I had a hard time coming up with an idea for this article. When I think about power, especially from my super liberal, super progressive, social-justice oriented Milton bubble, I think about oppression. Talking about oppression feels like a cop-out to me: I know exactly what to say about oppression, because we all know exactly what to say about oppression. It would be easy to write an article that people would love about oppression, because all I would have to do is reiterate what’s been published in every paper and said in every hall. And I know oppression is important, probably more important than what I’m going to talk about, but the theme of May isn’t oppression, it’s power.

Writing about oppression feels like a cop-out to me for another reason. Writing about power feels taboo. If I talk about power, that might imply that I’m okay with people in power, that I like power, or worse, that I want power, and wanting power is wrong, because having power means having more than someone else, and that’s not fair: everyone needs to be equal. In Pre-K at the latest, we learn that we need to share, that we aren’t allowed to have all the blocks because everyone who wants blocks should have the same amount of blocks. That philosophy carries through, all the way to high school, college, adulthood, until the day you die: just change “blocks” to “power.”

Society, at large, hates powerful people. Milton students act as though the administration is evil, as if they *want* to make student’s lives hard. News flash, Milton, the administration can’t outwardly support political issues. Many complain about the 1%, as though the only reason they have money is to take it from the poor. A kid born into wealth can’t help pit any more than a kid born into poverty, they aren’t purposefully trying to take it from some. In fact, most wealthy people donate to multiple charities and non-profit organizations. CEO’s and company owners are hated, which has never made sense to me. Business success takes hard work and luck, and it doesn’t make a CEO or business owner a terrible person because they hit the right combination and succeed. Even successful students are often hated, as though playing the game and doing it well is a bad thing.

Why does power get so much hate? I’ll point to human nature and the societal need to overcome it, but a head nod to other aspects like abuse of power are appropriate. I’m not a scientist, but I think wanting power ties to survival instincts: the person with more meat is the person least likely to die, and we all want to be the person with more. From that we can infer that I think everyone wants power, which I do. Some may be better at repressing it, but we all want to be the one in control, the one who gets the most meat. And why is that hated? For the same reason many hate math: repressing the desire for power is hard, and we are constantly trying to repress human nature.

Saying that society inherently represses human nature seems dramatic, but it’s true. One example of this is selfishness, which is treated as one of, if not the greatest flaw. Selfishness is a survival instinct: when you have to find or kill all your food, chances are you’ll only find enough for one, and that one has to be you, or you die. Yet, we are told so often and so harshly to put others first that doing so much for other people you stress yourself sick isn’t an uncommon or shocking problem. Power is the same way.

While overcoming selfishness to some degree isn’t a bad idea, repressing the desire for power and ostracizing those who can’t is. In our capitalist society, success holds hands with power, and wanting success is good. To clarify, for this purpose I’m defining success as a loose sort of being the best: Steve Jobs was the best at making and selling computers, and he was successful, and also had power. If success and power go together, then so do wanting success and wanting power. We don’t despise the desire for success, so we need to stop despising the desire for power.

I sure as hell want power, and I’m sure a lot of other boarding school students do. Why else bother putting yourself through the rigor of an excellence-driven school? Maybe you want power in the most traditional sense, to hold a high government position, or maybe in a more capitalist one, to be a businessperson. Maybe you want a societal power, to be famous, or influential power, to be a teacher or known academic. And perhaps, like me, you smother this part of yourself, shrug when people ask you what you want to do, study enough that you know you aced the test and agree with everyone who says it was hard.

Maybe this article doesn’t seem as meaningful as one about oppression, and it probably isn’t. This isn’t contributing to a movement that will give swathes of people the equal treatment they inherently deserve. But maybe this article will help someone to stop pretending they don’t have ambition because they think that makes them bad. Wanting power is okay, in fact, it’s inherently human. Power isn’t bad or evil either. It can be abused, definitely, but power in and of itself is not evil, and we need to stop treating it as such.

-Willa DuBois