Toxic Socialization

Draft

Add section on manifest/latent violence and unintended violence

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Abstract

We live in a surprisingly violent world. We experience physical assault, emotional and psychological attack, and even the intellectual violence of manipulation and indoctrination. Psychology is becoming increasingly aware not only of the prevalent violence but also of the profoundly deleterious impact of said violence on the human mind and body; however, sociology lags behind. Socialization, or our experiences at the hands of agents of socialization, is a key concept in sociology. Every introductory sociology text that is printed devotes and entire chapter to a discussion of socialization and related concepts. However rarely, if at all, is there any indication that sociologists are aware of the profoundly deleterious impact of toxicity (violence, neglect, etc.) in the socialization process. This paper seeks to alleviate this lacuna by providing concepts (toxic socialization the 5Ds of Toxic Existence) by which psychologists, sociologists and others (e.g., psychologists, parents, teachers, and anybody involved in the socialization of human beings) can more readily discuss the problem of a violence and neglect in our socialization processes.

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As soon as you're born they make you feel small
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A working class hero is something to be

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They hate you if you're clever and they despise a fool
Till you're so fucking crazy you can't follow their rules
A working class hero is something to be
A working class hero is something to be

When they've tortured and scared you for twenty-odd years
Then they expect you to pick a career
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A working class hero is something to be
A working class hero is something to be

John Lennon

As a psychiatrist dealing on a daily basis with emotional problems that plague human life, I became keenly aware of various destructive and self-destructive patterns that are being passed like a curse from one generation to another throughout history. The traumas that the parents experience during their own development in the family of origin leave them emotionally wounded and unable to function adequately in the role of husbands, wives, fathers, and mothers. As a result, they inflict emotional wounds on their off spring. To break this vicious circle is one of the major challenges of modern psychology and psychiatry. **Stanislav Grof**

Preface

This working paper introduces a concept, "Toxic Socialization." The basic thrust of the paper is that our current socialization process is a patriarchal/colonial process intentionally designed by the **Accumulating Class** not to support the development of fully actualized human beings, but to create a class of compliant working, middle, and upper-class worker bees willing to work 40+ or more of the best hours of their week as cogs in the capitalist machine. The toxic socialization provides the gears by which humans are shaped into tools of the Capitalist system. The socialization process does not reflect or actualize full human potential but instead undermines full human development by dismembering the body's cognitive and emotional systems.

Part one of the paper outlines the theoretical foundation for the above statements. In this section, we theorize the colonial/toxic socialization process along five axes, violence, neglect, chaos, indoctrination, and parentification. Part two surveys the scientific record for evidence of the deleterious impacts of violence, neglect, chaos, indoctrination, and parentification, ultimately underlining the notion that the colonial socialization process, of which we are *all* victims, undermines human potential and contributes to what we might call the 5Ds of Toxic Existence..

1. Toxic Socialization – Theoretical Overview

We live in a surprisingly violent world. It used to be that we entered violently, with Western doctors slapping a child on the backside as soon as it passed out of the womb. That is not done anymore, but other forms of infant, child, adolescent, and adult violence are still prevalent. Indeed, during the course of our lives, we will experience physical assault, emotional and psychological attack, and even the intellectual violence of manipulation and indoctrination. For many, the violence does not stop until we die.

In the past two decades, psychological research has clearly demonstrated the profoundly deleterious impact of various forms of violence on the human mind and body. We now know it is not a case of "what does not kill you makes you stronger," it is a case of what does not kill you leaves you physically hurt, emotionally and psychologically diminished, and spiritually damaged and disconnected. And honestly, it doesn't take much. A single word or dirty look delivered to a child or vulnerable adolescent/adult at just the right moment can destroy that person. You can imagine the damage after a year, a decade, a life.

Despite the profound impact of even minor instances of violence on the human organism, not to mention the chronic violence we all experience, violence remains an almost taboo topic in personal and professional life. It underrepresented in introductory textbooks in psychology and sociology and generally just not talked about by people. This paper seeks to alleviate this lacuna by providing a concept, **Toxic Socialization**, by which sociologists and others involved in the socialization and child/adolescent/human development processes can more readily understand and discuss the root, nature, outcomes, and associated problems of the violence we all endure.

For the purposes of this paper, we will define toxic socialization as a socialization process that takes a sensitive newborn bundle of playful joy and turns it into a compliant, hard-working [normal] thing suitable for insertion into the workforce of this planet. Theoretically, this process of toxic socialization fits comfortably within **Louis Althusser's** analysis of the **Ideological State Apparatus (ISA)**. Althusser (1971) argued that the **Accumulating Class** maintains its power not

only through repressive means (e.g., police, military) but also through **Ideological Institutions** such as schools, families, and media, which shape individuals through hard force and also through the "gentler" imposition of ideology. Toxic socialization, as described here, is the mechanism agents in these institutions (wittingly and unwittingly) use to apply **hard power** and **soft power**[1] turn potential human beings into compliant workers bees suitable for insertion into **The System** (a.k.a. **Regime of Accumulation**).

I'm not going to talk about "The System" here. Best place for that will be the "Introduction to the System" LP course.(Sosteric, 2025) Here I want to focus in on toxic socialization. When we do that, we see that

- toxic socialization is characterized by six elements: **violence**, **neglect** (of one's seven essential needs), **chaotic/stressful** environments, **destruction of attachments**, **indoctrination**, and **weaponization**

- these six elements help to create (via cognitive and emotional **diminishment**) the compliant hard-working worker bee,

- these six elements inevitably lead, as we shall see, to the **5Ds of Toxic Existence,** dysfunction, dysfunction, disease, disconnection, and death.

We'll talk more about the diminishment that occurs when we talk more about the 5Ds below. Before we get to all that though, let us briefly look at each of these six elements of toxic socialization, starting with the element of violence.

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[1] We find these terms first in political science where hard power is coercive and soft power relies on attraction and persuasion (Nye, 1990, 2004). That's basically it.

Violence

The first element of toxic socialization we shall examine is violence. Violence is complicated and prevalent and humans have been so thoroughly desensitized that the vast majority don't even see the violence that surrounds them, much less consider its characteristics and profoundly deleterious consequences. We can address these deficiencies by starting with a clear conceptual overview, first by defining violence and then by providing appropriate categorizations. First, the definition, then, the categorization.

Definition: Violence is an intentional, unwanted, nonessential act that is harmful to individuals (Hamby, 2017), specifically that undermines the actualization of full human potential (Galtung, 1969, p. 169), and that causes temporary or permanent organic dysfunction.

Categorization: Violence may be categorized by target, valance, type, and mode.

Targets

Targets of violence include the physical body (**physical violence**), the emotions **(emotional violence**), the cognitive systems (**cognitive violenc**e), sexuality (**sexual violence**), the finances (**financial violence**), the nervous system (**neuronal violence**), and one's **connection systems** (commonly, **spiritual violence**).

Valence

Violence may be categorized by its valance, as either positive or negative (Galtung, 1969).Negative Violence is violence that diminishes as a consequence of pain and suffering. Positive Violence is violence that diminishes as a consequence of pleasure and reward. **Negative violence** diminishes individuals by causing emotional, psychological, spiritual, financial, or physical pain while **positive violence** diminishes individuals by shaping thoughts and behaviour via operant conditioning, where expected behaviours are rewarded (love, money, attention, sex) while unwanted behaviours are punished with violence, chaos, and neglect. Both forms of

violence are designed to influence and control individuals and society in a direction generally antagonistic to their own full development.
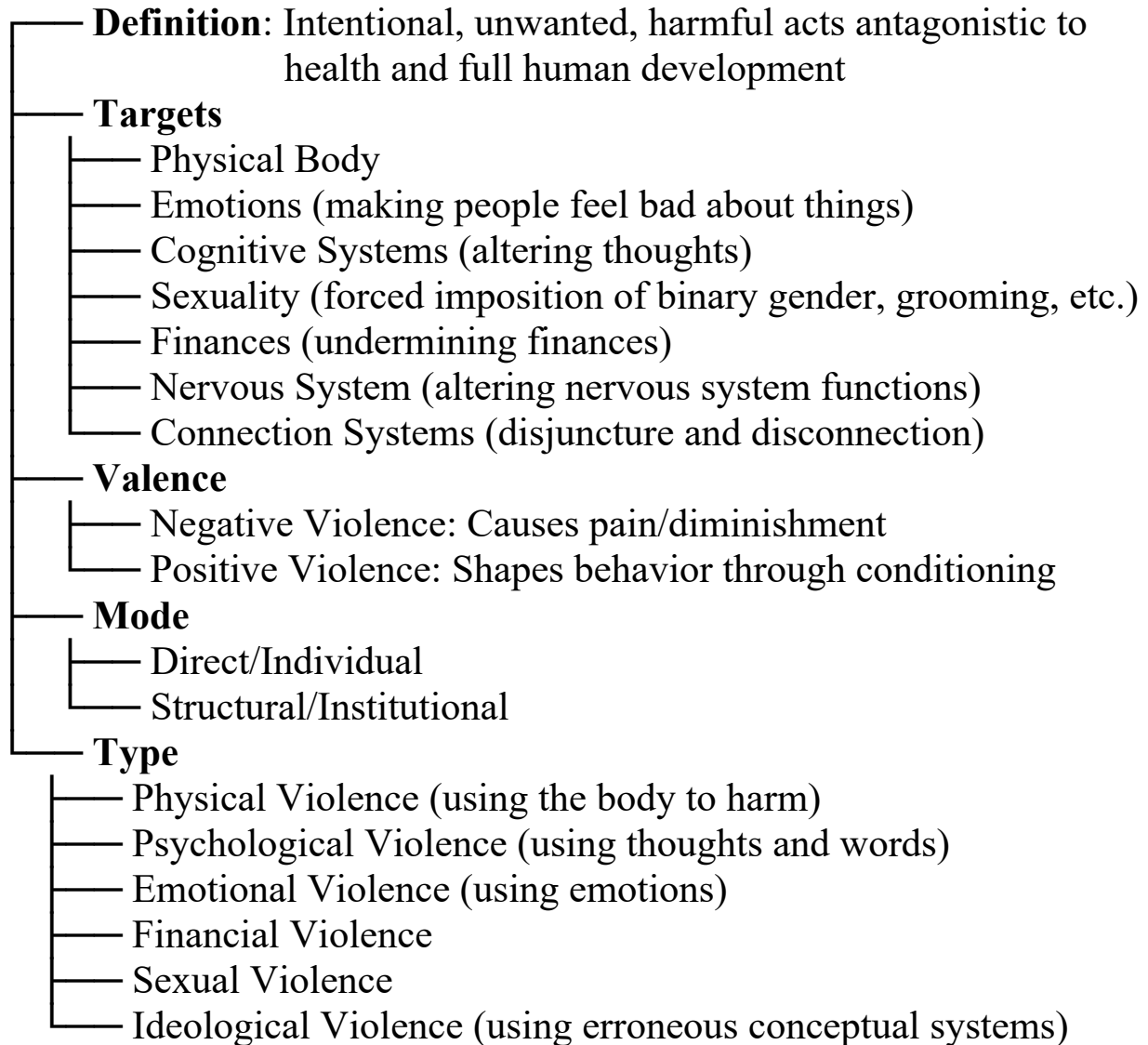
Type

The type of violence is the method of delivery by which the positive or negative violence is delivered to the target. An individual can target emotions, with emotions (e.g., the "silent" treatment) but also with words, finances, and so on. Types of violence include **physical-type violence** (using your body to harm), **psychological-type violence** (using thoughts and words to harm), **emotional-type violenc**e (using emotions like anger, fear, love to harm), **financial-type violence**, **sexual-type violence**, and **ideological-type violence**.

Mode

Mode of violence refers to the mechanism of delivery, distinguishing between **Individual (Direct) Violence** (enacted **personally and intentionally** by one or more individuals against specific targets) and **Structural (Indirect) Violence** (embedded in **social systems, institutions, and cultural norms**, often operating invisibly, economic inequality, systemic racism, lack of access to healthcare, and policies that disadvantage certain groups.

Using this four-part categorization, illustrated in Figure One below, we can identify a total of 168 possible combinations of violence. We're not going to go into any kind of detailed examination of the impact of these forms of violence here. That's useful for introspection, and maybe an AI driven analysis of the literature, but we only need a very general overview to see how bad violence. We'll get to that overview when we look in a bit more detail at the consequences of toxic socialization later.

Figure One: LP Violence Framework

Definition: Intentional, unwanted, harmful acts antagonistic to
health and full human development

Targets
- Physical Body
- Emotions (making people feel bad about things)
- Cognitive Systems (altering thoughts)
- Sexuality (forced imposition of binary gender, grooming, etc.)
- Finances (undermining finances)
- Nervous System (altering nervous system functions)
- Connection Systems (disjuncture and disconnection)

Valence
- Negative Violence: Causes pain/diminishment
- Positive Violence: Shapes behavior through conditioning

Mode
- Direct/Individual
- Structural/Institutional

Type
- Physical Violence (using the body to harm)
- Psychological Violence (using thoughts and words)
- Emotional Violence (using emotions)
- Financial Violence
- Sexual Violence
- Ideological Violence (using erroneous conceptual systems)

Neglect

Neglect, broadly defined, is the "Harming of child either through lack of care or supervision" (Burgess & Conger, 1978, p. 1163). We formally define neglect as neglect of our **Seven Essential Needs** (Sosteric & Ratkovic, 2022). The needs are visually represented in the Circle of Seven Essential Needs above. Neglect includes failure to meet the basic needs in the outer circle (physiological, emotional, psychological, cognitive, and environmental) needs and failure to teach and meet our spiritual needs for alignment and connection. Harm through lack of supervision falls under the need for safe environments, since adults need to create safe environments for children. Neglect also includes medical neglect (Behl et al., 2003). Like violence, neglect leads to damage to the physical body, including reduced stature, atrophied and weak internal organisms, and atrophied or non-optimally wired neural structures, all of which contribute to diminishment of full human potential. Note that conceptually, it is possible to include violence under the category of neglect, specifically neglect of one's need for safe environment. We prefer to distinguish neglect by its negative character. Violence is an act directed at an individual while neglect is failure to act even when one has the knowledge and resources to do so. Neglect can be both individual (a parent neglecting their child) or institutional/societal (a society that neglects its poor, or that fails to provide adequate income redistribution).

SEVEN ESSENTIAL NEEDS

PHYSIOLOGICAL

COGNITIVE
know and understand

ALIGNMENT
(SELF ACTUALIZATION)

CONNECTION
(TRANSCENDENCE)

PSYCHOLOGICAL
Freedom, Power, Esteem

ENVIRONMENTAL
safety, security, nurturing aesthetics

ALIGNMENT

EMOTIONAL
Love and Belonging

Chaos

Chaotic/Stressful Environments are environments characterized by crowding, noise, unpredictability, instability, lack of routine, and unplanned changes (Evans & Wachs, 2010). "Household chaos is the "level of disorganization or environmental confusion in the home, and is characterized by high levels of background stimulation, lack of family routines, absence of predictability and structure in daily activities, and an overly fast pace of family life" (Marsh et al., 2020, p. 2) As Marsch, Dobson, and Maddison (2020, p. 2), point out, household chaos is associated with a "diverse range of adverse childhood outcomes," some of which will be noted below.

Destruction of Attachments

Destruction of Attachments refers to the inadvertent or deliberate destruction of strong family attachments, like the kind undertaken brutally in Residential Schools and also in the K12 education system, which separates children from family and plugs them in to capitalist designed social environments. The destruction of family attachments is a process instantiated in capitalist societies where individuals need to be constituted as independent (read emotionally stunted) workers capable of separating from family for long periods in order to work long hours, often in cities and locations remote from the family. It can be difficult to see the destruction of attachments as problematic since it is so effectively normalized in our society. However, if you consider the history of residential schools, schools designed specifically to break Indigenous children's attachment to their parents, community, and culture, you might see the significance of this for sociological and psychological theory.

The negative consequences of the destruction of attachments are obscured by the ascendance of "attachment theory" in psychology, a theory which enshrines a Capitalist model of child development and attachment. Attachment theory was created by a white, upper-middle-class male (van Dizken, n.d.) whose patriarchal upper-middle-class European upbringing certainly left him with upper-middle-class European values of hard work, independence, capitalism, and detachment. Attachment theory was created by a man whose early experiences of profound parental neglect likely left him emotionally stunted and potentially disordered. The relationship Bowlby had with his own four children is an interesting biographical question.

Bowlby's theory focuses, in the typical fashion of early European patriarchs, on the mother/child dyad. His theory presumes the child attaches to the mother and also presumes the European process of detachment through childhood and adolescence, a process which successfully produces independent worker bees, is natural. Attachment theory misconstrues the capitalist attachment process as natural and ignores the fact that in the majority of the world, "children are not viewed as separate individuals outside of their families but are instead nested within the identity of their parents, wider kin group, or community at large" (Keller, 2018). In these

societies, attachments to parents, siblings, and community remain strong throughout the lifespan. For a modern revision of attachment theory see the article "It takes a village" (Sosteric & Ratkovic, 2022)

Under capitalism, the destruction of attachments serves the Regime of Accumulation (Sosteric, 2016) and involves severing parental/child/sibling attachments early by separating parents/child/siblings through daycare the age-structured exclusionary practices of daycare, and the K12 education system. Scholars have assumed the superiority of this neo-liberal model of child nurturing and development (Keller, 2018), presumably because it creates separated individuals whose primary means of satisfying essential needs, like the need for self-esteem, alignment, and connection, is through hard work in isolated workspaces, and via consumer purchase. Because of this assumption, limited empirical work has been conducted on the psychological and emotional outcomes of a social system that undermines and destroys tight family attachments. Abraham Maslow did note, anecdotally, how members of the Blackfoot nation had much stronger self-esteem (Maslow et al., 1982) than those indoctrinated into neo-liberal society. Cross-cultural studies are needed to document the psychological/emotional development and security of individuals raised in different systems. It is our hypothesis that the destruction of attachments leads to various forms of emotional, psychological, spiritual diminishment and destruction.

Weaponization

Weaponization is a critical yet often overlooked element of the toxic socialization process. It refers to the systematic transformation of individuals into instruments of the capitalist state, repurposed to enforce and perpetuate the very systems that exploit and diminish them. Under capitalism, weaponization operates through the normalization of roles, behaviors, and ideologies that serve the interests of capital accumulation, often at the expense of individual well-being, autonomy, and collective solidarity.

The Soldier as a Weapon

One of the most overt examples of weaponization is the creation of soldiers—individuals trained to kill and die in the name of "democracy," "freedom," or "national security." These ideological constructs are carefully crafted to obscure the true purpose of militarism: the protection of capitalist interests, both domestic and imperial. Soldiers are socialized to see themselves as heroes, defending noble ideals, while in reality, they are tools of state violence, deployed to secure resources, markets, and geopolitical dominance for the ruling class. The psychological and physical toll of this weaponization is immense, leaving soldiers traumatized, alienated, and often discarded once their utility to the state has expired.

The Parent as a Weapon

Parents, too, are weaponized under capitalism, often unwittingly serving as agents of the system's reproduction. From an early age, children are conditioned to internalize the values of productivity, competition, gender, and obedience. Parents, themselves products of toxic socialization, are complicit in this process, pushing and punishing their children to excel academically, conform to societal norms, and prepare for a lifetime of labor,. Homework, extracurricular activities, and the relentless pursuit of "success" are not merely educational tools; they are mechanisms of control, designed to mold children into compliant workers. In this way, parents become weapons against their own children s authentic and full development, enforcing the very systems that will exploit and diminish them.

The Friend or Spouse as a Weapon

Even intimate relationships are not immune to weaponization. Friends and spouses often reinforce capitalist-friendly norms, consciously or unconsciously policing behavior, aspirations, and identities to align with the demands of the system. A friend who discourages radical thought, a spouse who prioritizes career advancement over personal fulfillment, or a peer group that mocks nonconformity—all serve as instruments of social control. These relationships, which should be sources of support and solidarity, are instead weaponized to maintain the status quo, ensuring that individuals remain docile, productive, and isolated from collective resistance.

The Self as a Weapon

Perhaps the most insidious form of weaponization is the internalization of capitalist ideology, turning individuals into weapons against themselves. This process, often referred to as **self-exploitation**, involves the adoption of values and behaviors that prioritize productivity, competition, and consumption over well-being, creativity, and connection. Individuals become their own oppressors, pushing themselves to meet unrealistic standards, sacrificing their health and relationships in pursuit of capitalist-defined "success." This self-weaponization is a hallmark of toxic socialization, as it ensures that even in the absence of external enforcement, individuals will continue to serve the interests of capital.

Indoctrination

Indoctrination is the linchpin of the capitalist toxic socialization process. Indoctrination refers to the process of teaching children a particular view of self and society, a view that supports their insertion into the capitalist regime of accumulation, but that undermines the actualization of full human potential by misrepresenting the nature of reality, the nature of society, the nature of the economic system, and the nature of human beings. Indoctrination diminishes human potential and instills in individuals "a mood of submission and inhibition which considerably eases" system function and **System Maintenance** (Fanon, 1963, p. 4). Indoctrination itself involves psychological and emotional silencing (Giroux, 1983), controlling discourses (Foucault, 2012b, 2012a) and the reproduction of Master Narratives (Sosteric, 2021, 2024), all of which are designed to create docile, compliant, and easy to manipulate workers. Indoctrination is carried out by what Althusser called the Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser, 1971, 2008)within what I call **Ideological Institutions** and **Symbol Factories** (Sosteric, 2024). For example, indoctrination is carried out in the school system (an ideological institution) where neo-liberal ideology is imposed and children are shaped into complaint working, middle, professional, and upper-class cogs. Indoctrination is carried out via the mainstream media (another ideological institution) which produces and reproduces the dominant master narrative (Sosteric, 2021).

2. Consequences: The 5Ds of Toxic Existence

What are the consequences of a toxic socialization process? Physical and mental illness, and lots of it. We'll look at the empirical record momentarily, but before we do that I'd like to propose a conceptual schema that can help us better understand and discuss the damage done by toxic socialization. I would like to call this the **5Ds of Toxic Existence** (5 dimensions). These dimensions—Diminishment, Dysfunction, Disease, Disconnection, and Death—highlight the pervasive and often intergenerational impacts of violence, neglect, chaos, indoctrination, and the destruction of attachments. Below is an introduction to each these dimensions:

Diminishment: This refers to the reduction of human potential and the failure to thrive or actualize one's full capabilities. Toxic socialization stunts intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth by undermining critical developmental needs. Think of it like growing a flower but not giving it enough food or water, and stoming it down periodically. The flower never grows to fulfill potential. Diminishment includes **cognitive impairments** (chronic stress and neglect can lead to reduced IQ and compromised problem-solving abilities), **emotional atrophy** (a lack of unconditional love or positive reinforcement diminishes self-esteem and emotional resilience), **behavioural limitations** (positive violence (e.g., operant conditioning)) constrains free will and creativity by enforcing rigid societal norms.

Dysfunction: Dysfunction encompasses physical, emotional, and psychological impairments and adaptations arising from toxic environments. This includes **physical dysfunction (**chronic stress damages bodily systems, leading to reduced physical strength, stature, and organ health), **psychological dysfunction** (impairments in memory, attention, perception, and moral development are common outcomes), **emotional dysfunction** (individuals may struggle with self-image, self-esteem, and interpersonal relationships due to unresolved trauma), and **Maladaptive Adaptations** (defense mechanisms like the reduction of awareness, hyper-focus, hypervigilance, etc.) developed to mitigate and cope with the damage of toxic socialization.

Disease: Toxic socialization contributes to a range of serious physical and mental health conditions including **physical diseases** (chronic stress caused by violence, neglect, chaos, and

parentification) is linked to heart disease, cancer, obesity, and gastrointestinal disorders), **mental health disorders (c**onditions such as depression, anxiety, complex PTSD (CPTSD), eating disorders, borderline personality disorder (BPD), and substance abuse often stem from early exposure to violence or neglect), and **addictive behaviours** (the unmet needs created by toxic environments can drive individuals toward substance dependence or other compulsive behaviours. Substance abuse and addiction are attempts to meet unmet needs.

Disconnection. Disconnection refers to spiritual or existential dysfunction—the inability to integrate one's sense of self with the broader community, world, and with one's own higher self and purpose. This includes s**piritual disconnection** (individuals may struggle to connect with their inner selves or find meaning in life due to emotional and psychological damage), **social alienation** (broken attachments within families or communities), **loss of self/purpose/hopelessness** (indoctrination into capitalist ideologies often replaces authentic self-exploration with superficial goals tied to consumerism or productivity.

Death: The ultimate consequence of toxic socialization is a reduction in lifespan through **premature mortality (c**hronic stress accelerates aging processes and increases susceptibility to life-threatening illnesses) and **suicidality** (emotional neglect and unresolved trauma significantly elevate risks of suicidal ideation and attempts).

Note, technically all damage, including psychological, emotional, and spiritual damage, is physical damage. Physical damage includes damage to the structures of the physical body (damage to skin, bones, internal organs) and the brain and central nervous system. Damage to the central nervous system provides the somatic foundation for emotional, psychological, and spiritual damage and diminishment.

3. The Consequences of Toxic Socialization: Detailed

Violence

It should be noted without equivocation that negative violence in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood has significant deleterious impacts on the mind and body of the human being. Studies in recent years flag a host of negative emotional, psychological, and physical consequences that occur.

Negative Violence

Negative physical violence is associated with physical diminishment and increased incidence of physical disease (Cuijpers et al., 2011; Felitti, 2002; Hager & Runtz, 2012), including heart disease (Fuller-Thomson et al., 2010, 2012), and cancer (Alcalá, 2016; Kelly-Irving et al., 2013), obesity, (Danese & Tan, 2014) and angina (Eslick et al., 2011).

Negative violence is associated with intellectual impairments, including lower grade performance in school (Strøm et al., 2013) and serious cognitive deficits, i.e. lower IQ (Bee et al., 1982; Bengwasan, 2018; de Oliveira et al., 2012; Hu et al., 2017).

Negative violence is associated with emotional impairments and pathology, including the development of unhealthy and risky behaviours (Annerbäck et al., 2012), adolescent delinquency (Trickett et al., 2011) and increased criminality (DiLillo, Lewis, & Loreto-Colgan, 2007). Negative violence impacts an individual's ability to have healthy relationships, contributing to increased interpersonal difficulties (Poole et al., 2018) (i.e. dysfunctional personal relationships) and leads to various forms of emotional pathology, including depression (Blain et al., 2012; Heim & Binder, 2012; Liu et al., 2012; Merrick et al., 2017) including maternal depression (Li et al., 2017), anxiety disorders (Blain et al., 2012), eating disorders (Burns, Fischer, Jackson, & Harding, 2012; Hasselle, Howell, Dormois, & Miller-Graff, 2017), personality disorders (Wingenfeld et al., 2011) including borderline personality disorder (Paris, 2008), conduct

disorders (Docherty, Kubik, Herrera, & Boxer, 2018), risky sexual behaviours (Thibodeau, Lavoie, Hébert, & Blais, 2017), post-traumatic stress disorders (C Heim & Nemeroff, 1999; Zanarini et al., 1997), complex PTSD[2] (Bertó et al., 2017), ADHD (Hunt et al., 2017), suicidal ideation and suicide attempts (Choi et al., 2017; De Sanctis et al., 2012), late-life suicide (Behr Gomes Jardim et al., 2018), and non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI)(Swannell et al., 2012).

Negative violence in childhood contributes to alcohol dependence and abuse (Danielson et al., 2009; de Paula & Hoshino, 2002; Oberleitner et al., 2015).

Note that under the rubric of negative violence we include racism and sexism which leads, in addition to neurological changes in the brain (Fani et al., 2021)., all the other deleterious effects.

Also note, the deleterious effects of physical violence extend to our experience of spanking and "softer" forms of violence like teasing (Kerr et al., 2017), which researchers are now finding causes many of the same types of problems as more violent forms of assault (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016; Okuzono et al., 2017).

Notably, people who experience violence in childhood are "almost three times more likely than matched controls to perpetrate child abuse" when they become adults (Milaniak & Widom, 2015), pointing to intergenerational cycles of abuse. This finding is particularly noteworthy when considering, for example, the multigenerational impact of residential schools on Indigenous populations.

Of course, negative violence does not have to be physical. **Verbal and emotional violence** contributes to the same sorts of emotional, psychological, and physical damage as noted above (M.-T. Wang & Kenny, 2014). In fact, the consequences of negative verbal and emotional violence may be even worse. As one researcher noted, "Psychologically maltreated youth exhibited equivalent or greater baseline levels of behavioural problems, symptoms, and disorders compared with physically or sexually abused youth on most indicators" (Hodgdon et al., 2018; Spinazzola et al., 2014). Also, simply witnessing violence in toxic households can cause

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[2] Complex PTSD is a more form of PTSD experienced by maltreated children that "exceed those relating to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)" (Berto, 2017: 42).

problems. As one author notes, "Witnessing high levels of discord and conflict increases children's risk for a wide array of psychological problems including internalizing (e.g., depression, anxiety) and externalizing (e.g., aggression, conduct problems) problems" (Love, 2014). And note, the family is not the only site where toxic socialization processes impact child and adolescent development and health. Exposure to peer victimization is also an important stressor (Rudolph et al., 2014), as is bullying by teachers, and even toxic competitive environments (Kohn, 1986). Peer victimization and abuse can be physical (e.g., hitting), verbal (e.g., name-calling), or relational (e.g., social ostracism) [citation needed] and encompasses emotional, psychological, and also spiritual abuse. Be aware, this is not an innocuous part of growing up. It is not just "boys being boys" and "girls being girls." Victimization at school (by peers or by teachers) can have adverse effects on multiple aspects of development [citation needed]. Toxic socialization at school exacerbates the impact of toxic environments at home and is associated with **academic maladjustment**, **absenteeism**, **low academic ability**, **lower scores on standardized tests**, **school avoidance**, and **destruction of self-esteem** (ref needed). The risk of witnessing violence and discord should not be downplayed since the "risk conferred by frequent interparental hostility and discord is almost twice the size of the risk associated with divorce!" (Love, 2014). Indeed, interparental aggression and conflict "contributes unique Variance to the prediction of childhood conduct disorder, personality disorder, inadequacy-immaturity, and clinical levels of problematic child behaviour…" (Jouriles et al., 1989).

Positive Violence

As noted above, positive violence is violence designed to manipulate behaviour through positive reinforcement. The diminishment of positive violence is realized through mental, emotional, and behavioural conditioning that, while seeming positive and supportive on the surface, undermines free will, limits expressiveness, reduces the full gamut of human behaviour, ultimately leading to diminishment and disconnection (i.e., existential crises, loss of purpose, spiritual amputation).

The impact of positive violence is most obvious in the imposition of binary-gender roles. Binary gender serves the accumulating class by ensuring one particular class of human beings, women, are primed to engage in the generational reproduction of the capitalist labour force (Butler, 1990)

Even in this so-called modern age, girls are encouraged to be mothers, to be nurturing, to limit their intellectual potential, to sacrifice career for the sake of having children. Girls are thus encouraged to amputate intellectual capability, lower ambitions and do girly things so they can fit into the binary-gender box provided by the accumulating classes. In this process, development and expression of their full potential is circumvented. The same amputation, the same limitation of potential, occurs in boys who amputate expressive potential (e.g., suppress emotions) so they can fit into the binary-gender box. This emotional amputation can lead to mental health issues (Rice et al., 2018), substance abuse, physical health problems, suicide,(Kõlves & De Leo, 2016) and shorter lifespans (Alu, 2019).

This limitation of potential can be easily observed in the K12 education system which proffers a hidden curriculum that provides differential training depending on one's social class. In this hidden curriculum, which serves the accumulating classes by ensuring the regular and efficient production of new generations of properly prepared worker bees, working-class students, for example, are trained to sit in chairs for long periods, taught rote memorization, forced to follow rules and to regurgitate the answers provided by authority figures (Anyon, 1980; Brownell, 2017), all traits desirable for those destined to work on factory assembly lines or in cramped office cubicles. By contrast, kids from upper-class backgrounds are taught to think creatively, to solve their own problems, to exercise authority, and to be self-directed, once again traits useful for those destined into upper-management positions (Anyon, 1980; Brownell, 2017; Giroux, 1983).

The limitation of potential, the constraint of ability via the use of positive (and negative) violence is also seen in Indigenous children where "hidden, hegemonic processes that mold Indigenous students' ethnic and cultural identities to correspond with national interests" operate along side mechanisms that silence these students and "excluding the meanings and effects of race from state education to protect white normativity and ensure that mainstream settler-colonial societies remains ignorant about historical violence and ongoing racial domination" (MacDonald, 2019, p. 38; Regalsky & Laurie, 2007). In these situations, Indigenous children are reinforced when they act white (positive violence) and punished when they do not (negative violence).

Neglect

Actual emotional, physical, verbal, or spiritual violence causes profound damage to the human body, but simple lack of care and neglect, which is the most prevalent form of child maltreatment (Cohen et al., 2017), causes profound damage as well. When children are neglected, one or more of the seven essential needs (Sosteric & Ratkovic, 2020), like the need for safe housing, food, and rest, are not met. Lack of safety and the biological stress associated with deprivation of one or more of the basic needs undermines the physical, psychological, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual development of the child. The literature is very clear on the deleterious impact of neglect in general. There is, however limited effort to delineate the diminishing impact of specific forms of neglect, partly because neglect of one set of basic needs, like physiological needs, are often coincident with neglect with one or more of the other needs, and partly because there is insufficient granularity in research. In this summary, an attempt is made to distinguish the impact of the neglect of specific needs, though more research is clearly needed.

Neglect of Physiological Needs

Physiological needs include the need for food, water, air, clothing, exercise, and freedom from pain. Neglect of any of these needs leads to lower weight, atrophied physical development, known as Failure To Thrive (Batchelor, 2008), as well as a host of physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual diminishment, and substance abuse issues. Neglect of the physiological need for sleep (less than 6 hours a night in adolescents) leads to psychological, interpersonal and somatic deficits (Roberts et al., 2009). Adolescents with disturbed sleep report cognitive impairments, emotional impairments (higher levels of anxiety, depression, anger, inattention and other conduct problems), substance abuse issues (drug and alcohol use), impaired academic performance, and suicidal thoughts and behaviours. Adolescents with disturbed sleep patterns have more fatigue, less energy, and symptoms such as headaches, stomachaches and backaches (Dahl & Lewin, 2002).

Neglect of Emotional Needs

Emotional needs are the need for unconditional support, acceptance, and inclusion, the need to feel wanted and connected, to feel like we belong. Emotional neglect, defined as a "parent's emotional unavailability and unresponsiveness," is a common type of childhood abuse (Chen et al., 2021) and is linked to various forms of physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual diminishments and impairments.

Physically, emotional neglect is associated with abnormalities in brain development, including reduced corpus callosum area (Teicher et al., 2004) with alterations and atrophy of brain structures.

Physical touch, a component of emotional needs satisfaction. Studies all the way back into the 1980s demonstrate the critical biological and psychological significance of touch, caress, love, and human contact. Children who get their needs met, including their need for human contact, simply do better. They weigh more, are more physically active, have higher IQs (Chisholm, 1998), demonstrate superior cognitive ability, and had better language function (Bee et al., 1982). By contrast, children and adults who do not receive sufficient human touch are stunted and damaged. Lack of appropriate parental contact also leads to depression (Christ et al., 2017), growth impairment and developmental lagging, e.g. reduced height in childhood and adolescence (Abajobir et al., 2017), reduced head circumference (Abajobir et al., 2017), risk of metabolic syndrome (Johnson & Gunnar, 2011), enlarged amygdala[3] [(Roth et al., 2018)], impaired/altered neuroendocrine functioning, and altered cortisol responses (stress hormone) levels (Dozier et al., 2006). As one author notes, neglect can be so serious that children who are not provided with physical contact may even die as a result of their neglect. "About 1/3 of babies placed in the barest orphanages can die as a result" (Bruce D. Perry & Maia Szalavitz, 2010). Even if death is not the result, people experience a lifetime of struggle and increased challenges into their old age. As Miller, Chen and Parker (2011, p. 959) note, those who are exposed to major psychological stressors in early life suffer "elevated rates of morbidity and mortality from chronic diseases of ageing." As they note, "The most compelling data come from studies of

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[3] An enlarged amygdala is associated with greater levels of anxiety.

children raised in poverty or maltreated by their parents, who show heightened vulnerability to vascular disease, autoimmune disorders, and premature mortality."

Neglect of emotional and psychological needs is particularly disturbing since such neglect is also associated with an **increase in an individual's suggestibility** (Benedan et al., 2018), perhaps, as the authors suggest, because children learn to get the attention they need by complying with adults. One study found that key neurobiological mechanisms of empathy, emotion, attachment, and social functioning were damaged by lack of physical contact in early infant-hood (Fries et al., 2005). In other words*, lack of appropriate and copious parental contact leads to problems empathizing, attaching, and connecting with others,* accompanied by increased suggestibility.

Neglect of Cognitive Needs

Cognitive needs are the need to know and understand, the need to be in touch with reality. Maslow considered satisfaction of the cognitive need to "perceive clearly, to see the truth, to penetrate falsehood, phoniness, hypocrisy, and so on" to be the "most important characteristic… of psychological health…" (Maslow, 1961, p. 3).

There is definitely reason to believe that neglect of cognitive needs undermines human development. Researchers clearly show that the "quality of stimulation and learning opportunities" are key dimensions, lack of which lead leads to delayed cognitive and motor development (B. Wang et al., 2020). As one author put it, "spending one's early years in a not stimulating, emotionally and physically unsupportive environment will affect brain development in adverse ways and lead to cognitive, social, and behavioural delays" (Maggi et al., 2010, p. 629). Note it is not just cognitive deficits which accrue. Since "the central nervous system 'talks to' the immune, hormone and clotting systems, systematic differences in life experience will increase or decrease levels of resistance to disease. This will change the long-term function of vital organs of the body and lead to socio-economic differentials in morbidity and mortality" (Maggi et al., 2010, p. 629).

The provision, or lack, of stimulating environments extend beyond the home and into the community programs and the school environment (Gottfried et al., 1998)

Neglect of Psychological Needs

Psychological needs include the need for autonomy, the need to feel efficacious, competent, and powerful (Deci & Ryan, 1985), to have high self-esteem, to successfully manifest and create the world we want (Sosteric, 2018). Psychological research has long demonstrated the importance to psychological health of feelings of efficacy and competence (Bandura, 1989, 1989; Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1969, 1980; White, 1963). More recently, these needs are discussed under the rubric of self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Ryan and Deci note that "The Fullest representations of humanity show people to be curious, vital, and self-motivated. At their best, they are agentic and inspired, striving to learn; extend themselves; master new skills; and apply their talents responsibly. That most people show considerable effort, agency, and commitment in their lives appears, in fact, to be more normative than exceptional, suggesting some very positive and persistent features of human nature" (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, p. 68). In other words, left to their own devices, people are naturally motivated to develop skills and mastery, to strive for autonomy and competence. This drive is part of an individual's "inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs." "Satisfaction of these needs has been linked to well-being (Sheldon et al., 1996), competence, vitality" (Ryan et al., 2010, p. 68; Sheldon et al., 1996), and enhanced creativity.

Intrinsic motivation for skill development, mastery, and competence can be easily thwarted, and often is under toxic family and school conditions, and exploitative and oppressive conditions of employment (Abril, 2022; Dean, 2022). As Ryan & Deci note (2000a, p. 70) satisfaction of psychological needs for competence and autonomy require "environmental supports and social nutriments" (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 401) including environments that provide optimal challenges (not too hard, not too easy), positive feedback, "freedom from demeaning evaluations," etc. These requirements are often absent under capitalism where employment conditions are often boring, alienating, and disenfranchising (Deci & Ryan, 1985), and they may certainly be absent in many families whose parents have been trained to impose toxic socialization practices.

Failure to meet psychological needs can have devastating consequences for the individual, impacting their "biological, psychological, and sociological capacities" (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p.

401). When psychological needs are not met, individuals develop feelings of helplessness, hopelessness (Abramson et al., 1989), lack of motivation and aimlessness (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). But it is worse than that. Issues of autonomy self-esteem, and integration are key factors in the emergence of psychopathology (Ryan et al., 2016; Shapiro, 1981; Winnicott, 1968), which itself is rooted in experiences where behaviours, cognitions, and emotions are subjectively experienced as pressured, controlled or otherwise compelled or, alternatively, as uncontrollable (Ryan et al., 2015). As Ryan and Deci (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 403) note:

> ...in addictive and impulsive disorders people feel unable to regulate specific behaviours. In other psychopathologies, behaviour is highly and rigidly regulated, such as in restrictive eating disorders or some forms of obsessive–compulsive disorders. Still other forms of psychopathology, usually entailing a history of significant trauma or abuse, involve behaviours being emitted without the feeling that they are mediated or regulated by the self. For example, in some dissociative disorders, behaviours can occur without the intentions of the self. In still other pathologies, such as severe depression, the motivation for pursuing intentions and goals is weak or absent. In sum, compromised autonomy is implicated in a range of psychological problems, from those involving impoverished behaviour regulation to those that are characterized by rigid self-control. Corresponding to this, caregivers' thwarting of children's autonomy has been implicated in the etiology of a broad range of psychopathologies.

The impact of a failure to meet psychological needs also impacts eating disorders, contributes to and morbid obesity (Strauss & Ryan, 1987), is implicated in character disorders, paranoia (Ryan, Deci, et al., 1995), Borderline Personality Disorders, dissassociative disorders (Ryan & Deci, 2017), and conduct disorders (Ryan, Kasser, et al., 1995). The impact is profound and long term, and certainly as damaging as physical abuse. For excellent overview of various psychological and emotional disorders emerge from failure to meet psychological needs, see Ryan and Deci chapter 16, "Development, Basic Psychological Needs, and Psychopathology" (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Note, the above outcomes are the most benign. Ryan and Deci argue that failure to meet psychological and emotional needs is a precursor to the development of the "darker sides" of human capacity, "depression, hate, violence, and the degradation of self and others" (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 320). As they note, there is strong evidence to "suggest that people who have become serial killers have typically suffered severe [and probably chronic] over control, humiliation, neglect, or all of these from the individuals who should have cared for them at an early age" (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 321)

Also note, *importantly*, that contrary to received "wisdom," sociality, friendship, and relationship networks are not necessarily salutatory. "Across the spectrum of biological vulnerabilities, the onset and maintenance of pathological episodes can be prompted or amplified by social experiences such as rejection, neglect, domination, humiliation, or debasement brought on by cold, chaotic, nonresponsive, controlling, or abusive people or circumstances" (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 402).

Neglect of Environmental Needs

Environmental needs are needs related to the condition of the environment you live in. Environmental needs include your need for a safe, secure, nurturing, and aesthetically pleasing environments. Safe home, safe spaces, secure finances, consistency, and stability. Safety includes the absence of assault of any kind, including physical assault (e.g., spanking), emotional assault, and psychological assault. Financial stability includes resources sufficient to remove the anxieties and uncertainties of survival.

Violent environments, that is, environments where children, adolescents, and adults are regularly exposed to various forms of psychological, emotional, physical, and spiritual violence, are unsafe environments that fail to meet the important need for safe, secure, and nurturing environments. For a rundown on the deleterious impact of violence, refer to the section in this paper on the impacts of violence

It is not just violence that undermines human health and potential, insecurity, specifically financial and job insecurity, does so as well. Financial insecurity contributes to a decline in

social interactions (Corman et al., 2012), lowered sense of well-being (Brown et al., 2005), undermined general mental health (Rajani et al., 2016), elevated anxiety, and depression (Felitti, 2002; Rocha et al., 2006), all of which are incredibly costly to the individual, their families, and to society. Financial insecurity also contributes to existential emptiness, to a sense of a lack of meaning and purpose in one's life (Abeyta et al., 2017). This existential emptiness in turn contributes to a decline in health and well-being and even a decline in longevity (Boyle et al., 2009). Note that a Universal Basic Income (UBI) could go a long way towards helping people satisfy their need for secure environments (Mahabir et al., 2021).

Financial insecurity may have a direct impact on health and well-being, however it may also contribute indirectly, by undermining an individual's ability to meet their psychological needs need for autonomy, competence, and inclusion (financial stability is a factor in social inclusion) (Weinstein & Stone, 2018).

Chaos

Household chaos is the "level of disorganization or environmental confusion in the home, and is characterized by high levels of background stimulation, lack of family routines, absence of predictability and structure in daily activities, and an overly fast pace of family life" (Marsh et al., 2020, p. 2). As Marsch, Dobson, and Maddison (2020, p. 2) point out, household chaos is associated with a "diverse range of adverse childhood outcomes" including poor social-emotional functioning, behavioural problems, reduced intelligence (Deater-Deckard et al., 2009), sleep problems (Boles et al., 2017; Philbrook et al., 2020), reduced academic achievement, risky behaviours (Delker et al., 2020), and so on. Research in this area appears nascent.

Destruction of Attachments

Parentification, an element of toxic socialization where children are forced to adopt adult responsibilities prematurely, often because their own parents are incapable or unwilling to function as parents, has profound negative impacts on their physical, emotional, psychological,

and spiritual well-being. This phenomenon disrupts healthy development by placing undue burdens on children, often in environments characterized by neglect, chaos, or the destruction of attachments.

Parentification, a role reversal in which a child assumes responsibilities typically reserved for adults, can have significant physical consequences. Children who are parentified often take on tasks such as caring for younger siblings, managing household chores, or even providing financial support. These responsibilities can lead to chronic stress, fatigue, and sleep deprivation, as the child's time and energy are diverted from age-appropriate activities like play, rest, and schoolwork (Jurkovic, 1997). Over time, this chronic stress can manifest in physical symptoms such as headaches, gastrointestinal issues, and a weakened immune system, making the child more susceptible to illness (Hooper et al., 2011). Furthermore, the lack of time for self-care and physical activity can contribute to long-term health problems, including obesity or malnutrition, depending on the family's circumstances. Disruption in sleep patterns exacerbates fatigue, impairs cognitive functioning, and increases the risk of chronic illnesses such as obesity and diabetes (Dahl & Lewin, 2002; Roberts et al., 2009).

Emotionally, parentified children often experience feelings of inadequacy and resentment due to the overwhelming responsibilities placed upon them. Children in these roles often suppress their own needs and emotions to prioritize those of their family members, which can result in emotional dysregulation and difficulty forming healthy relationships later in life (Byng-Hall, 2008). The lack of unconditional love and support from caregivers undermines their self-esteem and emotional resilience (Chen et al., 2021). These children are frequently unable to express or process their emotions effectively because they are conditioned to suppress their own needs in favor of others. Over time, this emotional suppression can lead to anxiety disorders and depressive symptoms (Merrick et al., 2017). They may struggle with feelings of inadequacy or fear of failure, as they are often held to adult standards of responsibility. Psychologically, parentified children are at a higher risk of developing depression, anxiety disorders, and low self-esteem (Hooper et al., 2011). The constant pressure to perform adult roles can also hinder their ability to develop a coherent sense of self, as they are forced to adopt an identity centered around care giving rather than personal growth and exploration (Jurkovic, 1997).

Althusser's concept of **interpellation**—the process by which individuals are "hailed" or called into specific social roles—helps explain how toxic socialization functions. From birth, individuals are interpellated into roles such as "student," "worker," or "consumer," roles that are designed to serve the interests of capital. The destruction of attachments, for example, severs individuals from traditional support systems, making them more susceptible to ideological control. Similarly, weaponization turns individuals into enforcers of the system, policing themselves and others to maintain the status quo. In this way, toxic socialization is not merely a byproduct of capitalism but a deliberate strategy for maintaining systemic control and reproducing the labor force.

Existentially, parentification can distort a child's understanding of their place in the world and their sense of purpose. These children may grow up believing that their worth is tied solely to their ability to care for others, leading to a diminished sense of individuality and autonomy (Earley & Cushway, 2002). This may lead them to sacrifice/amputate parts of themselves as they adopt an inappropriate role and inappropriate behaviours. They may also struggle with feelings of injustice or betrayal, questioning why they were burdened with responsibilities that were not theirs to bear. This existential confusion can lead to a lifelong search for meaning and validation, often manifesting in codependent relationships or an overemphasis on achievement as a means of self-worth (Byng-Hall, 2008).

Indoctrination

Indoctrination refers to the process of teaching children a particular view of self and society. Under Capitalism, indoctrination is designed to create compliant worker bees (Althusser, 1971, 2014)to diminish and enslave (Fanon, 1963). The indoctrination is carried out with the assistance of carefully constructed **Master Narratives** (Sosteric, 2021). These master narratives contain several "archetypes" which provide answers to key existential questions, like "who am I?", "Why am I here?" and "What is my purpose?" The answers provided by these archetype shape human thought and behaviour in ways conducive to the creation of a compliant workforce (Sosteric, 2020). I discuss all this in detail elsewhere (Sosteric, 2021, 2024). Here I would like to focus on the **Myths of Self** propagated by the elite's master narrative. Under the capitalist regime of accumulation, we are taught a **Capitalist Self**., which is an individualist, isolated, self. In

order to capture both atheists and believers, there are two version of this self, a secular version and a spiritual version.

The secular version of the capitalist self imprints an image of self as an isolated and atomized individual on a biological journey of evolution. In this version, the self is a biologically limited material self. This self exists in isolation from the surrounding milieu and is, unlike the self typically taught in pre-colonial societies, solely responsible for its own life outcomes. The purpose of this secular self is to work hard, compete for survival, strive and "rise above for the sole purpose of social, economic, and political domination. Ideas of this self are transmitted in social Darwinist thought (survival of the fittest), in European colonialist ideologies pimped by Eurocentric intellectuals (Blaut, 1993, 2000), in cultural products like 2001 a Space Odyssey (which shows humanity evolving from violent apes), and so on

The spiritual version of the capitalist self also imprints an image of self as an isolated and atomized individual on a "soul" journey of training or redemption. This self exists independent of our biology, but is still isolated from the surrounding milieu. The purpose of the capitalist's spiritual self is, depending on the particular ideological flavor, to pay of karmic debt, learn lessons, or seek redemption. Ideas of this self are transmitted in religious thought (humans needing redemption, humans needing to be good, karmic debt and rebirth) and in cultural products. The Western tarot deck, for example, is a perfectly self-contained example of the elite master narrative (Sosteric, 2014).

Note that the imposition of master narratives is only one component of the indoctrination process. Specific "streams" exist that train children to fit into various worker roles. These streams are also damaging. A child inserted into a working-class education stream is not given the same type of training a child inserted in an elite stream would be given. They are given training that diminishes their emotional and intellectual responses and makes them suitable as factory workers (Anyon, 1980). The same can certainly be said of the training elite children get, though their diminishment is different. Elite children have their capacity for empathy and understanding systematically reduced and even eliminated. When they eventually enter into their management and CEO roles, this allows them to "do what it takes" (mass firing, layoffs, the

dumping of toxic waste, environment destruction) to increase accumulation, regardless of the cost to the lives of employees, consumers, or general citizens.

Interestingly, the neuropathology of psychopathy has been established. As Dozier et al. (2006, p. 195) note, neglect is associated with low cortisol levels, and "Low cortisol levels have been associated with **conduct disorder** among children, emerging **antisocial behaviours** among adolescents, and **psychopathy** among adults…." Psychopathy is, of course, a key requirement of the capitalist regime of accumulation, even in its stable state between violent wars. Only psychopaths, i.e., individuals with a severely compromised ability to empathize with others, can make the sorts of brutal economic decisions required to ensure maximum accumulation of value.

Indoctrination with a secular or spiritual version of self conducive to capitalist accumulation is a violent act because it reduces human potential. In general, the capitalist version of self creates individuals ready, willing, and excited about sacrificing their entire healthy, adult lives in workplaces designed to facilitate the extraction of surplus value. The capitalist version of self creates individuals whose creativity, when it is allowed to flourish at all and not simply stamped out by the education system, is bolted to the requirements of the accumulating classes. The capitalist version of self creates individuals unable to exercise their "sociological imagination," that is, unable to consider themselves in social, political, and economic context. As a consequence, these individuals, rather than blaming capitalism for their economic woes, blame themselves. The tendency for isolated and atomized individuals to blame themselves increases compliance and reduces difficulties.

The imposition of elite master narratives also undermines one's spiritual potential. Elite master narratives present a view of human spirituality as either absent and irrelevant (secular version), or as tied to notions of cosmic karma, tutelage, and testing, with a dose of horrific punishment thrown in (spiritual version). Neither of these, in my view, represents an accurate view of human spirituality and human spiritual potential. Acceptance of these views as real represents a profound diminishment of human spiritual potential, and pre-empts authentic spiritual exploration and development.

4. Stress as Mediating Mechanism

Researchers are still working to determine neurological and biological pathways between abuse, violence, neglect, chaos, and emotional, physical and psychological damage. It is notable that even minor forms of stress can have major impacts on health and well-being (Kanner et al., 1981). Since toxic socialization certainly increases stress, exploring stress as pathway to diminishment and dysfunction seems reasonable.

Stressful and abusive environments lead to what researchers call *allostatic load*. Allostatic load is essentially the wear and tear on the body's biological systems that results when the body is exposed to chronic and repeated stress. *Allostatic load thus represents the physiological, psychological, and emotional consequences of amplified neuroendocrine responses resulting from toxic socialization*. Chronic stress caused by abuse, assault, insecure environments, insecure attachments, unmet needs, and so on leads to allostatic load which in turn leads to damaging alterations in the hormone system of the physical body, for example causing dysregulated patterns of cortisol output (Miller et al., 2011). Cortisol is a hormone important in some areas of biological function, including the body's response to stress and risk. Cortisol is implicated in the body's "fight or flight" mechanisms and acute release of cortisol in response to stress is short-term positive. Cortisol helps maintain mental alertness and make energy available in the bloodstream for use in stressful situations (Conradt et al., 2014). However, *chronic activation of the body's endocrine systems causes wear and tear, and increases the likelihood of disease (Conradt et al., 2014)* metabolic syndrome, chronic inflammation, **insulin resistance and weight gain** (Weber-Hamann et al., 2002), **suppressed immune function**, and **gastrointestinal problems**, **Irritable Bowel Syndrome (Aronson, 2009)**, and other physical dysfunctions. As one author notes, the physical consequences of allostatic load are severe: "Allostatic load leads to impaired immunity, atherosclerosis, obesity, bone demineralization, and atrophy of nerve cells in brain. Allostatic load is seen in major depressive illness and may also be expressed in other chronic anxiety disorders such as PTSD and should be documented" (McEwen, 2003). Stress also leads to "coronary heart disease and stroke; insulin resistance and thus type 2 diabetes; also altered endothelial function and increased risk of hypertension; central and peripheral propensity

to obesity; altered body composition, including reduced bone mineral density which may lead to osteoporosis; and possible effects on cognitive and emotional function. " (Gluckman et al., 2007, p. 2)

Notably, it is not just the physical body that is harmed by the stress and violence of toxic socialization. **Brain damage occurs as well**. When experimenters stress rodents by restraining them for six-hour periods, rat brains change. Neurogenesis (i.e. the building of new brain cells) is suppressed and the number of neurons in dentate gyrus declines (McEwen, 2003). Besides suppressing neurogenesis, daily stress reduces branching and length of dendrites and neurons in the brain (Lupien et al., 2009). Stress thus causes structural changes (i.e. damage) to the human brain, and these structural changes have many behavioural, psychological, emotional, and physical effects (Sousa et al., 2000) As McEwen (2006) notes: "Allostatic overload resulting from chronic stress in animal models causes atrophy of neurons in the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex, brain regions involved in memory, selective attention, and executive function, and causes hypertrophy of neurons in the amygdala, a brain region involved in fear and anxiety, as well as aggression. Thus, the ability to learn and remember and make decisions may be compromised by chronic stress, and may be accompanied by increased levels of anxiety and aggression." McEwan continues: "The cognitive impairment is likely to be related to the structural changes in the hippocampus…whereas the anxiety, fear, and aggression may be due to changes in the amygdala" (McEwen, 2003). Notably, the greater the stress, greater the effect (Moss et al., 1999).

Stress impacts throughout the lifespan, but is particularly damaging to children. "Early life experiences perhaps carry an even greater weight in terms of how an individual reacts to new situations. Early life physical and sexual abuse imposes a life-long burden of behavioural and pathophysiological problems. Cold and uncaring families produce long-lasting emotional problems in children. Some of these effects are seen on brain structure and function, and in the risk for later depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)" (McEwen, 2006).

Toxic environments also impact sleep patterns in a negative way, adding to the allopathic load. When stressful environments are present in the home, at school (i.e. physical abuse, fighting,

yelling, assault, walking on eggshells, etc.), or at work, sleep problems ensue. Sleep deprivation increases blood pressure, increases cortisol and insulin levels, increases appetite, and has been associated with obesity (McEwen, 2006). Sleep deprivation also leads to cognitive impairments (McEwen, 2006). Sleep deprivation has also been associated with increases in fighting behaviour (de Paula & Hoshino, 2002), impaired physical, psychological, and emotional health, stress, increased cortisol levels, temporal lobe atrophy (Cho, 2001), chronic disease, elevated mortality risk (Carroll et al., 2016), senescence, accelerated aging (Carroll et al., 2016), structural changes to the brain, and cognitive impairment (Rosenberg et al., 2014).

Stress has a direct impact on the well-being and development of an individual, but it also has an indirect impact. Decades of epidemiological, clinical, animal research demonstrate maternal prenatal distress affects infant and child development, altering brain development, increasing psychopathology (Monk et al., 2019) causing increased ADHD, increased conduct disorders, lower cognitive performance, and alteration in endocrine function (Glover, 2011). Chronic PPD (prenatal psychological distress) leads to alteration in the gut bio and the presence of pathogens in infants, potentially leading to negative child health outcomes (Aatsinki et al., 2020). "… maternal distress is associated with children's increased risk for psychopathology: For example, high maternal anxiety is associated with a twofold increase in the risk of probable mental disorder in children" (Monk et al., 2019).

5. Prevalence

It is difficult to assess the prevalence of toxic environments and victimization. One study finds that almost 75% of adults report some form of toxicity in their childhood (Poole et al., 2017). Researcher estimate that between 30% and 60% of children at school experience peer victimization at school (Guarini et al., 2020)[4] Another study suggests one in five experience forms of neglect (Cohen et al., 2017). Nationally representative Canadian data have indicated that 32% (1 in 3) of the adult population in Canada has experienced child abuse, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, and exposure to Inter-Personal Violence (IPV) (Afifi et al., 2015).

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[4]Original citation lost. Need to recover.

Wang & Kenny (2014, p. 918) note that "nearly half of the mothers and fathers reported that they had directed harsh verbal discipline at their adolescent children in the past year." Similarly, "recent findings indicate that one in eight children in the United States will experience maltreatment severe enough to be substantiated by CPS between birth and age 18" (Putnam-Hornstein, Simon, Eastman, & Magruder, 2015, p. 92), but researchers argue that incidence numbers "seriously underestimate the prevalence of maltreatment"(Swahn et al., 2006, p. 1849). These authors note that "Only 1 in 4 study participants who reported needing medical treatment as a result of maltreatment also had a court record of such abuse or neglect."

Putnam-Hornstein et al. (2015, p. 92) go on to indicate that "Available data suggest that the rates of child maltreatment in the United States may be 2 to 3 times higher than the number of identified victims in any given year." Indeed, these are conservative estimates and often these don't include measures of emotional and psychological victimization, or neglect, consideration of chaos, the destruction of family attachments, and the violent impact of indoctrination, which if included would send the numbers skyrocketing. Annerback et al. (2012) note when definitions of abuse are liberal, and when we include other aspects of toxic socialization, like indoctrination, chaos, and the destruction of family attachments, just about everybody on the planet becomes a victim of toxic socialization, a fact which any reader can anecdotally confirm simply by examining their family life, school, and work life. Indeed, Ryan and Deci (2000b, p. 320: emphasis added) note that "the social world, including its economic and political arrangements, cultural values, and interpersonal dynamics *inevitably...*obstructs or fails to afford opportunities for fulfillment of the basic psychological needs."

Putting the above together, we can see that, to a great or lesser extent, we are *all* victims of toxic socialization—all victims of a regime of accumulation whose sole goal is to enrich a few off the backs of the many (Sosteric, 2016). This is not a revelation that should be taken lightly since even single instances of emotional violence or neglect perpetrated by trusted adult figures can have long-term debilitating consequences. Toxic socialization and its debilitating impact on human beings needs to be taken seriously not just because of the personal and familial damage it causes, but because of the massive cost involved. Toxic socialization that leads to physical, psychological, emotional, and spirituality diminishment and dysfunction costs society huge

money. It costs governments in higher than necessary medical costs, and it costs society in lost creativity and productivity. For the United States alone, the estimates are dramatic. As (Fang et al., 2012) note:

> The estimated average lifetime cost per victim of nonfatal child maltreatment is $210,012 in 2010 dollars, including $32,648 in childhood health care costs; $10,530 in adult medical costs; $144,360 in productivity losses; $7,728 in child welfare costs; $6,747 in criminal justice costs; and $7,999 in special education costs. The estimated average lifetime cost per death is $1,272,900, including $14,100 in medical costs and $1,258,800 in productivity losses. The total lifetime economic burden resulting from new cases of fatal and nonfatal child maltreatment in the United States in 2008 is approximately $124 billion. In sensitivity analysis, the total burden is estimated to be as large as $585 billion.

Of course, there is a problem with liberal definitions of toxicity. Liberal definitions make research difficult. How do you do grouped statistical analysis, for example, when you have one group, the abused. Narrow definitions however do not reflect the seriousness of the issue since even "moderately" toxic environments can lead to long-term damage and debility. Nevertheless, resistance to more liberal definitions can be anticipated. Open definitions are politically and economically explosive. For example, when one provides a liberal definition, even the experience of poverty may be included as abuse, a fact that would not serve conservative actors. Liberal definitions of toxicity may also be personally damming, for example, as an inexperienced parent with my own mental health issues emerging from my own toxic childhood, I am guilty of abusing my first child. No doubt there are many out there who, in moments of honesty and clarity, would have to admit the same. Given the guilt, scholars, sociologists included, may be reluctant to talk about it, or they may even actively work to suppress the reality of forms of abuse, as psychoanalysts did with Freud (Masson, 2003). As Masson notes, Freud originally argued that females were being sexually abused at very high rates in his button-down Viennese society. This original revelation fits with what we now know to be the truth about child sexual assault. However, this revelation likely made his colleagues (some of whom, given the high rates

of sexual assault, must have been involved in the crime) uncomfortable. As a result of professional resistance, and perhaps to preserve his career path, Freud eventually revised his theories to argue that children's recollections of sexual abuse were oedipal and electoral *fantasies* and nothing more (Masson, 2003)! Thus the very core of psychoanalysis is corrupt!

I should note that none of the information presented here is meant to blame parents or teachers. Parents and teachers operate within a Regime of Accumulation that organizes society, its institutions, and the roles and behaviours, in a way conducive to accumulation. The goal here is to identify toxic social system and to emphasize the need to change the system and protext children and adults from it." (Monk et al., 2019, p. 333)

Intentionally Designed

It is important to underline the fact that toxic socialization is not a random process that arises as a consequence of ignorance. Toxic socialization is designed and facilitated by [System Agents](#) because it helps shape human beings into forms suitable for insertion into the capitalist labour force. It is part of a larger system of brutal exploitation and control that uses violence, neglect, chaos, ideology, and the destruction of attachments to expand (think colonialism), protect, and maintain the integrity of this world's regime of accumulation, and the power and privilege of the accumulating classes who run it (Jalata, 2013).

Violence and Chaos

At this point, it should not be hard to see how toxic socialization contributes to the expansion and maintenance of the system. The v**iolence and chaos** of toxic socialization lowers intelligence and damages emotional and psychological responses. Damaged people are **easier to manipulate and control**—a benefit both for employers who seek to manipulate worker behaviour, marketers who seek to manipulate consumption patterns, and sociopaths seeking to build cult followings or murder en mass.

Chronic Neglect

And note, it is not just about manipulation. Toxic socialization creates **dysfunctional individuals who can more easily be plugged into demeaning, demoralizing, and exploitative work positions**. It does this because it creates individuals driven to fulfill needs left unmet by chronic neglect. In other words, toxic socialization puts individuals into what we might call **<u>Deficit Mode</u>**. Deficit Mode is a theorized psychological mode of operation whereby an individual is motivated primarily to meet unmet essential needs, like the psychological needs for self-esteem, or emotional needs for inclusion. Members of the accumulating class exploit these anxieties, deficits, and hatreds, which they have created, by offering products, by linking self-esteem and self worth (essential needs that go unmet in the toxic socialization system) to hard work and career advancement (so called self-actualization). In deficit mode, which can approach desperation in individuals with chronic needs deficits, individuals are easily manipulated and controlled by system agents promising needs satisfaction. This is obvious in the case of consumer capitalism whose marketing wizards fuel product purchase by associating product purchase with the satisfaction of unmet needs. It is also obvious in certain filial esoteric **Ideological Institutions**[5] like Freemasonry, which draw individuals in for indoctrination by playing to their self-esteem deficits (oh, you're one of the "special" ones), and by offering a venue for satisfaction of other essential needs, like esteem, acceptance, belongingness, the need for truth, alignment, and connection. The stark evil of all this becomes apparent when we consider that the manipulation of needs deficits drives cult formation. Consider Deborah Layton who cites Jim Jones' attention and manipulative praise (Jones meeting unmet psychological and emotional needs) as psychological reasons for her toxic attachment to the Jonestown cult (Layton, 2010). On the issue of mass murder, we only have to consider Hitler or any of the other world leaders who use violence to further their imperialist ends.

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[5]**Ideological Institutions** are "special instruments of... thought control" designed to create a compliant population. (Ruyle, 1975, p. 11)

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Destruction of Attachments

Destruction of attachments also plays a role in creating a compliant and hard working labour force. Destruction of attachments, facilitated by early placement in schools originally created specifically for the purpose of destroying parental attachments and removing children from traditional influence (Gatto, 2006) makes children easier to shape and control. Twelve years of carefully choreographed social class training (Anyon, 1980; Giroux, 1983) with children who have been removed from family influence creates perfectly shaped working, middle, management, and upper-class actors more than willing to enter the labour force as docile and compliant workers willing to work their lives away so the few can accumulate their labour value.

It may be difficult for some to consider the fact that the education system serves the needs of the accumulating classes, or that the education system was deliberately designed to destroy family attachments so as to more easily subject students to indoctrination, but consider residential schools, but this is not analysis (Althusser, 1971). It might be hard to see this in the mainstream educational system, but the attachment-breaking function of modern education is obvious when we consider residential schools. Agents of these schools forcibly removed Indigenous children from their traditional culture and placed them in an isolated and violent institutional setting where parental and traditional influences were cut off and where they were abused, neglected, and indoctrinated into the dominant European capitalist culture. Classic toxic socialization. The purpose of residential schools was exactly to destroy attachments to parents and traditional cultures, and to damage and diminish through violence and neglect, thereby making children vulnerable and susceptible to indoctrination.

Conclusion: Breaking the Chains of Capitalist Socialization

The concept of **toxic socialization** exposes the insidious mechanisms through which capitalist systems reproduce themselves by shaping human beings into compliant, alienated, and diminished workers. This process is not accidental or incidental—it is a deliberate, systemic strategy designed to maintain the dominance of the Accumulating Class. Through violence,

neglect, chaos, the destruction of attachments, and indoctrination, capitalism systematically undermines human potential, creating individuals who are easier to exploit, control, and discard.

The **5Ds of Toxic Existence**—Diminishment, Dysfunction, Disease, Disconnection, and Death—are not merely individual tragedies but collective outcomes of a system that prioritizes profit over people. These outcomes are not bugs in the system; they are features. Capitalism thrives on the alienation of workers, the suppression of critical thought, and the destruction of communal bonds. It requires a population that is too exhausted, too traumatized, and too disconnected to challenge its fundamental injustices.

The socialization process under capitalism is not about nurturing human potential but about molding individuals into tools for economic exploitation. From the moment we are born, we are subjected to a system that values us only for our labor and our ability to consume. Our emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs are systematically neglected, leaving us in a perpetual state of deficit, desperately seeking fulfillment through consumerism, careerism, or other forms of false consciousness.

To break free from this cycle, we must first recognize that **toxic socialization is not inevitable**. It is the product of a specific economic system—one that can and must be dismantled. This requires a radical reimagining of society, one that prioritizes collective well-being over individual profit, and human flourishing over economic growth. It requires us to reject the master narratives of capitalism and to rebuild our systems of education, family, and community around the principles of solidarity, care, and liberation.

The struggle against toxic socialization is not just a personal one; it is a political one. It is a fight against the structures of power that perpetuate violence, neglect, and alienation. It is a fight for a world where human beings are not reduced to commodities, where our essential needs are met, and where we are free to actualize our full potential. This is the promise of a post-capitalist future—a future where socialization is not a tool of oppression but a process of empowerment.

In the words of Karl Marx, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it." Let us take up this challenge, not only by critiquing the toxic

socialization processes of capitalism but by actively working to create a world where every human being can thrive. The chains of capitalist socialization are heavy, but they are not unbreakable. Together, we can forge a new path—one rooted in justice, solidarity, and the unyielding belief in the possibility of a better world.

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