

The Aggressive Class Theory.

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Abstract

Many successful people are neither hard working nor able, but somehow they manage to “navigate the system” and take advantage of others, and many unsuccessful people are hard working and able. The economic essence of capitalism is extraction of surplus from workers by capitalists and it is only possible due to the aggressive-submissive relationship between classes. I propose that aggressiveness is typically necessary and often sufficient for success in capitalism. Furthermore, it is important to pay attention to aggressiveness, because it is typically overlooked or mislabeled. Worse, it is often argued that the opposite of aggressiveness, submissiveness, is necessary for success. People are often told or believe that in order to succeed they need to have integrity, be unselfish, obedient, and hard working. Actually quite the opposite is true: best to appear to have these qualities, so that by example and reciprocity others adopt them, but in fact take advantage of others as much as possible. In short, it is best be a hawk (aggressive) among the doves (submissive).

KEYWORDS: MARX, CAPITALISM, CLASS, INEQUALITY, AGGRESSIVENESS, DOMINANCE, ALTRUISM, HUMANISM, GREED, MONEY, MORALITY, LABOR

“Nice guys finish last.” Leo Durocher (cited in Judge et al. 2012)

“Society is divided between the rich and the poor, [...] some people subjugate and exploit other people” Fidel Castro on discovering Marxism, 2009

A theory is needed to explain a fact that many successful people are neither hard working nor able, but somehow they manage to “navigate the system” and take advantage of others. Also, there are many people who are hard working and able—they are productive, but unsuccessful. Success in capitalism, as elaborated later, is mostly money, and hence, top one percent or so of income distribution defines success.

Many social classes were defined, notably capitalist and working classes. This article offers a new social psychological perspective on old issue of social classes and class struggle between the successful and the unsuccessful. A new class, the aggressive class, is proposed by arguing that aggressiveness is key for success. In other words, an economic class (successful or wealthy group, typically capitalists) is defined in terms of behavior: aggressiveness. Aggressive class overlaps with capitalist class (and their mercenaries) and submissive class overlaps with working class.¹ If the theory is correct, the two typologies must overlap to large degree: if aggressiveness results in success, then capitalists are aggressive because they are most successful group in capitalism.

There is an aggressive-submissive relationship with respect to resources. Aggressive types (‘type’ is used interchangeably with ‘member of a class’) typically either own means of production, and hence, do not work for wages, or they aid capitalists controlling resources (capitalist’s mercenaries) and do not work for wages to produce either, but are mostly paid for extracting surplus from labor. Increasingly capitalists are rentiers, that is, they simply extract rents (make money due to resources’ ownership) as opposed to extracting value added in production (Litan and Hathaway 2017). Capitalism must force submissiveness—someone needs to work and create value, so that capitalists can extract surplus. Workers cannot be too aggressive or their aggressiveness cannot succeed. Otherwise, the aggressive class would cease to exist—if there is nobody generating surplus value that can be extracted, one needs to start generating value herself. Aggressiveness is typically overlooked and mislabeled as, for instance, “leadership.” Worse, its opposite, submissiveness, is promoted as a key to success, for instance, “hard work.” Submissiveness, however, leads to failure (lack of domination and accumulation).

Capitalism would not be nearly as pernicious and malignant if it were as fair as it claims to be: the hard working are successful, and only those who do not put in enough effort fail. It is winners’ merit and losers’ fault. It is person’s own virtues or vices that determine the outcome. This is worrying because clearly it is not so, and still most people seem to believe that the outcome is fair enough. The winners are not the most able in a broad sense, neither hardest working. Same with losers—most lose in a broad sense despite being able and working hard.

In developing aggressive class theory, first predictors of success are enumerated and case for privileged position of hard work (and ability) is rebuffed. Two behavioral types are discussed: aggressive and passionate types; finally, the aggressive class is defined at micro and macro levels, and concluding discussion is provided.

¹In principle, however, terms “aggressive” and “capitalist,” and “working” and “submissive” are not synonymous. Importantly, as elaborated later, there are many other aggressive types: politicians, economists, etc, that is, capitalists is a major category of aggressive class but not the only one. There are also many exceptions: capitalists who are not aggressive, and workers who are—such people, however, are likely to change their class over time: aggressive workers may be successful, and submissive capitalists may fail and become workers.

1 Ingredients for Individual Success

”Success is the result of perfection, hard work, learning from failure, loyalty, and persistence.” Colin Powell

Hard work is most commonly advertised as necessary and sufficient for success, and this myth successfully functions in popular culture in the US (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2011).

However, as this paper argues, in capitalism, aggressiveness is key for success. Others have argued other ingredients as enumerated in table 1, but aggressiveness has been largely overlooked—or rather omitted and mischaracterized on purpose. At the same time, we seem to more readily acknowledge that aggressiveness is important for success among other animals. Argyle (1994), for instance, lists following predictors of dominance among animals: age, sex, size, rank of mother, intelligence, and aggressiveness.

Table 1: Ingredients for success. The list is rather exhaustive than mutually exclusive: There is an overlap and circularity to some degree, for instance, both genes and environment define talents.

iq (intelligence quotient)/talent/intelligence (Herrnstein and Murray [1994] 2010)
eq (emotional intelligence quotient)/emotions/social skills or “ability to navigate the system” (Goleman 2006)
communication skills (Grant 2013, Trump and Schwartz 2009)
environment/ecology (notably country, neighborhood, and family) (Fischer et al. 1996)
hierarchy/elites (Mills 1999)
education (Becker 2009)
creativity (Florida 2008)
intuition, gut feeling, or leap of faith (Dane and Pratt 2007, Bezos 2010, Jobs 2005, Walker 2014)
passion/flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1991, Vallerand et al. 2007)
luck/risk (including genes) (Frank 2012, 2016)
hard work (Andrews 2005, Duckworth 2013)

Over the course of our civilization development, we are trying to or in most cases actually increasing the success ingredients listed in table 1), including hard work (Schor 2008). We are decreasing, on the other hand, aggressiveness (Freud et al. 1930). Indeed, decreasing aggressiveness is one of the hallmarks of human progress, what makes us different and better than animals. Luck and hard work are peculiar, too. Luck is purely beyond our control and typically underestimated, and hard work is purely within our control and typically overestimated—the myth is that if you work hard and keep on trying you will finally succeed.

All above ingredients for success matter, and lack of any single one can jeopardize benefits of all others, or plenty of any single one can compensate for all others. In short, all ingredients from table 1 are often necessary, and sometimes few or even one is sufficient for success. I will not try to argue, as many others did, that my key ingredient, aggressiveness, is more important than others. I simply want to make a case that it has been overlooked, misused, and that there are some far reaching consequences.

In its crudest, yet popular and populist form, all success depends on hard work in capitalism. More enlightened observers would add other ingredients as enumerated above, but most people emphasize individual agency in determining one’s own success. Few, such as Fischer et al. (1996), Mills (1999), and Frank (2012) deviate from such view and claim that success is largely determined by outside forces.

Ingredients for success could be classified as positive or negative, virtues or vices. All success ingredients from table 1 would be mostly positive, but aggressiveness is a vice. We want more talent/intelligence, education, creativity, and communication skills. We want better emotions, and environment/ecology (notably neighborhood and family). But we do not want more aggressiveness, nor “better” aggressiveness—this is true for human society as a whole. Persons, groups, and notably countries,

unfortunately, typically benefit from being aggressive, at least in the short run. In other words, aggressiveness is “smart for one, but dumb for all.” Our civilization has realized that aggressiveness is harmful, and hence, it has been discouraged (Freud et al. 1930), especially violent aggressiveness is commonly penalized. Aggressiveness is discouraged and penalized among children and adolescents (Little et al. 2013) and among adults (e.g., Dahling et al. 2014). People rarely get advice to be aggressive violently, rather they are sometimes advised to be aggressive in a “smart” way: they are told to be a leader, to compete viciously, etc. But by far the most popular advice for success is to work hard, or to get education (i.e. working hard at school). One needs to make an effort, create value. How convenient for a capitalist.

1.1 Is Hard Work Sufficient for Success?

“People need to work longer hours” Jeb Bush, 2016 presidential candidate (Smith 2015)²

“The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.” Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*

INUS condition is a useful way of thinking about causality (Mackie 1980). It is Insufficient but Non-redundant part of Unnecessary but Sufficient Condition. Hard work is clearly Insufficient. There are many people laboring really hard, say in “gig” or service industry, and they make a minimum wage. If they work twice this hard and double their working hours from say 40 to 80, it will not result in success (wealth, power, etc). Hard work is Non-redundant—it clearly contributes to success as documented by countless self-help prescriptions (e.g., Andrews 2005, Robbins 2013). What is overlooked however, is that hard work is Unnecessary for success. Any successful gambler, criminal, or capitalist would tell you that—they do what they do (crime, gambling, extracting value) because they know that it is possible to be successful without hard work. All you need is some luck and plenty of aggressiveness. Remarkably, capitalists’ progeny is successful by default and immediately—no ingredients for success are needed except being born in the right family. Yet, hard work is Sufficient for success if it is accompanied by at least some other ingredients—luck, talent, right ecological conditions, etc. Popular wisdom usually assumes that these other right conditions are always present or at least will be present at some point, and just hard work is missing. You need to work hard for long time (don’t give up no matter what), and then at some point the right conditions will happen and you will succeed. But even many ingredients for success combined, e.g., talent, education, and hard work, may result in little success unless one is aggressive enough. Even many extremely talented, educated, hardworking, and accomplished people ended up as mere salaried workers or working class,³ say Dennis Ritchie, inventor of C language. This is rather a norm than exception in capitalism. Capitalists, or technically their mercenaries (typically various managers) will try to extract the value added from person’s work paying as few dollars as possible, unless you are aggressive enough to outsmart them by doing the same—trying to extract value added from others and becoming a capitalist one day.

Not only hard work is neither sufficient nor necessary for success, it is also often unhealthy. This relentless pursuit of success through hard work starts early, already among children, and already then it is leading many children to develop mental health

²The same blunt point is made by Ted Cruz in a more touching way “I’m running for President because we need to build a dynamic nation where anybody with nothing can achieve anything.” The quote appears to be Cruz’s (and most other conservative Republicans’) motto—it appears as the only text (except a box to subscribe) on the front page of one of the versions of his website (https://www.tedcruz.org/landing/g6_lp2/). Clearly the quote is about legendary (and deeply mischaracterized) income mobility in the US. Importantly, this kind of thinking tells the masses that all needed to be successful is hard work.

³By working class I mean people working for wages, paid for their labor, not only industrial or blue collar workers.

problems and even commit suicide (Scelfo 2015, Bruni 2015, Rosin 2015). “We are not teenagers” says Carolyn Walworth, a junior at Palo Alto High School, but “lifeless bodies in a system that breeds competition” (Richtel 2015).

To be clear, in principle, hard work is a virtue and working hard must be applauded, however, vast majority of hard work done in capitalism is done by workers, not capitalists. Being exploited is not virtuous, but naive and foolish. Yet, workers continue to work and are happier to work than be unemployed (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2011)—it is better to be exploited than homeless and starving. But they would have been much better off if they worked hard for her own good, not their oppressor, a capitalist (Okulicz-Kozaryn et al. 2014). According to some recent research, which is very helpful for aggressive class, what matters for success is not only toiling for long hours but doing it with passion—this of course sounds bad and repelling, hence the research calls it ‘grit’ (Duckworth 2013). Workers with grit are resilient source of income for capitalists—the more they work, the more income for a capitalist and the larger the gap between haves and have nots. It is counter-intuitive, but capitalism tends to penalize hard work and reward (smart) aggressiveness.

1.2 Is Ability (or Education) Sufficient for Success?

While hard work is a favorite ingredient for success among the aggressive class to promote for the masses, education is the economist’s favorite. Nobel prize winning free-market economist Gary Becker advocated it heartily (2009), and now many economists follow the suit.⁴

The appeal of education is that it improves cognitive ability, and it is more easily changed than cognitive ability. Cognitive ability or IQ predicts college and life success (Herrnstein and Murray [1994] 2010), caveats acknowledged (Fischer et al. 1996). Education measures some ability, but also proxies: (1) perseverance and hard work—both passive and submissive qualities; and to some degree (2) marketing of yourself, or in other words ability to navigate the system—aggressive or dominant qualities.

An often missed attribute of education is that it is largely a positional good (Frank 2012): it buys position, but one also needs money to buy education in the first place and wealthy people are better suited to do that, and hence, in that respect education is widening disparities as opposed to closing them. Elite education (top universities, Ivy League) often enable success, but also success enables elite education—capitalists’ and other elites’ progeny typically go to top schools (Economist 2015b,a). Fundamentally, aggressive class is using other success ingredients (education, communication skills, etc) as tools to dominate. Passionate types (defined later) are approaching those success ingredients with passion and intention to use them to achieve something, to accomplish some task. For instance, passionate or submissive types obtain more education because they are curious about some topic. Aggressive types obtain more education because it can be used (especially elite education) to dominate others.

Much of education is simply hard (mental) work, and like any hard work is submissive in many respects. In general, education seem to promote conscientious and agreeable (Charlton 2009) or cooperative (Fischer et al. 1996) behavior. Such people are more likely to be taken advantage of by the aggressive class. To summarize, education, like hard work, is overrated and not sufficient for success. At best it is merely an INUS condition.

Out of frustration with inability of education or IQ to explain success, creative class theory has been proposed (Florida 2002, 2008), and despite some criticism (Peck 2005), it remains popular (Florida 2004, 2011, Mellander et al. 2011). Creative class theory is part of inspiration for present aggressive class theory—creative class theory helped to explain some success, and aggressive class theory hopes to add more explanation. There is an important difference, however: creativity is probably the most important ingredient for broadly understood human progress (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2015b). Aggressiveness, on the other hand, has

⁴Marx’s Capital is fundamentally a critique of the economic concepts that make social relations in a free-market economy seem natural and inevitable, in the same way that concepts like the great chain of being and the divine right of kings once made the social relations of feudalism seem natural and inevitable. (Menand 2020). In his 1845 The German Ideology, Marx wrote, “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.”

mixed effects, and on the whole, it rather hampers than helps with progress. In short, creativity is a virtue, and aggressiveness is usually a vice. Yet, it is aggressiveness that may lead to more success than creativity, especially in the short run and especially for persons or groups, but not society as a whole.

Creativity, ability, hard work, and other ingredients for success are promoted for the masses (workers) so that they create as much value as possible that can be extracted by aggressive class. Not only ability is not enough for success, but there is also some evidence that ability and aggressiveness are negatively related (Heaven et al. 2011).

2 Passion for Dominance v Passion for Work: Be Aggressive or Be Taken Advantage Of

“Lead me, follow me, or get out of my way.” George S. Patton (<http://www.generalpatton.com/quotes/>)

Passionate or submissive types want to excel at some type of work, they want to achieve or accomplish something. Capitalists and other aggressive types want to excel at dominance and they peddle a myth via economics and other acolytes that capitalism rewards hard work and talent, while it usually bestows greatest success on the ones who excel at dominance. There are two types of people: few aggressive leaders and many submissive followers; it is actually rather a submissive-aggressive continuum, but for simplicity it is useful to define two classes. A person usually belongs to only one class, rarely both. The two classes can be also defined in terms of what their members want, what they are passionate about. Leaders want to dominate, take advantage of others, and control resources in general. Others are passionate about, devoted, or committed to some task at hand, accomplishing something, goal attainment—they have passion for some kind of work—they can be called ‘passionate types.’ Passionate types are those at the bottom of aggressive-submissive hierarchy, but in this section I prefer to use term ‘passionate’ as opposed to ‘submissive’ to highlight what they are focused on. Aggressive types aim for domination, hence ‘aggressive’ describes their intentions well; submissive types do not aim for submission—usually, they are actually unaware of it, they lack class consciousness. Submissive types are passionate about something else than submission.

The key point is that passion for task at hand along with ability, education, and other ingredients for success usually can only lead to limited success or wealth. To be successful, one typically needs aggressiveness, and sometimes aggressiveness is all that one needs.⁵ Very passionate types are often referred to as “nerds” or “geeks,” which highlights an important feature of people who are truly passionate about their job—they are often socially inept, and much of such ineptness is simply caused by lack of interest and practice in domination—these people do not have much time for social contact and manipulation—they are busy with their work: “high IQ, no clue.” They are off-the-grid, social, economic and political power grid. Aggressive types, on the other hand, are on the grid, closer or further to the power source, but always submitting to the more powerful and dominating the less powerful ones. For instance, Bernie Sanders is off the grid, as aptly observed by the Clintons, who are very much on the grid. Accordingly, aggressive Hilary Clinton won with passionate Bernie Sanders, but lost to even more aggressive Donald Trump. Aggressive types are all about social interaction. A typical aggressive type, a manager, spends his time attending meetings, making phone calls, etc, all with one goal in mind: to extract as much value added as possible for a capitalist.

Aggressive types strive for control or dominance, passionate types strive for achievement, attainment, or closure; not only the first class does not produce much, but is also remunerated better.

⁵Evidence is presented later.

2.1 A Very Fundamental Tradeoff?

When you are aggressive, you typically cannot focus on perfecting anything, because your energy is devoted to strategizing and plotting, not producing, developing, or building. And reverse is true as well—passionate types are busy with some task, not social dominance. There is opportunity cost—due to time constraint, one can only be fully devoted to taking advantage of others (aggressiveness), or performing a task (passion). But it is not only a time constraint, there seem to be the two types of people. There appears to be a fundamental tradeoff in terms of personalities, values, interests, motivations, etc: People tend to be either aggressive (focused on mastering others) or passionate (focused on mastering some task).

It is almost two different modes of functioning: doing v thinking, conquering v producing, being street smart or “common-sense” (aggressive) v being book smart (passionate). Book smart people are overanalyzing and they are more vulnerable; street smart people, on the other hand, are fast and easily taking advantage of others. Being book smart makes one ill adjusted to be competitive in the market, e.g., reading fiction may result in empathy (Bal et al. 2013). Andrew Carnegie noted that colleges prepare for “life upon another planet,” and they often generate “bizarre and destructive visions of reality” as noted more recently by Newt Gingrich (Delbanco 2012).

With passion, one is really getting deeply into the task at hand, disassemble problem into pieces, take a new unorthodox look, etc. With aggression quite the opposite—speed and simple brute ruthlessness matter. Of course, ideally brute ruthlessness must be concealed, to be successful it is not enough to be aggressive, one needs to be aggressive in a sophisticated or “smart” way as elaborated later.

Yet, passion is important for success, as are other ingredients for success (Bezos 2010, Jobs 2005, Walker 2014, Vallerand et al. 2007), and while people typically have either passion for accomplishing some task at hand or they have passion for dominance, sometimes they have both passions. Steve Jobs, for instance, clearly had passion for design and fashion with respect to electronics, but he also had passion for dominance—he was reportedly quite aggressive, he even wanted to put a “ding” or “dent” in the universe (Manjoo 2015). Likewise, Jeff Bezos seems passionate about both task at hand (selling things online) and dominance (Streitfeld and Kantor 2015). Wu Xiaohui, a Chinese tycoon, is reportedly passionate, impatient, very ambitious, and aggressive (Miller and Price 2016). Elon Musk is another example: one engineer was too slow and timid and heard from Musk: “You’re a f* idiot! Get the f* out and don’t come back!” (Duhigg 2018). Visionary leaders are often cruel (Schwartz 2015). Perhaps, extreme success requires both passions: passion for work and passion for dominance. Extreme success is extremely rare and so is having both passions. More common success, however, seems to require rather aggressive leadership than passionate work.

Many talented and hard working people are passionate—they are so engulfed in work that they do not have time or motivation for aggression, and as a corollary, aggressive types do not have time for work (plotting and scheming is not considered productive work here). If you really want to do something well, you often need to devote all your energy and time to that task—you can work to accomplish, produce, and invent. Or you can use your time and energy to dominate others and make them work for you, or work for someone else, say capitalist that pays you to extract surplus from workers. You cannot really do both well—there is an opportunity cost. Often, of course, workers move up to management, or even become capitalists, but the latter is rare, and workers who successfully move up to higher management probably were not very good at working. Again, “managing” or “leading” is not considered work, because its goal is not to produce value, but extract it. Entrepreneurs may appear as both good at some task, and aggressive enough, but vast majority fail due to not being good at a task or aggressive enough. Those entrepreneurs who are really good at something will be rather swallowed by some bigger companies that are aggressive or led by some aggressive type, because, again, people good at some work tend not to have will, time, or skills to be aggressive.

Weber’s Protestant work ethic (2003) is full of prescriptions to become submissive: hard work, self discipline, and ascetic way of life. So called flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1991) is closely related to being passionate about task at hand. Flow requires loosing oneself in the task and being spontaneous, while aggressiveness is quite the opposite—deliberate thinking, strategizing, premeditation, plotting, etc. Flow involves loss of reason and control outside of a task. Passionate types become easy prey for aggressive class.

Furthermore, there is not only a tradeoff at the moment, but being aggressive or passionate changes a person more or less permanently. When you are dedicated to the task and really focused for extended periods of time, then you become somewhat benign and vulnerable. It is a path-dependent process—the longer you are aggressive or passionate the more likely you will stay that way. In other words, doing one makes you less able to do the other one. Losing reinforces losing and wining reinforces wining, even at hormonal level (Wood and Eagly 2012).⁶

Habit matters a great deal—we do not realize it, but most of the time we are on “autopilot” (Duhigg 2012). Aggressive class thrives by figuring out how the system works and making it a habit to act in a way that guarantees success: having an eye for opportunities, taking advantage of them ruthlessly, pretending being benign and trustworthy, and so forth. Aggressive types have such behavior in their blood—they act fast, automatically, they are on “autopilot” looking out for situations and people to take advantage of.

Passionate types act in quite the opposite way, especially when task at hand requires creativity. They remove the habit, think outside of the box. They take new perspectives, reorganize patters, perhaps use lateral thinking (De Bono [1970] 2010). They focus all energies on solving some problem, accomplishing some task. Submissive class spends time figuring out how to master task at hand. Aggressive class spends time figuring out how to take advantage of the system and master passionate types who have mastered their tasks.

2.2 A Similar Dichotomy: Dominance v Prestige

Cheng et al. (2013) introduced a similar dichotomy: (1) Dominance as the use of force and intimidation to induce fear, and (2) Prestige as the sharing of expertise or know-how to gain respect. Social status, hierarchy, or rank can be accurately conceptualized as an outcome of either Dominance or Prestige (or reputation) (Cheng and Tracy 2014).

Dominance is similar to this study’s aggressiveness, but Prestige differs from this study’s submissiveness or passion. Passionate types simply enjoy working on something, which differs from prestige; and passionate types are typically taken advantage of and fail to reach the top or prestigious position. Prestige in Cheng’s typology, on the other hand, does lead to success. Prestige often includes aggressiveness. It is often not just benign reputation that you do not have to tend to. Prestige often results more from aggressive marketing than from actual accomplishment.

2.3 Aggressive v Passionate Occupations

A contemporary aggressive class member is not a brute savage from Middle Ages; he is often a leader. Leadership is a peculiar term for aggressiveness. Fundamentally, leadership means using others to achieve one’s goal in a way that others do not feel

⁶It may also be more difficult to change over time: The more passionate you become, the less able you are to navigate the system; and probably the other way round, too—the more able you are to navigate the system, the less able you are to do some work. There are probably some complex dynamics, too. For instance, it seems that if one is passionate for a long time, then as argued here, one would be taken advantage of, and then to save oneself, one often becomes aggressive. And another thing is that one has to become more aggressive when pressed! Most people would argue consider committing a crime if they were homeless; but even in less extreme situations such as having difficulty to provide for family, people, arguably, become more aggressive. In short, frustration causes aggression (Dollard et al. 1939). Indeed, low socioeconomic status causes aggression (Greitemeyer and Sagioglou 2016).

being taken advantage of, and ideally they actually feel helped. In other words, leader strives to realize his own potential and ideas using other people. He takes over and takes advantage of others for his own gain. Because males are more aggressive and successful, male pronoun is used to refer to aggressive class members, and female pronoun is used to refer to others. Leader acts like a capitalist who extracts value added from workers, but leader rather extracts human energy. In aggressive-submissive relationship, the submissive target is likely to be objectified, that is, serve as an instrument to achieve one's goal, where aggressor uses not only his own energy but also that of the target (Gruenfeld et al. 2008). In other words, aggression by aggressive class is instrumental and deliberately enacted in order to achieve a goal.

Best leaders make their followers think they are being led to greatness, that it is him, the leader, working for them, not the other way round. Leadership is sneakily sold as something helpful for those led: guidance or help to succeed, not what it is: using others to achieve one's goals. What sustains this facade is a belief that leaders are more able, talented, hard working, etc, but not more aggressive, and actually quite the opposite. Leaders pretend to be nice, benevolent, and altruistic. Leaders pretend they are doing the leading for the benefit of those led, not themselves. The above description of a leader differs of course from what is taught at business schools (e.g., Kouzes and Posner 2006). And this actually works—workers are most easily fooled when leader actually thinks himself that he is helping workers. To be sure, many leaders, especially lower level managers, may actually be helping people as opposed to be taking advantage of them. But make no mistake, capitalists always take advantage of workers by definition—this is how capital works—by accumulation through dispossession (e.g., Harvey 2014).

In general, there seem to be typically aggressive occupations (salesmen, managers, lawyers, etc) and typically passionate ones (carpenters, programmers, academics, engineers, etc).⁷

Even within a discipline, occupation, and organization there are people that are either or—aggressive or passionate—there are almost always mercenaries/leaders/organizers/managers and “geeks” who do the work. In academia, too. Some of the most successful academics do not actually perform research themselves, but rather delegate it and take advantage of lower-level faculty, postdocs, and students. Those who actually did the work, often foreigners such as Asians and Latinos, are taken advantage of and end up unsuccessful. Foreign born academic scientists and engineers are producing more, but are paid less (Corley and Sabharwal 2007)—arguably they are not aggressive enough.

One category of people fits well outside of the aggressive class—all people passionate about task at hand, people experiencing the “flow.” Some typical examples include computer programmers and athletes. One could counterargue that athletes are aggressive—they are, but in a different sense—their aggressiveness is directed at task at hand (overcoming opponent or their own weakness). They do not extract value from others' work, if anything, others extract value from their work, for instance, by selling advertisements.

Academics are a great example of passionate types. It is easy to see that many are experiencing the “flow”—they are clearly disconnected from the world, and they appear not to be present and are often difficult to communicate with—and the reason is that they are fully engaged with their work (research) to the point where almost nothing else matters. Dawkins (2004), for instance, provides a colorful description of his colleague at Oxford University, who was very productive as an academic, but had problems to navigate the real world. Many passionate types that are great at their work and advance our society fall prey to aggressive types who do not produce much and are often remunerated better than those who contribute more. Again, aggressiveness matters within occupations, too. To continue with academics—many are neither productive in research, nor good

⁷Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) has a wonderful database of occupational styles, and some fit aggressive and passionate types. For instance aggressive types are about leadership <https://www.onetonline.org/find/descriptor/result/1.C.2.b> and social orientation <https://www.onetonline.org/find/descriptor/result/1.C.3.c>, while passionate types are about analytical thinking <https://www.onetonline.org/find/descriptor/result/1.C.7.b>, and attention to detail <https://www.onetonline.org/find/descriptor/result/1.C.5.b>.

at teaching, but yet they manage to navigate the system and succeed, and many extraordinary performers fail because they are too busy working and fail to do the “networking.” Same with students—many smartest or hardest working students fail, and many manage to succeed despite being neither talented nor hard working and not even lucky. There is a class of people who succeed despite mediocrity or lacking in many respects. There is a class of people whose success has been made by others. This is the aggressive class.

3 The Aggressive Class Theory

The key thesis of this study is that aggressiveness is a key ingredient for success. It is useful to define success first, and then define the aggressive class.

3.1 Definition Of Success

Success in capitalism, of course, equals money, wealth, or capital, especially the last two. The most successful types are able to live off rents from property, stocks, etc. That is, they do not have to work to support themselves. Not only they do not have to work, but their wealth is multiplying itself almost automatically and without much attention, except perhaps some supervision of capitalist’s managers, economists, lawyers, accountants, and other mercenaries. Those people in service of capitalists are called mercenaries following Google dictionary: “a person primarily concerned with material reward at the expense of ethics.”⁸ Income predicts unethical behavior (Dubois et al. 2015). There is a clear tradeoff between capitalist interest and virtues. Mercenaries are, in general, various managers and leaders. They are paid well and they themselves belong to a ruling elite (Mills 1999) or aggressive class as defined here. There are of course other terms that could be used—Harvey, for instance uses term “(craven) acolyte” (2014) to stress their submissiveness to a capitalist; my term “mercenary” stresses aggressiveness towards workers. Another close term is “salaried” or “service class” (Argyle 1994). Among defenders of capitalist’s wealth are economists—they are paid well, too. They are also (along with lawyers, politicians, and capitalists) running the country. This article is as much against capitalists as it is against economists because they are the ones who provide “science” to support capitalists’ interest. Even the most progressive and welfare oriented economists such as Amartya Sen and Thomas Piketty are still quite capitalistic (Harvey 2014, Peet 2015). Aggressive types tend to be amoral and dishonest (Van IJzendoorn 1989, Altemeyer 2004). It does not require much discussion to claim that aggressiveness and virtues are at odds. There are many lists of virtues, and it is beyond the scope of this study to discuss them at length, but suffice it to say that such virtues as temperance, charity, sacrifice, generosity, kindness, humility, and friendliness are at odds with aggressiveness as defined below.

More generally, success is power or dominance, which in turn are typically caused by and measured with money. Yet, sometimes one lacks dominance despite having money as in French Revolution. Also, dominance can be achieved in other ways than through money, for instance, one can become politician, scientist, bishop, etc. In extreme cases, power is actually achieved explicitly through being much less aggressive than custom or circumstances require. Rejection of aggressiveness and certainly rejection of violence can lead to dominance as exemplified by Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, and others. These are exceptions, of course. Vast majority of non-aggressive people end up being unsuccessful, and even the above exemplars were aggressive in some ways.

Again, capitalists are increasingly rentiers, that is, they simply extract rents (make money due to resources’ ownership) as opposed to extracting value added in production. In terms of population proportion, successful types are at the top of income

⁸<https://www.google.com/search?q=define%3A+mercenaries>.

distribution, say top five or one percent, which translates into individual income of more than about \$125,000 or \$250,000 a year.

3.2 Definition of Aggressiveness

Term aggressiveness was used loosely in common meaning. Now, having provided a broad context, it is time to define aggressiveness precisely. First, I mean intraspecific aggression, that is within human species, and typically over material resources such as means of production and money. Second, I do not mean physical or verbal aggression, though they or their threat may be used. I rather mean social class aggression: capitalists and their mercenaries v workers. Such aggressiveness is instrumental (proactive, offensive, “cold-blooded”, etc); it is deliberately enacted in order to achieve a goal; it is motivated by greed; and, importantly, it is unprovoked and long-term. It is structural, institutionalized, systemic, and systematic. Two other types of aggression are somewhat related to aggression meant here: relational or covert aggression (damage to someone’s relationship or social status), and institutional aggression. Aggressiveness, as defined here, is accompanied by at least one more quality, especially ability to navigate the system.

To fix the ideas, it is useful to start with a graphical depiction of what an aggressive class is in Venn diagram in figure 1. By aggressive class I mean people in shaded areas, that is, a person needs to be aggressive and have at least one more accompanying quality. One needs at least some of them—pure aggressiveness will not lead to much success, especially in the long run. If I mean aggressive only, I would clearly say so, otherwise I mean aggressiveness as defined in this section.

In a similar way, narcissism helps with success—one should be selfish, greedy, egoistic, and exploitative—indeed, these are the foundations of capitalism. Some (not too much) psychopathy may help with success, too: being ruthless, bold, merciless, unfeeling, and remorseless surely help to win in competitive market. Yet, narcissism and psychopathy need to be accompanied by Machiavellianism, otherwise one is likely to be ostracized, imprisoned, or fail otherwise before becoming successful. Machiavellianism is pursuit of self interest but appearing merciful, faithful, humane, frank, and religious (Hawley 2006). All three members of so called “Dark Triad,” narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism correlate negatively with agreeableness (Paulhus and Williams 2002). Lack of agreeableness can be considered a correlate of aggressiveness—aggressive types tend not to be agreeable.

Being in aggressive class should result in success: actual dominance, power, usually wealth. Capitalists are clearly the most successful people in capitalism, but few others are successful to some degree as well, for instance, bishops, professors, generals, senators, etc. Many, if not most of them, reached the success thanks to aggressiveness. Note, neither hard work nor ability are necessarily part of the picture.

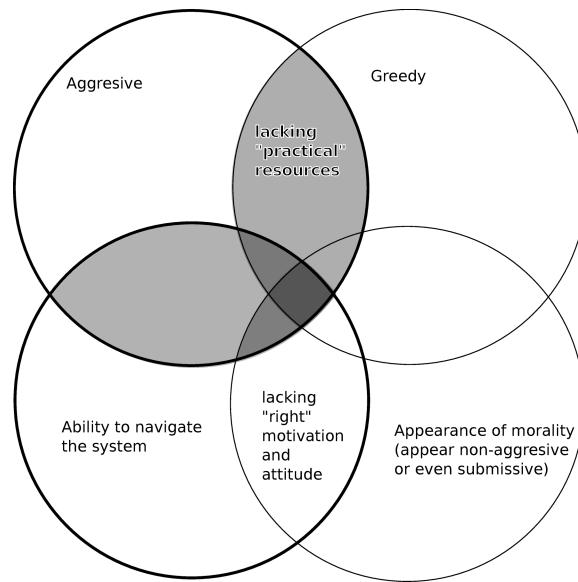


Figure 1: Aggressive class is denoted by gray area—it is sufficient to be aggressive and have one more quality to be classified as aggressive class. The more qualities, the closer one is to aggressive class ideal—and the darker the color in figure. Aggressive and Ability to navigate the system are two most important ingredients—their circles are in bold. Aggressive only is more like a villain or criminal; aggressiveness can be measured with SDO (Social Dominance Orientation) scale or testosterone, as discussed later. Greedy only is a materialistic person; greed is rather latent—it provides drive, energy, motivation, but doesn’t mean much without execution; greed can be measured with LOM (Love of Money) scale. Greed is important to channel aggressiveness properly in capitalism—it is important to be greedy to thrive in capitalism. Ability to navigate the system is close to EQ (Emotional Intelligence), ability to navigate emotions and interpersonal relations. But ability to navigate the system also importantly pertains to broadly understood institutions—being “street smart” and having knowledge of how “system works,” e.g., lawyers and politicians have such ability and knowledge. Ability to navigate the system is important to carry out aggressiveness. Appearance of morality is important for the long haul, to go undetected. Note: neither hard work nor ability are part of the picture—they are neither necessary nor sufficient for success—but they contribute to it, as do other ingredients for success, education, creativity, etc.

Aggressiveness could be defined in one sentence as “forceful, assertive, and monopolizing pursuit of one’s aims and interests without provocation and deference to others.” Dictionaries list many synonyms for aggressive; some supplement the above definition well: mercenary, confrontational, combative, pushy. Aggressiveness could be defined in terms of what it is not: respectfulness submissiveness, and notably altruism and its synonyms: compassion, kindness, goodwill, and decency.

Note that this definition differs from psychological textbook definition (e.g., Anderson and Bushman 2002, Stangor 2014) that requires there to be an intent to cause harm by perpetrator, and motivation to avoid harm by the target. The intent of perpetrator is trying to dominate and accumulate typically material resources; harm is typically not a direct goal; and, strikingly, targets are usually not only unaware of being targets, but they often believe they are fortunate to be submissive to the aggressor. For instance, being ignored by a capitalist and left unemployed is worse than being taken advantage of.

The other closely related term is greedy. In fact, it could be “greedy class” instead of “aggressive class.” Aggressiveness is close to greed. You need to be greedy to be successful but it is not enough. You need to be able to act on it. Aggressive people act on their greed to take advantage of others. It is greed or passion for money, wealth, and domination that when implemented through aggressive behavior, results in success. As a sidenote, “greedy” in “greedy capitalist” is redundant, it should be enough to say “capitalist”—there cannot be a capitalist who is not greedy. Such capitalist would soon be overcome by those who are. This is how capitalism works.

A related term is dominance or power, which can be defined as: freedom from subjugation, having impact on others, maintaining reputation and prestige, ability to access valued resources, influence others, affect social outcomes, ability to act without deference to others (Burgoon et al. 1998, Pratto et al. 2011). Dominant types are: forceful, monopolizing, assertive,

competitive, stubborn, bossy; and are not: deferential, cooperative, conflict avoiding, submissive, humble, obedient, easily led, docile, and accommodating.

I prefer “aggressive” over “dominant” or “powerful,” because the latter terms are more neutral, benign, and closer to status that denotes a rank or position in hierarchy, while “aggressive” reflects better assertive and forceful nature of behavior such as forcing others to do one’s will or using others to reach one’s goals. For the same reason, I prefer submissive over subordinate—submissive reflects better naive behavior. This aggressive behavior is also often premeditated and covert as discussed later. Typically, aggressive types are also powerful or dominant but not always so. Aggressiveness usually results or at least is done in order to achieve power and dominance especially with respect to preferential access to resources for capitalists or people aggressive economically, and to achieve rank or position in society for people aggressive in other domains (e.g., politics and academia). For discussion of dominance and power see Burgoon et al. (1998), Goodwin et al. (1998).

How specifically aggression is manifested? This is the key feature—it must not be manifested openly, otherwise aggressive class is at risk of reactive counter-aggression. It can take many forms, but it is usually non-physical, and even non-verbal, inter-group/class and interpersonal, and sometimes passive, i.e. passive-aggressive. Aggressiveness is a close state to that of mild mania that characterizes many successful types from Alexander Hamilton to Andrew Carnegie, from Clinton to Donald Trump (Edsall 2015):

He is flooded with ideas. He is driven, restless, and unable to keep still. He channels his energy into the achievement of wildly grand ambitions. He often works on little sleep. He feels brilliant, special, chosen, perhaps even destined to change the world. He can be euphoric. He becomes easily irritated by minor obstacles. He is a risk taker. He overspends in both his business and personal life. He acts out sexually. He sometimes acts impulsively, with poor judgment, in ways that can have painful consequences.

Likewise, aggressive children are not only successful individually, but also, which is somewhat counterintuitive, socially (Little et al. 2013).

3.3 Greed

“Life is a game. Money is how we keep score.” Ted Turner, attributed

Aggressiveness is related to, enhanced, or even entirely caused by greed or love of money. Per frustration-aggression hypothesis (Krahé 2013, pp 34-36), greed can be seen as source of frustration, which in turn causes aggression. Love of money itself would not result in success, one needs to carry it out. Love is a great motivator and can push people to extraordinary acts. For discussion see Liu and Tang (2011), Tang (2007), Lemrová et al. (2014). Alternatively, instead of greed, one could use achievement motivation (e.g., Argyle 1994), especially with respect to monetary reward or resource control.

3.4 The Ability to Navigate the System

Being aggressive in capitalism often means “ability to navigate the system.” Members of lower social classes are often either aggressive physically and verbally (crime, violence) or passive (disillusionment, alienation, anomie, giving up) (Banfield 1974). But they lack “proper” aggressiveness as defined here, specifically they lack a key dimension of aggressiveness, the ability to navigate the system. And this is arguably one important reason why they fail, why they are lower and not upper social class.

For instance, students from lower class, often minorities, struggle and often fail at the elite universities not because of lack of cognitive ability or hard work but because of lack of ability to navigate the system (Tough 2014). The opposite is true as well. Students from upper class succeed at elite universities not necessarily due to their cognitive ability, but due to their ability to navigate the system (Economist 2015b,a). In short, social classes are hereditary and so is aggressive class—it is often inherited within traditional upper classes. And submissiveness is inherited within lower social classes.

A closely related term to ability to navigate the system, but more politically correct is “emotional intelligence” and unsurprisingly there are books to help you master it (Goleman 2015, Bradberry and Greaves 2009, Goleman 2006). To paraphrase the acronym for emotional intelligence, EQ, one can devise “AQ”: aggressive quotient, or perhaps “GQ”: greediness quotient. The ability to navigate the system is not so much a technical skill, but rather emotional attitude, a strategy. It is marketing and manipulation not only in knowledge, but also in emotions: “Being able to manage emotions in someone else is the core of the art of handling relationships” (Goleman 2006, p. 112). How can managing emotions in someone’s else serve any good purpose? Even more puzzlingly, emotional intelligence has been related to character, morality, and acts of democracy (Goleman 2006). Even better than being aggressive is to be aggressive and feel good about it.

3.5 “Moral” or “Smart” Aggressiveness: Be Aggressive, But Pretend Otherwise

‘Keep your friends close, but enemies even closer’ Sun Tzu Art of War

“I have been told of a certain sea snake which has a very unusual method of attracting its prey. It will lie at the bottom of the ocean as if wounded. Then its enemies will approach, and yet it will lie quite still. And then its enemies will take little bites of it, and yet it remains still.” Falco (a character in Gladiator movie, <http://www.imdb.com/character/ch0002128/quotes>)

“If you’ve been playing poker for half an hour and you still don’t know who the patsy is, you’re the patsy.” Warren Buffett.

To clarify, worker is a patsy. Capitalists would like the patsy to have integrity so that she will not cheat the capitalist who is cheating her. Capitalists do not have much benefit from people like them, without integrity. The key for success in capitalism is to take advantage of others (or you will be taken advantage of) in such a way that people do not realize it. In short, one should not only be aggressive, but also covert. In other words, narcissism and psychopathy fail if one is not Machiavellian enough.

A “smart” aggressiveness is when you do not show it, but on the contrary, you pretend the opposite so that others are not aware of the fact that you are taking advantage of them, and they keep on working for you faithfully thinking they are getting a good deal. In other words, you want to take advantage of people in such a way that they do not realize it, or ideally they think that they are being served or helped by you. Such nonsense is perpetuated in many capitalistic proverbs, for instance, “a rising tide lifts all boats.”

Unfortunately for capitalists, this does not seem to work recently—70% of American workers are “not engaged” or “actively disengaged” at work (Harvey 2014), hence, some desperate attempts, e.g., to make people happy at work (Davies 2015).

Aggressive types pretend they have morality, and perhaps many actually think they do. A traditional way to secure morality badge is to be religious and go to church. Indeed, aggressive types tend to be religious (Altemeyer 2004) and religion has been used to control and oppress lower classes (Argyle 1994), and take over resources: “When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said ‘Let us pray.’ We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land” (Gish 2004, p. 101). Aggressive types may also demonstrate morality by giving to charity, setting up a

foundation, or simply advertising it as for instance in Chevron’s environmental commercials. This is aggressiveness at its best: the “smart” aggressiveness.

“Smart” aggressive types will not punch you in the face to take over your resources. Smart aggressiveness often involves smiling and other strategies that induce a positive feeling. Aggressive types would make you believe that working for them and letting them extract surplus from your labor, you are doing yourself a service and, indeed, it works very well. Not only people do not revolt, but they are actually grateful to have a job.

“Smart” aggressiveness looks like assertiveness: everyone feels comfortable and safe and if anything led or helped to achieve success, and actually thankful for such assertive behavior. “Smart” aggressiveness appears respectful, but it is not. One attempt at “smart” aggressiveness is so called passive aggressive attitude—try to get your way, but also try to have everyone like you. Passive aggressive is rather defensive and a sign of weakness—such person is neither in control, nor undetected. There are better ways to be “smart” aggressive. For instance, some of so called “compassionate conservatism” appears to work quite well (Brooks 2007). Another recent example is so called “conscious capitalism” (<http://www.consciouscapitalism.org>). All these “smart” strategies advertise that profit is not the only goal of a capitalist. But it is. Social responsibility of a business is to increase its profits, as rightly pointed out by a leader of capitalistic thought, Milton Friedman (1970).

“Smart” aggressiveness promotes submissiveness among workers in a smart way. In addition to working hard, and letting capitalists extract your value added, capitalists also want you to be altruistic and give away your money to be happy (Brooks 2008). Furthermore, capitalists advise to work with passion and focus (Bezos 2010, Jobs 2005, Walker 2014). So be passionate and focused on task at hand, work hard, be altruistic, and have integrity—this is the best characterization of a perfect prey for capitalists. It is best to quote such advice. Black Berry’s CEO advice to young workers and even mid-career managers is to “be as unselfish as possible” (Chen 2015). Brian Tracy, a motivational speaker, adds few more words of wisdom: “Successful people are always looking for opportunities to help others. Unsuccessful people are always asking, ”What’s in it for me?” (Angier et al. 2004, p. 43) Indeed, aggressiveness among workers at low level of authority is not beneficial to the organization (O’Boyle Jr et al. 2012), that is, to the capitalist.

3.6 Relationship to Other Theories

My Aggressive Class (AC) is close to Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) (Pratto et al. 1994, 2006). SDO is broader, while AC focuses on specific form of dominance: economic class conflict between capitalist and worker classes. AC explicitly takes Marxist perspective, while SDO integrates Marxism along with other perspectives. SDO is a social psychological theory, AC is more interdisciplinary. Like much psychological research related to aggression, SDO is about development and maintenance of dominance. AC is about the relationship between aggressiveness and success—this is probably the key difference.

AC follows SDO in important respects: group-based inequality is very much based on hierarchy legitimizing myths, not on brute force. The myths are elaborated in other sections, notably the myth of hard work. The paradox here is that the myth of hard work is told as a hierarchy-attenuating legitimizing myth (HA-LM), say, “work hard, and you’ll succeed” while it is actually a hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myth (HE-LM): the more one works, the more value is extracted from her, and unless she is aggressive enough (which is discouraged), she’ll never be a capitalist and reap benefits of her work. Hence, by working harder, one is actually widening the gap—the aggressive types are getting richer, while workers remain poor. Hierarchy-legitimizing myths are used to mask aggressiveness, dominance, or taking advantage. AC is also close to interpersonal dominance, and authoritarianism, but differs from them as it differs from SDO. SDO correlates weakly to modestly with Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) (Altemeyer 1998, Passini 2008). My aggressive class also has resemblance to RWA—many aggressive types are not only interested in

dominance (SDO), but they are also willing to value traditional rigid social hierarchy and willing to be subjugated to those higher in hierarchy—they want to both submit and dominate. For instance, aggressive managers are subjugated to owners/capitalists; small scale capitalists (petty bourgeoisie) are subjugated to large scale capitalists and so on. RWA (and system justification theory) even better help to explain subjugation of workers: many workers justify status quo, value tradition, respect authorities (and capitalists), and are aggressive towards those attempting a change (e.g., Marxists). SDO is aggressor’s authoritarianism; RWA is target’s authoritarianism. Aggressive class wants to dominate (SDO), and submissive class wants to follow and obey (RWA). Again, many aggressive types also submit to those above them. SDOs are often manipulators, and RWAs are the manipulated. There are many other relevant scales (relevant to what I mean by aggressiveness) and they tend to correlate more with SDO than RWA, that is, AC is closer to SDO than RWA—for instance economic conservatism correlated at .2 with RWA and .4 with SDO, exploitative manipulative amoral dishonesty scale correlated at .1 or -.2 with RWA and .5 or .6 with SDO—for overview see Altemeyer (1998). Some people are both SDO and RWA—such types believe in submission, as RWA do, but they want to be the ones submitted to (Altemeyer 2004). There is evidence that many aggressive types tend to be also “smart aggressive”—high SDOs and high RWAs or only high SDOs score high on Exploitative Manipulative Amoral Dishonesty scale (Altemeyer 2004).

Aggressive types are close to managers identified in McClelland motivation classification: especially those motivated by the need for power or the need to influence people (McClelland and Burnham 1995). My aggressive class has also some resemblance to Hawley’s classification (Hawley 2006, Little et al. 2013). Aggressive class is similar to “bistrategic controllers” (Machiavellian), who are not only aggressive, but aggressive in a smart way—they use mostly socially acceptable strategies to gain command of resources and ascend in social hierarchy as opposed to “coercive controllers” who are more characterized by pure aggressiveness. Bistrategic controllers, depending on situation, can be hawks or doves.

4 The Aggressive Class At Macro Scale

“There’s class warfare, all right, but it’s my class, the rich class, that’s making war, and we’re winning.” Warren Buffett

What Buffet noticed, goes almost unnoticed in the US—one of the exceptionalisms of the US is very low class consciousness (Lipset 1997, Lipset and Marks 2000). Americans are unconscious about capitalistic and working classes, and they are unconscious about aggressive and submissive classes (again, the two typologies largely overlap). Aggressiveness and submissiveness of individuals has far reaching consequences for the functioning of the society as a whole.

Social classes typology is not an archaism of industrial past when factory owner abused factory worker, and when Marx, Engels, Veblen and others took notes. The same relationship is alive today—it must be alive—it is a defining feature of capitalistic mode of production. Classless capitalism never existed and never will.

Term class is used here as in Florida’s creative class to denote a critical ingredient for success—I wholeheartedly agree with Florida that creativity is very important for success, but so is aggressiveness. As with Florida’s creative class (Florida 2008, 2002, 2004), it is not clear cut—there is some creativity and some aggressiveness in each of us.

The term class seems justified—there is a group of people that are aggressive, another group that is passionate, and other groups that are neither, say withdrawn/gave up/in nirvana, or hedonists/dionisist and some other groups, and there is of course always some overlap, but the categories appear distinct enough to use term “class.” Aggressive class is mostly capitalists (and their mercenaries), but not only and with important differences, and hence, I feel a new term/theory is justified. So how

aggressive class differ from capitalist class? Some capitalists are not aggressive—they could have inherited wealth, or just have been extremely talented, etc.

Aggressive class encompasses many if not vast majority of successful people in market and non-market domains. Many capitalists, politicians, professors, bishops and other powerful persons achieved success because they were aggressive enough, and they are able to retain their high status in hierarchy because they are aggressive enough. If you are not aggressive, you are likely to drop out of the upper class; if you are aggressive, you can make it to the top and stay there. Capitalism is rather about competition than collaboration, and so aggressiveness is clearly a desirable behavior in competitive environment, especially if it can be masked or ideally displayed as altruism or even submissiveness. Otherwise, by means of bad reputation, aggressive persons could be ostracized and lose competitive advantage.

In too many cases, aggressiveness defines success. It is hard to find a nice non-aggressive person who is successful at the same time. Aggressive types are successful in terms of income, wealth, and resources, but they do not produce much, rather they are able to dominate and manipulate more submissive types to produce and generate wealth, and they extract it—the process is depicted in figure 2. Such system is maintained through system justification and hierarchy legitimizing myths (inequality is due to differences in hard work, perseverance, education, talent, etc), and false or lack of class consciousness (everyone is free and has equal opportunity and almost everyone is in broad middle class and everyone can advance), and few other factors specific to the US (Lipset 1997, Lipset and Marks 2000).

Marx’s Capital is fundamentally a critique of the economic concepts that make social relations in a free-market economy seem natural and inevitable, in the same way that concepts like the great chain of being and the divine right of kings once made the social relations of feudalism seem natural and inevitable. (Menand 2020). In his 1845 The German Ideology, Marx wrote, “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.”

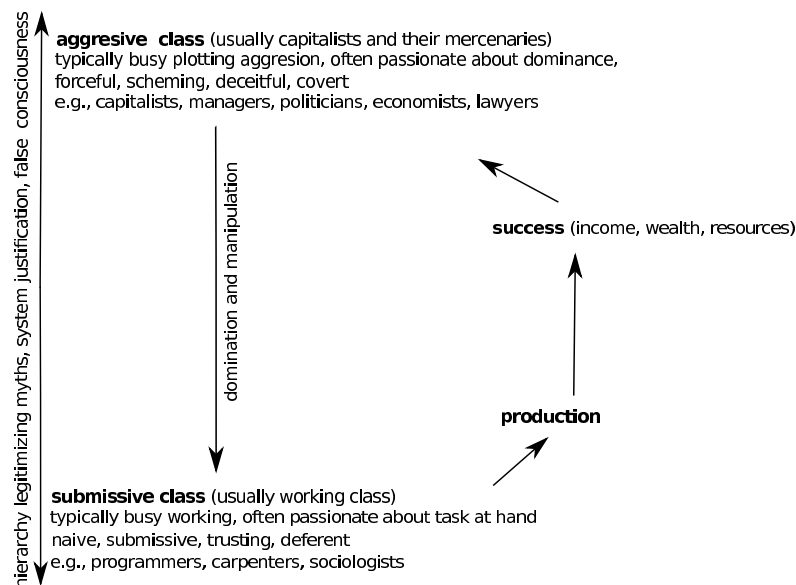


Figure 2: Hierarchy legitimizing myths (Pratto et al. 1994, 2006), system justification (Jost and Banaji 1994, Jost et al. 2004), false or lack of class consciousness (Marx [1867] 2010, Marx and Engels [1848] 2012), and perhaps right wing authoritarianism (Altemeyer 1998) enable exploitative status quo. Aggressive class uses submissive class to produce, and aggressive class enjoys fruits of labor and benefits of domination. Graph depicts simplified general patterns; there are, of course, much more complex relationships and exceptions: some success goes to submissive class; some production is done by aggressive class; some economists are submissive and some sociologists are aggressive, etc. Inclusion of academic disciplines as examples seems justified: most economists and lawyers work to support the aggressive class interests, while most sociologists work against it. Importantly, over the long run, plenty of success may diminish aggressiveness (due to satiation), and lack of success may increase aggression (due to relative deprivation and frustration).

In a capitalistic society, hard work (among workers, not capitalists) is a form of submissiveness: one is generating value through work, and this value is then being extracted by a capitalist—the foundational principle of capitalism is accumulation through dispossession (Harvey 2014), or in my terminology, it is a dominant-submissive relationship between classes. Often workers work really hard to the point of mental and physical health damage, not to mention damage to family and social relations. There is evidence that capitalism causes people to work more. Often it is repeated that advancing capitalism brought prosperity and less work, but such comparisons are made against early industrialization when work hours were long—it is forgotten that people actually worked less before industrialization than they do now (Schor 2008). People tend to overearn, that is, they work to earn more than they need (Hsee et al. 2013). Overearning is another term for mindless accumulation. Overwork has negative health consequences (Artazcoz et al. 2012). Many jobs are meaningless—the modern equivalent of assembly line job are administrative “pushing paper” jobs that are not really needed (Economist 2013).

Perhaps, aggressiveness has caused capitalism—as in many animals, there is much aggressiveness in humans, and hence creating capitalism can be in some ways “natural.”⁹ But regardless of that, the point is that capitalism causes people to be more aggressive, that is, people would not be that way if not capitalism (Fromm 1964, [1941] 1994, 1992). Perhaps, if capitalism did not develop, people would be more like Rousseau’s “noble savage.” Capitalism is all about competition—aggressiveness is the key for success in competition. Even if you happened not to be aggressive, it makes sense to become aggressive to have a better chance to win. While some aggressiveness is natural or adaptive for humans (Little et al. 2013), more than hundred-fold inequalities in income, wealth, and command of resources are not natural. Neither is vicious capitalistic competitiveness natural to our species. Hunter gatherers were quite egalitarian and cooperative (Argyle 1994, Bowles and Gintis 2011, Fromm 1992). They were almost like Rousseau’s “noble savages,” although inter-group conflict and violence were common (Little et al. 2013).

Of course, if too many people try to live off capital, not work, the capitalistic engine gets in trouble—bubbles are created and crises arise (e.g., Harvey 2014). Yet, even if one knows that that crisis is near, even if one causes the coming crisis, one needs to do what one has to do—take advantage of the system and make as much money as possible or other more aggressive types will: “As long as the music is playing, you’ve got to get up and dance” remarked CEO of Citigroup regarding Citi taking advantage of people (Dealbook 2007).

It could be counterargued that being aggressive is a good strategy in any system, not just capitalism. Arguably, to some degree, but it is especially good strategy in capitalism. Again, capitalism is built on competition and aggressiveness is critical in competition. Extreme inequality is an integral part of capitalism and when rewards and punishments are greater, aggression intensifies. Aggressiveness is necessary to survive if one is not gifted with other ingredients for success—aggressiveness can compensate for lack elsewhere. There are positive feedback loops. Arguably, aggression breeds aggression. If most people are aggressive, then it is more difficult not to be so. Successful aggressiveness leads to dominance and inequality, which in turn leads to more aggressiveness. The more inequality, the taller are the social ladders and the more power at the top. Power corrupts (Fiske 2010, Frank 2012) and more instrumental aggressiveness is likely to occur. More inequality also means more relative deprivation among those at the bottom, and hence more reactive aggressiveness is likely. In such society aggressiveness makes more sense, even violence does. Indeed, inequality has been linked to crime (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010, Argyle 1994).

Dominance and inequality are foundational in capitalism, despite that economists argue to the contrary (Galbraith and Crook 1958). David Harvey, the world’s most cited geographer and foremost expert on capitalism, explains (2014, p. 171):

⁹Greed is good in many ways as reviewed by Seuntjens et al. (2015): Greed has many positive economic consequences: greed and self-interest are principal motivators for a flourishing economy: greed motivates the creation of new products and the development of new industries. Some greed may be inherent to human nature—all humans are greedy to some extent. Greed may be an evolutionary adaptation promoting self-preservation. Those who are more predisposed to gain and hoard as much resources as possible may have an evolutionary advantage.

The inequality derives from the simple fact that capital is socially and historically constructed as a class in dominance over labor [...] Workers must be dispossessed of ownership and control over their own means of production if they are to be forced into wage labor in order to live.

People tend to believe that status=competence, i.e. world is just and meritocratic (Benabou and Tirole 2006). Yet, causality rather goes in the opposite direction: high status causes high perceived competence (Fiske 2010). Even clothing or accent signaling high status causes high perceived competence (Argyle 1994). Many people at the top of the hierarchy, notably capitalists, are often neither able nor hard working and often just aggressive. Yet, they enjoy higher quality of life and many other benefits (Pratto et al. 2011, Fiske 2010). Notably, they are healthier and live longer (Marmot 2005).

How exactly aggressive types influence submissive types? There are at least several channels: (a) coercion, (b) reward, (c) legitimacy, (d) expertise, (e) information, (f) referent (i.e. affiliation). There is coercion and reward: carrot is wealth and stick is poverty (Galbraith and Crook 1958). There is legitimacy myth: the most able and hard working are those with power (Parker 2012). Typically workers have more expertise and technical knowledge than capitalists. Capitalists and their mercenaries, on the other hand, are well informed, organized, affiliated, and they know how the system works.

4.1 Failed Class Struggle

“If you’re not a leftist or socialist before you’re 25, you have no heart; if you are one after 25 you have no head” (Apocryphal)

Capitalism is a system where the winners are the ones who are best able to take advantage of others. It is a class struggle between capitalists and their mercenaries on one side, and workers on the other side. Both classes should be aggressive—it is a struggle, conflict, or warfare after all. Yet, one reason why workers fail is because they are not aggressive enough—that is why they are workers in the first place. Capitalists and their mercenaries are clearly more aggressive or perhaps aggressive in some “better” way—they are able to take advantage of others and get away with it. Others yet need to become more aggressive so that they are not taken advantage of. Note, that no amount of hard work is going to help. If anything, it will actually make things worse, because it would allow capitalists to extract even more surplus and widen the gap. This is what happened over past few decades: working hours increased, productivity increased, and upper class income increased, but median wage stayed flat (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2011, Okulicz-Kozaryn and Mazelis 2016).

Aggressive class can be defined not only by act (how aggressive you are), but also by outcome (whether your aggressiveness/taking advantage of others worked, whether you are at the top of the hierarchy, whether you are rich). In other words, aggressiveness can be understood as willingness to overcome others, but also as ability and outcome. By that approach, simply, aggressive class is upper income class; percentwise you could say 1 percent v 99 percent, and astonishing reality is that in western democracy where everyone is supposed to be equally important, the 99 percent of population is losing, and almost nobody is doing anything serious about it. Caveat, of course, is that in many cases people became rich mostly due to some other ingredient for success, and sometimes perhaps without much aggressiveness at all. Yet, most people need substantial aggressiveness to be successful, and many became successful mostly due to aggressiveness.

Capitalism appears like a democracy—a quite bad system with many problems, but nobody has a better idea than this. No one (except few obscure academics and activists) questions the very need for capitalism. People disagree about details—taxation, transfers, etc—but the very notion of replacing capitalism with something else seems unthinkable. But it is time to discuss alternatives, for instance, libertarian socialism seems to have many good ideas.

As of now, at least in the US, and arguably in most other highly unequal countries, the majority is clearly taken advantage of by the minority, and people seem to think that nothing can be done beyond cosmetic social transfer adjustment. At the same time, the rule in democracy is not by few oligarchs, but by majority, and clearly something can be done if masses become conscious.

Capitalism is supposed to make people free (Hayek 2014). We are not free. Everyone except capitalists is a commodity on labor market, just like any other commodity trying to sell herself for some price (i.e. wage) (Esping-Andersen 1990, Scruggs and Allan 2006), and some succeed (notably capitalist's mercenaries), but many fail (unemployed, underemployed, below living wage). And again, success or failure is largely due to aggressiveness, not due to hard work or ability only. Many manage to remain in middle class, but they toil long hours, remain under high pressure, and do not enjoy their lives (Fischer et al. 1996, Coote 2010, Schor 2008, Cha 2013). Middle class is not free, only capitalists are. Non-capitalists could be free to some degree in theory—as predicted long time ago by Keynes ([1930] 1963): In 21st century we have enough money now for everyone to enjoy her life. But the money is owned by few who buy majority's labor.

It could be counterargued that capitalist faces (perhaps fiercer than ever) competition from other capitalists and he needs to sell on market, too. But as long as his portfolio is diversified, he does not risk much. Increasing share of capitalists are rentier capitalists as opposed to industrial capitalists (Harvey 2014), and their business has very low risk, virtually zero if properly diversified. Fundamentally, any risk for any capitalist is of his own choosing, he could just keep his millions in a bank or in government bonds and live from interest.

The most striking is that many poor in the US still support such system. Majority is oppressed by minority, be it 95 v 5 or 99 v 1 percent¹⁰ and those being taken advantage of are actually often indifferent or even happy about it. For instance, I have met a taxi driver who vehemently opposes “Obamacare” (Affordable Care Act), yet cannot afford health insurance. Even the poor do not want to change the system—almost nobody revolts against capitalism; people only want some cosmetic changes within capitalism.

One important fascist-like feature of capitalism is crowd control (Kunstler 2012), and this is also a key feature of aggressive-submissive relationship—we are controlled and manipulated by aggressive class. Capitalism has a unique ability to make people who are taken advantage of to support those who take advantage of them. Alas, the aggressive and submissive classes are born and maintained. Brutal competition makes you more aggressive and competitive against weaker ones and submissive to those above you, i.e., capitalists. You cannot become a capitalist right away—you need capital, and hence you are forced to work hard for a capitalist to save and accumulate capital and hope to become a capitalist one day, and if you are aggressive enough, you may be able to gradually take advantage of people and extract value added from their labor. More realistically, however, you will simply work hard for a capitalist for the rest of your life. It has to happen this way—if you do not have capital—you have to embrace the system—otherwise you won't survive. If you have the capital, why would you act against the system? You may be leftist, humanistic, and Marxist in your youth, but at some point you are forced to turn pro-capitalistic. If you don't, you will become homeless, poor, or at best an academic or an artist, but almost certainly you will not be successful (wealthy), and hence your opinion will not matter much. Those who embrace capitalism, are likely to succeed, and hence their opinion matters and it perpetuates status quo. “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas” (Marx 1845). Such design ensures capitalism survival, and it works very well indeed.

Not only rationality, but also ideology perpetuates capitalism. Economics is to be blamed—it claimed that *laissez faire*

¹⁰The higher the ratio, the greater the exploitation, that is, top 10 percent takes less advantage or extracts less surplus per capita from bottom 90 percent than 1 v 99, or .01 v 99.99 and so on.

neoliberal free market capitalism is fairest for everyone—and masses believed in this. Ironically, masses supporting capitalism are irrational and acting against their own interest—but they do so following classical economic theory preaching that everyone is rational and self-interested. We know that people are not very rational and they often act against their own interest (Akerlof and Shiller 2010, Ariely 2009, Shiller 2015). Aggressive class is more rational and self-interested than others. As discussed above, non-capitalists are not free in capitalism, they are commodities in the market and they work too much and worry too much to enjoy life (Okulicz-Kozaryn et al. 2014). Ironically again, we have capitalism in the first place in order to be free—we justify the very existence of capitalism with freedom (Hayek 2014, Friedman 2009, Glaeser 2011b). Free market provides incentives to embrace capitalism and submit oneself to a capitalist, and economics provides “science” to justify such a system. There is also a biological or specifically hormonal mechanism supporting status quo or preventing submissive class from overthrowing the aggressive class (Wood and Eagly 2012).

4.2 Aggressive Class and Social Class Typology

Among animals, aggression is mostly directed towards those next in rank. Humans are not exception. Most aggressiveness is from top to bottom: capitalists→their mercenaries→workers. This is instrumental aggression (proactive, offensive, controlled, “cold-blooded,” etc). Such aggressiveness is portrayed as fair and desirable using terms like “leadership.” There is some reactive aggressiveness (defensive, “hot-blooded,” etc) from bottom to top in riots, strikes, protests, etc, and such aggressiveness is frowned upon. Bottom-up aggressiveness rarely aims to challenge capitalism in general; its aims are modest, for instance, raising wages.

Many aggressive types do not own much capital, neither they work for wages,¹¹ hence, they neither belong to capitalist nor working class. They are either self employed or they live off taking advantage of others (like capitalists and their mercenaries) but they do not own capital and simply consume their earnings like workers. They do not work directly for capitalists as mercenaries, but they are typically supportive of and submissive to capitalists. If they are self employed, their aggressiveness is directed towards their clients, business partners, and competition. Some of the middle class can be classified here: freelancers, entrepreneurs, owners of very small businesses. An old term “petty bourgeoisie” can be used to classify these people. For discussion of petty bourgeoisie in contemporary times see Steinmetz and Wright (1989). Aggressiveness-submissiveness relationship for each class, capitalists, workers, and petty bourgeoisie is summarized in table 2.

Table 2: Aggressiveness among contemporary Marxists classes as defined by Wright and Perrone (1977), who made a good case for adding managers (or mercenaries as labeled here) as a class. As anything, this is an oversimplification, for instance, some workers are aggressive and they may become capitalists one day; and some capitalists may be submissive (say they inherited wealth) and they may fall to working class. Likewise, there is much diversity within and overlap across classes, and there are other similar typologies—for discussion see Argyle (1994), Wright and Perrone (1977).

class	aggressiveness-submissiveness
capitalists	aggressive towards everyone, including other capitalists and submissive to none
mercenaries (leaders/managers)	submissive to capitalists (and higher-level managers) and aggressive towards workers (and lower level managers)
petty bourgeoisie	submissive to capitalists; aggressive towards workers (if any)
workers	submissive to everyone

¹¹Again, working class is understood here as comprising of people working for wages, paid for doing something else than extracting value added.

4.3 The Link Between Aggressiveness and Success: Empirical Evidence

This is a theory article and it does not test the aggressive class theory. There is, however, related evidence that is cited in this section. It is important to present evidence because the aggressive class theory may seem controversial and skeptics may try to dismiss the theory as simply false. Again, the core of the theory is that aggressiveness results in success in capitalism.

Many animals including humans are quite aggressive, and hence, such behavior must have had an useful function (Neuberg et al. 2010). For instance, among birds, aggressive males obtain larger territories (Watson and Miller 1971). When successful, aggressiveness results in dominance, and dominant animals obtain many benefits: more food, more sex, best nesting sites, reduced stress, and grooming from subordinates (Argyle 1994). Dominant (but mostly non-violent) humans are also more successful.

Judge et al. (2012) finds that agreeableness is negatively related to earnings (aggressive types are not agreeable). Greater aggressiveness of men is linked to their greater economic success (Gilder 2012).¹² Even aggressive posture may result in dominance (Cuddy 2012). Greedy teenagers, ones who think it is very important to be well-off financially, become successful (wealthy) adults (Kahneman 2011). One way to measure aggressiveness is to measure testosterone, or simply use facial width to height ratio (fWHR) as a proxy (e.g., Valentine et al. 2014, Mills 2014). And indeed more aggressive men are more successful financially (Valentine et al. 2014). Testosterone improves cognitive performance of high status persons (Newman et al. 2005). Managers in the need of power are “best” managers—one gets things done by influencing others (McClelland and Burnham 1995). One study even finds that whole companies led by more aggressive CEOs (with more testosterone) are more aggressive (Mills 2014). Low testosterone was found to be associated with low income (Hall et al. 2008). Females, who obviously are both less aggressive and have less testosterone (Wood and Eagly 2012), are less successful—they are paid less and are discriminated against (e.g., Artz et al. 2016, Glick 2013, Fiske et al. 2002, Wood et al. 1993, MIT 1999, Hegewisch et al. 2012, Corbett and Hill 2012).

It was argued here that lack of aggressiveness makes success less likely, and hence people of low social class are expected to be less aggressive, and people of higher status are expected to be more aggressive. Simply, people who are successful in capitalism would not reach the top if they were nice. Indeed, people of low social class are more generous, charitable, trusting, and helpful; and the successful, on the other hand, are less likely to exhibit empathy, respect norms and even laws, and more likely to cheat (Piff et al. 2010, Krugman 2016). And again, success breeds aggressiveness and failure breeds submission (Wood and Eagly 2012). Higher social class individuals are more aggressive: they are more likely to break the law while driving, more likely to exhibit unethical decision-making tendencies, take valued goods from others, lie in a negotiation, cheat to increase their chances of winning a prize, and endorse unethical behavior at work (Piff et al. 2012), and they are more narcissistic, too (Piff 2014). There are examples of narcissistic upper level managers, notably Jeffrey Skilling, former CEO of Enron (Galvin et al. 2015). These aggressive and narcissistic persons form a class that can be subsumed under term “oligarchy” or, as Paul Krugman put it, “narcistocracy” (Krugman 2016). And there is a book “Snakes in suits: When psychopaths go to work” (Babiak et al. 2006).

There is evidence concerning capitalist’s mercenaries. Aggressive types (high on SDO) are more likely to have jobs protecting privileged groups and more likely to be selected in hierarchy-enhancing jobs; and people low on SDO are likely to be selected into hierarchy-attenuating jobs and jobs serving the oppressed (Pratto et al. 1997).

Yet, contrary to aggressive class theory, SDO was found to be unrelated to income (Altemeyer 1998). One reason is arguably that subjects were psychology undergraduates. Another reason is that pure aggressiveness is not enough in most cases for success. Again, see Venn diagram in figure 1—aggressiveness only is usually not enough.

¹²Hardy and Van Vugt (2006) finds the opposite—that nice guys finish first, but the study’s limitation is its experimental design—people are likely to behave differently in the real world, and this study has very little external validity. For discussion of experiments’ limitations see Pawson and Tilley (1997).

Also, persons who are only aggressive and lack other important ingredients to be considered in aggressive class (Venn diagram in figure 1) arguably tend to lack other ingredients for success—education, hard work, etc— and hence the positive effect of aggressiveness on successes is offset by negative effect from lack of other ingredients. Smart aggressive (Machiavellian) people, on the other hand, were found to be more successful arguably due to their social skills or EQ (Czibor and Bereczkei 2012, Bereczkei and Birkas 2014). Altemeyer (2004) speculates that high SDOs and both high SDOs and RWAs are likely to become leaders. Machiavellianism may lead to success in politics (McCormick 2011). In recent reviews, Furnham et al. (2013), O’Boyle Jr et al. (2012) argue that the Dark Triad (Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy) alone is likely to lead to failure in the long run. As argued earlier, aggressiveness is only one of the ingredients for success, and especially in the long run, other ingredients may be necessary.

SDO correlated moderately to highly ($r > .4$) with “smart aggressiveness” or Machiavellianism. Smart aggressiveness can be measured with items such as “One of the most useful skills a person should develop is how to look someone straight in the eye and lie convincingly, “Basically, people are objects to be quietly and coolly manipulated for your own benefit” (Altemeyer 1998). High SDO and high RWA or only high SDO score high on Exploitative Manipulative Amoral Dishonesty scale (Altemeyer 2004).

At country-level, successful (rich) West is often seen as aggressive and dominating unsuccessful (poor) Third World (Loomba 2015, Kapoor 2014), or in general, more powerful countries dominate less powerful ones (e.g., Stiglitz 2002). Freedom and liberty are often used as an excuse for imperialism and neocolonial domination (Harvey 2014). As argued earlier, hard work and ability/education are used as an excuse for inequality; and freedom is also used to motivate capitalism in general. Not only many aggressive individuals are narcissistic, but also countries are—the US is perceived as exceptionally and problematically narcissistic (Miller et al. 2015). The US is able to dominate other countries through being (or threatening to be) aggressive and violent (e.g., Pratto et al. 2011). Indeed, the US is considered the leading terrorist organization in the World (Chomsky 2015). In general, Marxists have long argued that capitalism causes warfare (Geier 1999). Not only capitalism is likely to cause aggression between countries, but also aggression among persons, and such aggression actually is usually non-violent, as argued here. Violent aggressiveness, i.e. crime, is also likely to be promoted by spread of capitalism, especially among the poor who want to be part of consumer society and for whom crime is often the best opportunity (Hall et al. 2013). Still, criminals typically fail to achieve success (Levitt and Dubner 2010); it is better to channel one’s aggressiveness in a nonviolent way, i.e. to become a member of aggressive class.

Probably the most direct evidence comes from Altemeyer (1998), who found in several different studies that capitalists as measured by “capitalist social perspective,” a capitalist theory of how society should operate, scored higher than any other group on SDO and Ethnocentrism scales. This suggests that those at the top of economic hierarchy are the aggressive types. Much direct evidence was added by Little et al. (2013), who focused on children and adolescents. Their book is dedicated to debunking idea of aggressiveness as negative behavior only, and it cites multiple works arguing that aggression may lead to status improvement, resource control, and multiple other “successful” personal and social outcomes.

Americans think that rich are much more greedy and less honest, but also more hard working and intelligent (Parker 2012). There are also anecdotal observations among businessman, practitioners, and other nonacademics that aggressiveness leads to success (e.g., Fishman 1988, Stanton 2015). Popular culture also shows aggressive types as successful ones in movies: “The Social Network,” “Wall Street,” “The Wolf of Wall Street,” “Back to the Future,” and many others. Presidential candidates, who obviously are already successful, are aggressive, too. Not only Donald Trump and Ted Cruz are aggressive, females are aggressive, too: Hilary Clinton and Carly Fiorina.

Support for aggressiveness-capitalism nexus can also be advanced using cities. The hallmarks of capitalism, industrialization

and commercialization are closely linked with urbanization (e.g., O’Sullivan 2009, Glaeser 2011a). It is in the city where capitalism is most full-blown and felt most (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2015a), and greatest cities are clearly the most competitive and aggressive places—think of New York City, Chicago, London, Shanghai, etc. It is no wonder that aggressiveness and city are closely linked as remarked in a classic observation of city life (Burgess 1926, p. 82):

If a metropolite would ”get ahead” he usually must become ”aggressive,” but aggressiveness on the part of one person or of a group is often an invasion of the status of other persons or groups. Hence social-distance reactions are kept in turmoil.

Capitalism works best at high density (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2015a) when agglomeration economies are possible, but high density also increases aggressiveness in many forms, including violence and crime (Bettencourt et al. 2010, Bettencourt and West 2010, Bettencourt et al. 2007). Also, people toil longer hours in cities (Rosenthal and Strange 2008, 2003, 2002). Other animals suffer in high densities, too. Rats, for instance, become more stressed, aggressive, and kill each other (Calhoun 1962).

5 Conclusion

5.1 What can be done? Policymaking?

“The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who in a period of moral crisis maintain their neutrality” Dante (Apocryphal)

Aside from speculation about the long run, there is an easy fix in the short run. We should simply tax aggressiveness. It is a vice after all, and we tax other vices—smoking, drinking, etc. . Before we can measure aggressiveness reliably and inexpensively for everyone, we can simply tax capitalists and their mercenaries, that is, the rich. This is quite imprecise and crude, to be sure, but it is easy, does not cost anything (everyone already fills in a tax return), and most importantly, there are other good reasons to tax the rich more. As argued here, vast majority of successful people (notably capitalists and their mercenaries) do not deserve to be successful—some or even all of their success is not due to hard work but due to aggressiveness. Other random factors (beyond one’s control) such as luck and talents play a role, too. For elaboration see Frank (2012).

As a first step in the right direction, I would follow Piketty’s idea to tax incomes of rich people at 80% (Piketty 2014, Piketty and Saez 2003, Piketty 1995, Piketty and Saez 2006, Diamond and Saez 2011, Piketty et al. 2011).

5.2 Conclusion

Everyday we are experiencing a tyranny by aggressive class—they take advantage of us to achieve their goals, they extract value added from our work, they are remunerated for their dominance, and we continue to be submissive to receive a share of their wealth produced by us.

The very psychological structure of the system, the aggressive-submissive hierarchy perpetuates capitalistic system. The most successful and powerful ones are likely to be aggressive, as argued here, this is one of the reasons why they are successful in the first place. And the unsuccessful ones are not aggressive enough, again, this is one of the reasons why they are unsuccessful. Aggressiveness is required to change the system, but those who are aggressive have no interest in changing the system, but on the contrary, they have interest in increasing exploitation and inequality. This untamed greed, however, is leading to unmasking of the aggressive-submissive relationship. The aggressive class is, to paraphrase Marx ([1848] 2012), its own grave-digger.

On the other hand, there appears to be an equilibrium—aggressive class is only abusing and exploiting others as much as possible, but not more. It fears retaliation. Hence, many developments happened against aggressive class interests, for instance, New Deal, Great Society, and more recently, Walmart and McDonald’s raising wages. These developments might have prevented social unrest that could have endangered aggressive class existence.

The goal of this paper is to define aggressive class, show aggressiveness being key ingredient for success in capitalism, and hence, argue for action to break the link between aggressiveness and success. An obvious solution (that will also solve many other problems) is to replace capitalism with something else, say socialism and humanism (Maslow 2013, Harvey 2014), but further development of this line of thought is beyond the scope of this paper, and a more modest and narrow conclusion is offered instead.

We should stop overemphasizing hard work as key ingredient for success. At best, it is inaccurate. At worst, it is simply taking advantage of people, akin to slavery,¹³ making them work hard and then reaping the benefits of their work. Notably, academics and governments should stop overemphasizing hard work, because it is our job to protect the people—they pay us for that in taxes. Rules of the game are not clear, and worse, what is promoted (submissive hard work) is opposite to what leads to success: aggressive and covert taking advantage of others without doing much work. Aggressiveness is built into capitalism—capitalism is built on a premise of ruthless competition, and aggressiveness is a key skill when it comes to ruthless competition.

The thesis of this paper is that aggressiveness is key for success in capitalism and that aggressiveness is often mislabeled, and worse, it is often argued, that the opposite of aggressiveness, submissiveness, is necessary for success. But it is important to keep in mind that not only aggressiveness is key for success in capitalism but also that capitalism fosters aggressiveness—I do not intend to develop this line of thought further here—it was already developed by Erich Fromm (1964, [1941] 1994, 1992)—for a brief overview see Swanson (1975).

The fundamental problem with aggressive class is that it is remunerated for aggressiveness and not for hard work or ability or other virtue. Remuneration (money or exchange value) should reflect labor, or perhaps some other virtue such as ability or creativity, but not a vice, aggressiveness.

Given great injustice in the aggressive-submissive relationship, it is important to note the powerful forces working to support the status quo. First, there is lack of class consciousness or false consciousness (Marx and Engels [1848] 2012, Marx [1867] 2010) preventing the submissive class from realizing that they are being taken advantage of. Most people in the US believe that they belong to the middle class and they strongly believe that their hard work will result in success (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2011), and hence, even if poor and disadvantaged, they think that they will make it one day. Paradoxically, it is often the most disadvantaged ones that justify the system most (Jost and Banaji 1994, Jost et al. 2004).

For aggressive class, world is dangerous (Perry et al. 2013), but also aggressive class is dangerous for the world. It is likely that if they lead, there will be racism, sexism, and other prejudice, possibly unemployment, and even war and famine (Altemeyer 2003, 2004). Not only society, but also nature is likely to be more exploited in unsustainable way if aggressive types lead (Milfont et al. 2013, Klein 2014). Fundamentally, capitalists (the aggressive class) cause resource depletion, pollution, and climate change (Harvey 2014, Klein 2014).

Importantly, note that this article refrains from moral judgments.¹⁴ Aggressive class is simply condemned on the grounds that there is a logical inconsistency. The advertised logic of capitalism is that talents and hard work results in success. But aggressive

¹³Indeed, there is a concept of wage slavery; Marx himself makes a distinction between wage-labor and slave-labor ([1867] 2010). See also Goldman et al. (2003), Stefan (2010). Wage slaves are “hired slaves instead of block slaves. You have to dread the idea of being unemployed and of being compelled to support your masters” (p. 283 Goldman et al. 2003).

¹⁴Some may consider terms such as “greed, selfish, narcissistic” to be moral condemnations, but I use them in descriptive or positive as opposed to moralistic or normative sense.

class is largely remunerated neither for work, nor for talents, while the popular wisdom is the opposite: success in capitalism is a result of hard work and talents. Paradoxically, as elaborated earlier, morality is used to cover-up aggressiveness—most successful types appear moral yet act aggressively, and propagate and instill moral behavior in others so that others are more easily taken advantage of. Another paradox is economists’ use of freedom to justify capitalism: economists claim that people are free in aggressive-submissive relationship.

Aggressiveness and capitalism in many ways contradict broadly understood human progress and development. To use Harvey’s (2014) terminology, this is yet another contradiction of capitalism: Capitalism needs aggressiveness to develop further, but such development contradicts human development. Perhaps, aggressiveness and capitalism get us closer to our animistic nature and instincts, but they get us farther away from human development as defined by Maslow or Fromm (Maslow 2013, Fromm 1992, 1964, [1941] 1994). In other words, while aggressiveness is socially competent and successful, as argued here, it is not socially desirable. Because it is not socially desirable, it has been commonly argued that aggression is maladaptive and must be avoided. Recently, Little et al. (2013) made a case that aggression among children and adolescents is often socially competent and successful. This article extends this argument to political economy of class relations. In capitalism, it is incompetent to lack a considerable amount of aggressiveness.

We frown upon most forms of aggressiveness in general, and only allow it in some regulated form usually as a sport or some other form of entertainment. Notably physical aggressiveness on the streets is forbidden, but it is allowed as a sport, say boxing. Same with aggressive car driving: car racing on public streets is forbidden but we allow it as a sport. Yet, we still maintain that socioeconomic aggressiveness by capitalists and their mercenaries is somehow beneficial for everyone and everywhere. Arguably, one reason we still believe it is because human brain is hardwired to accept authority (Milgram and Van den Haag 1978). Another explanation for persistence and support by victims of aggressive-submissive relationship is perhaps victim-perpetrator attachment or so called “Stockholm Syndrome,” where victims support perpetrators (Van der Kolk and McFarlane 2012, Graham et al. 1988, Van der Kolk 1989). Just like physical violence and car racing, socio-economic aggression should be left for games. Monopoly board game is one already existing example.

Life would be better without aggressive class. Imagine a world when everyone or vast majority is aggressive—very little resources would be available because most energy would be devoted to plotting, scheming, and attempting to overcome others.¹⁵ It would be also a very brutal and barbarian world. A world without aggressive class, on the other hand, would be full of resources, because energy would be focused on production and enjoyment, not aggression. It would be also a welcoming and friendly world, where people can retain benefits of their work as opposed to being them taken away by aggressive class. It would be free-play spontaneous world envisioned by the Frankfurt school (Marcuse 2015, 2013, Fromm 1992, 2012, 1964, 1962, 1944, [1941] 1994).

¹⁵These are of course hypothetical examples meant for illustrative purpose. And there would be little resources if everyone or vast majority of people were in aggressive class. So far capitalism has actually produced great deal of resources (albeit highly unequally owned), but only a small fraction of the society was an aggressive class, and as argued here, the resources were mostly produced by non-aggressive class.

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6 SOM: Supplementary Online Material

7 Misc quotes

“Marxism taught me what society was. I was like a blindfolded man in a forest, who doesn’t even know where north or south is. If you don’t eventually come to truly understand the history of the class struggle, or at least have a clear idea that society is divided between the rich and the poor, and that some people subjugate and exploit other people, you’re lost in a forest, not knowing anything.” Fidel Castro on discovering Marxism, 2009

“Why should people who are successful in this society be burdened by people who aren’t? It’s just a fact of life. Some people will succeed, and some people won’t. And it’s just the way it’s going to be and has always been.” A high school student (Leibovich 2007)