

# 6 Signs You're in a Relationship With a Machiavellian Personality

**HAVE YOU EVER** met someone who seemed like the most charming, intelligent, and confident person ... *ever*? But, after a few months of [dating](#), you started to see another side to them—one that's [manipulative](#), power-obsessed, and even cruel.

If so, you might be dealing with someone with a Machiavellian personality type.

“Once they have pulled you into their world, it's difficult to see them as anyone but the person who made you feel that way,” says [Jennifer Kowalski, L.P.C.](#), a licensed professional counselor at mental health provider [Thriveworks](#). “You may start to get subtle hints that you're being [manipulated](#), but often that occurs slowly over time.”

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Machiavellianism is a personality trait, not a diagnosable condition. But, there's some overlap between the personality type and [narcissistic personality disorder](#).

Someone with a Machiavellian personality often views other people “as objects to be manipulated in pursuit of his or her goals,” according to the [American Psychological Association](#). They might be cynical, cunning, cold, calculating, and deceptive—but, these behaviors might not be fully on display, at least at first.

“When engaging with them, their behavior may feel charming, however, you never really get to know their authentic selves,” says [Chase Cassine, L.C.S.W.](#), a licensed clinical social worker in New Orleans.

So, being in a [relationship with a Machiavellian personality](#) can be a [dysfunctional](#), possibly abusive, experience. They'll likely show little emotion toward you and might even dump you once they get what they want out of you or think you can't benefit them anymore, Cassine explains.

People with this personality can be tough to spot. Here's how to tell if you're in a relationship with a Machiavellian personality type and how to deal with it.

## What *Exactly* Is a Machiavellian Personality Type?

The term Machiavellian personality comes from 16th-century philosopher and political advisor Niccolo Machiavelli. His political treatise, “[The Prince](#),” suggests that deception and wickedness were

more important in politics than morality.

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His motto was “the end justifies the means.” And, Kowalski says this phrase sums up the personality type well.

“People with a Machiavellian personality tend to manipulate, lie, act callously, and disregard morality,” she says. “This is all in an effort to achieve goals or gain power.”

They tend to exhibit three main characteristics: they lack empathy, they're deliberate, and they're self-confident.

Machiavellianism, as used to describe personality traits that are manipulative, deceitful, and have a cold, cynical view of other people, was coined by psychologists Richard Christie and Florence Geis in their 1970 book “[Studies in Machiavellianism](#).”

### **Machiavellianism Isn't the Same as Narcissism**

Machiavellianism and narcissism share several similar traits, like being manipulative and self-aggrandizing, Kowalski says. The motivations behind these behaviors differ, though.

Narcissists often lack self-confidence and overcompensate to appear extra special. Machiavellians are intelligent and actually believe they're the best and will do whatever they can to achieve their goals. They're also more calculating in using flattery or exploiting others than narcissists, Kowalski adds.

Machiavellianism is one of three personality traits that comprise the "[dark triad](#)," which also includes narcissism and psychopathy, or [antisocial personality disorder](#), where someone lacks empathy and the ability to control their behaviors.

## Signs You're in a Relationship with a Machiavellian Type

Relationships with Machiavellian personalities can be dysfunctional. At first, you might feel like you've found your dream partner, but then they become colder and more manipulative over time.



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Here's what to look for:

### **1. They're competitive and obsessed with power.**

Competitiveness isn't a bad thing. But when your partner is so fixated on winning all the time and

expects you to constantly contribute to their success and questions your loyalty when you don't, it's problematic, Kowalski says. Machiavellian personalities view relationships as a way to gain and maintain power—they're not usually capable of forming meaningful bonds.

## **2. They say one thing and do something else.**

Relationships with Machiavellians can be confusing. Your partner might be full of compliments on one hand, but cold and emotionless on the other. "You'll start to realize you don't truly know who they are because they'll say one thing and do something different," Kowalski says. "You'll start to feel like you're missing something."

## **3. They'll do whatever they have to get what they want.**

People with Machiavellian personalities have no qualms about using their partners or going to any means necessary to achieve their goals. "They'll manipulate you into being who they need in the relationship," Kowalski says. They might even use information that they know about you against you, "then minimize their actions, which will make you feel like it was your fault somehow." They're master gaslighters!

## **4. They're unemotional.**

Your relationship likely won't feel very deep, at least on their end. Machiavellians lack empathy and are typically indifferent and detached, Cassine says. Their focus truly is [using people to leverage themselves](#). "A person with these personality traits has a preference for emotionally detached relationships and doesn't desire to form healthy bonds with others."

## **5. They're selfish.**

All the early-on compliments feel nice, but you'll realize how surface-level the relationship is once you need support, Kowalski says. "They're not there for you. You will find this type of partner incredibly selfish, and may even feel like you are part of a bigger ploy to help them get ahead."

## **6. They're bullies.**

[Control](#) is a common tactic for Machiavellian personalities, and they may resort to bullying to manipulate you into doing what best serves them. Bullying may also come up if you try to leave the relationship, Kowalski says, "They believe they are the best person on the planet so you will never meet anyone as good as them ever again, and they will make it quite clear to you."

## **How to Cope With a Relationship With a Machiavellian Personality**

If you feel like you're being manipulated or deceived by your partner, you probably are. And, you really only have two options, Cassine explains: leave or set clear boundaries.

But, boundary-setting may be easier said than done.

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“Someone with a Machiavellian personality is not going to admit their mistakes or take accountability,” Kowalski says. “It’s more common that they will try to further manipulate you into believing that you have created this whole thing in your mind.”

Setting boundaries with your Machiavellian partner might involve:

Focusing on your own goals

Cutting your reliance on them

Practicing self-care

Staying on good terms with the partner

Trusting the opinions and perspectives of people outside your relationships

Trying to see the facts of the relationship

If your boundaries aren't respected, Kowalski says ending the relationship might be best for you. “To them, the means justify the end, so if you're in their way, they will not spend any time considering your feelings.”

You might feel deceived, confused, or doubt your own judgment. Kowalski says it's important to grieve the relationship (and, talk to a mental health professional if you need extra support), but avoid going back, or you risk repeating the cycle.

“Machiavellians will not change, but they are very good at convincing others they have,” she says.



Erica Sweeney is a writer who mostly covers health, wellness and careers. She has written for The New York Times, HuffPost, Teen Vogue, Parade, Money, Business Insider and many more.