

Between a Prince and a Prostitute

Machiavellian personality traits refer to cunningness, the human capacity to manipulate, and a drive to obtain power at any cost. *The end justifies the means.* In a PsyPost article, Eric W. Dolan examines the parallelism between machiavellian women and narcissistic men, and their shared intense desire to receive sexual attention from the opposite sex. Through constant “flirtation, obsessing over one’s looks, and even keeping online dating profiles active despite being ‘unavailable,’” this unhealthy thirst for sexual recognition can overtake a person’s life (Dolan, Eric W. “Machiavellian Women and Narcissistic Men Desire More Sexual Attention from Others.” *PsyPost - Psychology News*). For these persons, this venereal prioritization fuses itself with the feeling of control. This so-called life of theirs becomes more of a game - a simulation which has the sole purpose of fulfilling their pleasure.

Nevertheless, I don’t believe the significance in the article lies in *why* this parallel relationship exists between both parties, but what derived this blurry merging of two seemingly unrelated ideas for machiavellian women specifically. Sex and power: with the “and” being less of a separation of the two concepts and more so a combination for a new reality. And is it even really *sex* that is the focal point of this notion, or is it the potentiality of it all? Maybe Niccolo Machiavelli intended for this association with deception, ruthlessness, and immortality to be purely political, but in modern day society, these principles are frequently being applied to sexual relationships.

Although Machiavelli used Fortuna to symbolize the misleading emphasis on chance that can result in the downfall of an individual’s initiative, Virtu, the specific names and language chosen denote a comparison of gender. Niccolo Machiavelli depicts the virgin goddess, Fortuna, as being a dangerous temptress, comparing her to “one of those great rivers” that destroy “trees

and buildings, bearing away the soil from place to place” (*The Prince*, Chapter 25). To prevent this flooding, a man who wishes to stay in power must “beat and treat her badly” because a singular woman can annihilate a man and everything he’s built just through her femininity. With that being said, a machiavellian woman does not search for “Virtu” or feel the need to embody a masculine depiction of dominion, nor does she need to physically beat a man, instead she personifies this threatening Fortuna.

And in her machiavellian world, can a man ever be in absolute control if his life is an everlasting attempt to stay one step ahead of her no matter what? Her father can’t.

“Women scoring high in the desire for sexual attention were also...more likely to report having overprotective fathers.” Even in fatherhood, men are trying to outfox their daughters, but disguise this excessive amount of attention on their womanhood and figure as “protection.” The masculine desire to protect one’s daughter from pedophilia, perversion, and assault can really be a reflection of their own suppressed feelings towards women. Therefore, to tame this temptation, the one woman they *should* have authority over must be restrained from furthering a cycle of lustfulness. Unconsciously and ironically, us daughters are being conditioned to expect this same obsession with our feminine sexuality from all male figures we encounter. Thus, we find might in attractiveness. In an attempt to desensitize ourselves from this conditioning, we oversexualize and weaponize our bodies to regain some control - a control we’ve been deprived of from a man since birth. *Fortuna overtakes Virtu.*

The difference between a machiavellian man and a machiavellian woman - between Virtu and Fortuna - is that while he spends his time passively responding, she will always be the aggressive move-maker. While Virtu longs to be one step ahead, Fortuna just is. The point is this: Machiavelli’s acknowledgement that Fortuna *can* destroy Virtu, although Virtu might have some

preventative measure, demonstrates less of a masculine, stable power source and more of a feminine one. Once a machiavellian woman notices the fatherly suppression she endured, she then uses any means necessary to steal her power back. This power can be obtained through monetary means, sexual gratification, or even acknowledgment of physical attractiveness.

The premise of the “my body my choice” movement is inherently rebellious. After declaring bodily autonomy as a fundamental right, the term alone - bodily autonomy - remains ambiguous and thus can be used as justification for essentially anything a woman does that impacts her physicality. Machiavellian women benefit from this ambiguity as they use the blurred lines as a way to gain something of interest. A machiavellian woman might show up to her nine-to-five office job in a mini-skirt and a low-cut blouse to receive male attention, because even just the gaze of a man alone means she is controlling his eye, but when confronted by HR for her inappropriate work attire, she’ll defend her outfit as an execution of one of her rights. Her body, her choice in how to dress it. Although her intention *was* promiscuous, to outfox whoever currently feels threatened by her sexuality, she falls back onto this embodiment of her rights to provide justification for her actions.

Similarly, it’s not uncommon for women to explore themselves sexually with multiple partners to channel this feeling of empowerment and in some extreme cases, this realization of their power in pleasure leads to exploitation. After learning how a man cannot resist the temptation of seeing or getting close to a woman’s body, machiavellian women use this allure to their advantage. A blowjob to pass the class. An affair for a promotion. And they understand the possibility that they might ruin a man’s reputation, career, or relationship in exchange for their own personal gain, but the consequences don’t outweigh the end result. The end justifies the means.

Thomas More's *Utopia* attempts to regulate this distortion of sexuality. To prevent such an abuse of one's body, More's "utopia" consists of numerous marriage regulations, with one being the punishment for premarital "forbidden embraces" (127, Of Their Slaves and Of Their Marriages). Also, prior to finalizing the "privilege of marriage," the bride and bridegroom are presented to each other in complete nudity. By restricting premarital sex and requiring a revelation of the naked body to become worthy of marriage, More emphasizes the vulnerability in such intimacy. Intimacy not in touch, but in trust. In a natural state, the couple must "venture upon trust" with the other person instead of looking at this encounter as a form of transactionality. Nothing is necessarily gained by somebody, except for faithfulness in the individual across from them.

But these ideas from both Machiavelli and More aren't necessarily contrasting or opposing of the other. Thomas More depicts his perfect society, while Machiavelli's approach, although cynical, seems to be more realist. For machiavellian women, this acceptance of vulnerability could be an attractive idea, but after being raised in an environment so hyperfocused on carnalities instead of personhood, the idea cannot transfigure into anything of substance. In their reality, this vulnerability would strip away that feeling of control they prioritize.

A prime example of a machiavellian woman who understands this notion of vulnerability, but also refuses its acquisition out of remaining comfortable in control, is the prostitute who won't kiss their client on the mouth. Sex work provides women with authority over their own bodies and the price which a potential suitor must pay; however, to avoid the stripping of this authority, they must remain disconnected. Once feelings are involved, Virtu has a way of suppressing the power Fortuna currently has; therefore, by removing the emotionality from

sexuality, Fortuna ensures dominance. This machiavellian sex worker will always be in control, choosing who she gives such pleasure to and when. The refusal of service to a potential client allows dominion over her body, providing her with sexual emancipation, and the acceptance of a payment provides her with monetary emancipation. Either way she is free and empowered, taking advantage of a desperate or unsatisfied man for her own personal gain while still remaining cautious of susceptibility - still remaining a step ahead.

Ultimately, the linkage between power and sexuality for machiavellian women suggests the subjectivity of the term in its entirety. Maybe you don't have to be a Prince or an absolute government figure to have control. Maybe having power in decision-making over your own life and body is all it takes. Maybe just the feeling alone is all you need. At the end of the day, what's the difference between a royal subject and a sexually frustrated man, if they will both listen to their sovereign? What's the difference between a prince and a prostitute if they can both exert their power alike? Although Machiavelli may have intended to instruct men on how to gain political power, modern day women flipped the narrative to serve as an instruction manual on how to be autonomous in their own private, sexual sphere.