Machiavellians are famously described as having the "cool syndrome" and one wonders how they could go on to exploit others if they did have any aspect of hot empathy. There are a number of theories regarding the possible mechanisms by which empathy influences behaviors (e.g. Feshbach 1975, Marshall, Hudson, Jones & Fernandez 1995, Pithers 1999). However, many of these theories have as their fundamental basis the assumption that a greater amount of empathy inhibits antisocial behavior and increases the likelihood of prosocial behavior. This is because the ability to experience or understand another person's negative emotions should motivate a person with high empathy to act to alleviate this suffering. This action might be undertaken for altruistic reasons. Also an individual with high empathy would derive rewards in the form of vicarious pleasure from any subsequent positive emotions that resulted from the prosocial behavior.

Alternatively, low empathy should increase the likelihood of antisocial behavior. This is because an individual who lacks empathy is essentially free to act without an appreciation of the impact of their behavior on the emotions of others and without experiencing aversive

vicarious emotions. Furthermore a lack of empathy would prevent an individual from benefiting from another person's positive emotions because of the individual's limited ability to understand or experience such emotions. Given the intuitive strength of this theory it is not surprising that it was shown that there are relationships between hot empathy, Machiavellian beliefs, social competence and social incompetence. This paper investigated the relationship between hot empathy and Machiavellian beliefs and the role of the variables in prediction of social competency and social incompetence of 9 to 12 years students in Shiraz.

### **Research questions**

1- Is there a negative relationship between hot empathy and Machiavellian beliefs of students?

2- Is there a negative relationship between Machiavellian beliefs and social competence and positive relationship between Machiavellian beliefs and social incompetence of students?

3- Is there a negative relationship between hot empathy with social incompetence and positive relationship with social competence of students?

4- Can hot empathy and Machiavellian beliefs predict social competence and social incompetence of students?

### **Method**

Data for this study were obtained from 188 students (108 male, 80 female) 9 to 12 years old from primary schools in Shiraz. Empathy was measured using the Index of empathy (Bryant, 1982). This 22-item scale assesses hot empathy and was designed to measure the degree to which a person shares the emotions of another. Machiavellian beliefs were measured using the Kidde Mach scale (Christi & Geis, 1970). This 20-item scale assesses children's attitudes towards human nature and trust in interpersonal relationships. A peer nomination instrument (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995) was used to assess social competence and social incompetence of students. This measure consists of two subscales which assess social competence and social

## 16 *Studies in Learning & Instruction*

uncompetence of students. For analysis of data, multiple regression and correlation of Pearson methods were applied.

### **Results**

1- The relationship between hot empathy and Machiavellian beliefs were negative.

2- Machiavellian beliefs related to the social competency positively and to the social uncompetency negatively

3- Both hot empathy and Machiavellian beliefs could predict social competency and social uncompetency of students.

### **Conclusion**

Correlation between scores on the Empathy scale and Kidde Mach revealed some relations. As expected, students who displayed insensitivity towards the feelings of others were heightened in Machiavellian beliefs; in contrast, the students who displayed sensitivity to the feelings of others were low in Machiavellian beliefs. This finding is consistent with the study of Pellarini (2001) that found high levels of Machiavellianism were associated with low hot empathy (path=0.43,  $p<0.1$ ). McIlwain (2003) said that Machs have the cool syndrome. The developmental findings show that young Machs are low in this vital dimension of hot empathy, empathic concern. Affective coolness is there by age 10 in the form of an absence of the emotionally based, empathic concern dimension of empathy. As children and as adults, they lack empathy. They do not report being vicariously and compassionately aroused by the emotional experience of others. The present investigation explored the role of empathic disposition and Machiavellianism in the student's social competence and social uncompetence. Empathic positions were found to have a significantly positive role in predicting student's social competence and a negative role in predicting student's social uncompetence. These findings suggest that empathy is an important motive for helping; on the other hand, the lack of it tends to an insensitivity for the feelings of others and low empathy disposition can tend to be social uncompetence. Machiavellianism is found to have a

significantly negative role in predicting student's social competence and a positive role in predicting of student's social incompetence. Machiavellianism is characterized by a set of attitudes toward the interpersonal world, and by a preparedness to use exploitative tactics. Machs have the cool syndrome (Christie & Geis, 1970). This is not directly assessed by the Mach scales, but is invariably associated with Mach's real world performance. They betray little spontaneous affect, and thus are good deceivers; they respond little to the emotional situation of others and thus are exceptional at exploitation. They are competent manipulators from an early age. Machs have an articulated worldview, those identified as Machiavellian are willing to use and are adept at using manipulative tactics and give explanations to the deceived others that are plausible, if wide of the full truth. So, child's violent and social incompetence can be changed to social competence and prosocial behavior by promoting hot empathy and decreasing Machiavellian beliefs. Teaching empathy by peers, teachers and parents and changing Machiavellian beliefs by positive interpersonal relationships is suggested as a good intervention for anti-social and social incompetence programs. Investigating the role of empathy as a mediator for the relationship between Machiavellianism and social incompetence behavior is suggested for future studies. In addition, studying the causal role of empathy for Machiavellian behavior is the other suggestion for researchers too.

**Keywords:** Machiavellian beliefs, Hot empathy, Social competence, Social incompetence.