



**THE MARKET SOCIETY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUFFERING:
 A FANONIAN APPROACH**

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Abstract This article focuses on the market society as a source of psychological suffering for some people who seek the aid of therapists. I consider the maladies of the market society in terms of internalization and weak dissociation, both of which contribute to misinterpretation and misattribution of suffering, which, in turn, skews individuals' agency. The underlying premise of this article and, more particularly, the work of psychoanalytic therapy with these patients comes from Franz Fanon's view that the aims of psychotherapy are (a) "to 'consciousnessize' [the patient's] unconscious, to no longer be tempted by a hallucinatory lactification," and (b) "to enable [the patient] to choose an action with respect to the *real source of the conflict*, i.e., the social structure." An aim of psychoanalytic therapy, then, is to facilitate recognition of a person's sources of suffering so that s/he can decide how to respond.

Key Words: Capitalism, Weak Dissociation, Internalization, Market Society, Psychoanalytic Therapy, Suffering

As I have indicated before, modern man experiences himself as a *thing*, as an embodiment of energies to be invested profitably on the market ... If it (psychoanalysis) remains enmeshed in the socially patterned defect of alienation, it may remedy this or that defect, but it will only become another tool for making man more automatized and more adjusted to an alienated society. (Fromm, 1963, pp.199-200)

Frantz Fanon, a psychoanalyst born in Martinique, observed the psychological toll French colonization had on Algerians (and others), many of whom were forced to live beyond their psychological means. Fanon (1963) recalls an encounter with a 14-year-old Algerian boy who murdered a French teenager – ostensibly a friend. When Fanon asked why he murdered his friend, the Algerian boy shot back, "Why are there only Algerians in prison?" (p. 200). The young man was referring to the recent massacre of people in the village of Rivet by the French militia. Two of his family members had been brutally murdered. He asks again if any Frenchmen have been held accountable. Fanon answered no. Situations like that and his own experience as a

French colonial subject led Fanon to reframe psychoanalytic therapy. The aims of psychotherapy, Fanon (2008/1952) argued, are (a) “to ‘*consciousnessize*’ [the patient’s] unconscious, to no longer be tempted by a hallucinatory lactification,” and (b) “to enable [the patient] to choose an action with respect to the *real source of the conflict*, i.e., the social structure” (p. 80; emphasis mine). Interestingly, around the same time and on another continent, Ralph Ellison (1995/1953), commenting about the psychiatric clinic in Harlem, wrote “As such, and in spite of the very fine work it is doing, a thousand Lafargue (psychiatric) clinics could not dispel the sense of unreality that haunts Harlem. Knowing this, Dr. Wertham and his interracial staff seek a modest achievement: to give each bewildered patient an insight into the relation between his problems and his environment, and out of this understanding to reforge the will” (p.302). The reforging of the will is aimed, like Fanon, toward action in relation to the real source of psychological sufferings.

Psychological maladies that emerge in relation to systemic political and economic realities are not limited to colonialism and racism. Over the years, I have had a chance to work in clinics in the United States that helped low-income and poor persons. Many of these individuals are anxious, depressed, and weary. To use Agamben’s (1998) term, “bare-life”, these patients, deprived of resources and social recognition, struggle to care for their children, parents, and themselves. While some of these adults suffer as a result of impingements and deprivations stemming from their childhood, many others had good enough parents, suggesting that the sources of their suffering lie elsewhere. In this article, I consider the psychological suffering that arises from living in a market society – a society dominated or perhaps we could say colonized by a neoliberal capitalist ethos. While there are undoubtedly different types of psychological suffering resulting from a market society,¹ my focus is on understanding and responding to the anxiety, depression, and helplessness of people of the lower classes – individuals, families, and communities caught in the grip of the relentless cogs of a market society. I begin by briefly defining what is meant by a market society and how it negatively impacts the psychological well-being of many people on the lower rungs of society. From here I argue, using the psychoanalytic concepts of internalization and weak dissociation, that the disciplinary and justificatory regimes of the market society establish a hermeneutical framework that leads individuals to misinterpret and misattribute the sources of their suffering, which results in the skewing of agency in that their actions are not directed toward the real sources of their suffering.

Market society and its discontents

Sociologist Max Weber (1992) sought to understand the rise of capitalistic culture in the West, noting that this rise was accompanied by rationalization, bureaucratic organizations, and disenchantment. Weber presaged the hegemony of capitalism as the dominant symbolic ordering of society in the West. As Michael Sandel (2012) writes the “most fateful change that unfolded during the last three decades was not an increase in greed. It was the expansion of markets, and of market values, into spheres of life where they don’t belong” (p.7). He comments further that “The reach of markets, and market-oriented thinking, into aspects of life traditionally governed by nonmarket norms is one of the most significant developments of our time” (p.7). But what do we mean when we use the term market society?² In general, a market society refers to routine social interactions in a society that are, by and large, structured around and by principles and values of economic exchange. In other words, instead of the economy being a subordinate element in the ordering society, it becomes the dominant element that shapes relations and behaviors in public, political, and private spheres – not simply the economic sphere. Sandel (2012) offers numerous examples to support his claim. Concierge doctors, paying kids for good grades, bribes to lose weight, marketing bodies (tattoo advertisements) and body parts, hiring friends, death bonds, commercials in classrooms and jails are just some examples of a market society wherein people, relationships, and things are commodified.

Admittedly, the very notion of a market society is vague, though we can get a clearer picture by identifying and depicting its particular ethos, namely the ethos of neoliberal capitalism. This ethos shapes the perceptions, interpretations, rationality, and behavior of citizens. It is an ethos that colonizes the psyches of many citizens. While neoliberal capitalism is a contested term, I nevertheless identify eleven central tenets or features, namely: (1) human well-being, which is understood and evaluated almost exclusively in economic terms, is best achieved by providing entrepreneurial *freedoms* so that individual actors (includes corporations) can act out of their “rational” self-interests to secure their well-being (understood mainly in terms of material wealth) (Brown, 1995, pp.10-15), (2) social goods are maximized by expanding the reach and frequency of market transactions (Rieger, 2009, p.15), (3) few limits exist with regard to commodifying objects, ideas, and individuals (Sandel, 2012), (4) the state is

not to intervene to control markets or restrict the reach of commodification (Harvey, 2005), (5) the state functions to ensure private property rights and to deregulate so that there can be “free markets” and free trade can flourish in society’s public and private spaces (Lemm & Vatter, 2014, pp.174-175), (6) where markets do not exist, entrepreneurs and the state work together to privatize and deregulate (e.g., privatization of public education, prisons, healthcare, military etc.) (Mander, 2012; Reich, 2007; Stiglitz, 2015), (7) corporations inform the state and its officials as to the laws that will enhance profit and market expansion, (8) greed, it is believed, benefits individuals and the larger society (Duménil & Lévy, 2011; Couldry, 2010), (9) “market freedoms are natural and political restraints on markets are artificial” (Gray, 1998, p.17), (10) a market society depends on individual citizens being entrepreneurs – *homo oeconomicus* (Vatter, 2014, p.164), (11) individuals “are expected to cope with social risks and insecurities, to measure and calculate them, taking precautions for themselves and their families” (Lemke, 2014, p.65).

From this list, I want to highlight features that are factors in the psychological distress of some citizens in a market society. First, a market society forces “the subject to become a responsible self-investor and self-provider” (Brown, 2015, p.84). Responsibility, of course, presupposes the capacity for agency; agency in a market society is aimed at becoming successful (or surviving) in accordance with market rules and expectations. Agency, in other words, means taking actions toward living out market values and ideals. Both agency and responsibility in a market society are reduced to the individual alone. That is, the entrepreneurial self acts out of and for his/her own interests and is, therefore, not responsible to or for others, except to the degree others aid one in achieving financial success.

To achieve success the entrepreneurial self must be willing to follow the flow of capital (Eagleton, 2011, p.118), which means that relationships and stability of place are secondary. As Silva (2013) notes, “the only way to survive in such a competitive and bewildering labor market is to become highly elastic and unencumbered by other obligations—including their own families” (p.31). Indeed, both relationships and stability of place can serve as or be seen as obstacles to achieving financial success (or even survival). This means the entrepreneurial self, responsive to the market and responsible for his/her success, is a “hypermobile, entrepreneurial neoliberal subject who must assume the burden of risk that the state no longer shoulders” (Chari, 2015, p.9). This kind of responsibility and agency of a hyper-mobile self is aided by instrumental, calculative reason that leads to what Lukács (1968) called reification – the

objectification of human beings and relationships. The entrepreneurial self uses instrumental reasoning to determine self-interests and assess his/her self vis-à-vis market success/failure, as well as, critically assess whether one's relation to others serve as obstacles or aids in his/her success.

Self-responsible, instrumentally reasoning, and adaptable to the flow of capital are features of a market self. Do these attributes contribute to psychological suffering or distress of citizens? Those individuals who see themselves as entrepreneurs and find their entrepreneurial self positively affirmed and supported in a market society are not likely to experience distress or too much distress. The Warren Buffets and Bill Gates of the world seem to be doing quite well financially and psychologically.³ Individuals, who are not able to (or refuse) live out of the market ideals and unable to follow the flow of capital on their way to financial security, are more likely to experience psychological distress. Citing studies from Jean Twenge, a psychologist, and others, Jerry Mander (2012) notes that levels of anxiety (and depression) are at very high rates when compared to studies from 40-50 years ago (p.234; see also Marris, 1996) – rates that correspond to the rise of neoliberal capitalism as a societal hegemon. Similarly, Ann Cvetkovich (2012) points to higher rates of depression especially among the working class and poor, arguing that its sources are cultural, political, and economic. In particular, Cvetkovich explores the way capitalism produces depression, which is related to both a higher level of economic insecurity (including food insecurity) and feelings of helplessness among lower classes. Andrew Sayer (2005) offers evidence of this when he points out that people of lower classes, who are on the fringe of the market society, experience significantly higher economic insecurity, which is the direct result of restricted “access to things, relationships, experiences and practices” that could lessen their anxiety and ennui by providing better opportunities for “living a fulfilling life” (p.1). As McGowan (2016) notes, “Capitalism depends on the subject's sense of insecurity and on the belief that an absence of plentiful resources looms just around the corner” (p.197), though for the lower classes the absence is already a reality. The poor, sociologists contend, are a special focus of the disciplinary means of a market society, bearing the brunt of surveillance and punishment (Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011; Wacquant, 2009). I recall James Baldwin's (1960) comment: “Anyone who has ever struggled with poverty knows how extremely expensive it is to be poor; and if one is a member of a captive population, economically speaking, one's feet have simply been placed on the treadmill forever.” Psychological distress associated with lower classes is related to the impoverishment of material

conditions and the lack of positive social recognition, as well as experiences of shame, guilt, and anxiety for not having achieved financial success in the market society.

Most people are aware of their distress, but, more often than not, they do not attribute it to the market society in general and capitalism in particular. For instance, Silva's (2013) research on working-class young people who were in debt and emotionally distressed showed that they tended to blame themselves for not being entrepreneurial enough—despite the numerous social, political, and economic obstacles in their paths. This confirms my anecdotal experiences of therapy with working class and poor persons. They tend to see themselves and/or their families of origin as the sources of their suffering. To understand this I turn to the psychoanalytic concepts of internalization and weak dissociation.

Internalization, weak dissociation, and the market society: Mystification and the undermining of agency

In this section, I use the psychoanalytic concepts of internalization and weak dissociation to account for how citizens come to believe in the tenets of a market society, organizing their experience, misinterpreting and misattributing their suffering, and skewing their agency. By skewed agency I mean that the individual's actions inevitably fail because s/he is not able to identify the real source of their suffering. S/he is, at the same time, reinforcing the hegemony of the market society. It is analogous to the individual who attributes his stomach ache to emotional stress when the actual source is the gruel he is fed by his jailors. Until he recognizes the real source of his stomach ache, he will continue to act in line with his false interpretation, which means nothing will happen—except perhaps more intense self-blame.

Psychoanalyst Roy Schafer (1990) realized that the concept of internalization is useful in understanding not only psychosocial development, but also for explicating the processes by which individuals accept an ideology (p.xi). Indeed, Schafer believed the concept used in social theory can account for how the “oppressed and exploited [come] to accept and even idealize the socioeconomic and ideological system in which they and their oppressors are serving as participant-victims” (pp. xi-xii). In a similar way, I use the concept to depict how citizens come to accept and live out the neoliberal capitalistic ethos of a market society.

For Schafer, internalization refers to “all those processes by which the subject transforms real or imagined regulatory interactions with his environment, and real or imagined characteristics of his environment, into inner regulations and characteristics” (p.15).⁴ A child, for instance, internalizes the parent’s attunements – attunements regulate in that the parent is recognizing and responding to the infant’s assertions, thus modifying the child’s behavior and emotional experience. The child’s internalization of the object-action is partial and his/her taking in of the object accompanies some modification the object-action as s/he makes it his/her own. Winnicott’s (1971) notion of transitional objects (TO) is a good example of a child’s – having internalized the parent’s mirroring – altering and using the parent’s attunement in relation to an external object that is under his/her omnipotent control—an object taken from the cultural field. Schafer also makes clear that it is not only regulation, but characteristics of the parent that are also internalized and made one’s own (e.g., the adoption of some of the parent’s behavioral traits). So, in the case of a transitional object, the child may adopt a parental characteristic vis-à-vis the TO and/or imagine the object to have the parent’s characteristic.

Naturally, as a psychoanalyst, Schafer is concerned with the internal world of the individual and his/her conscious and unconscious processes and motivations, as well as self and [part, whole, introjected] object representations – object representations that entail regulatory actions and characteristics of significant figures. Moreover, he considers these features of the psyche and internalization in terms of the child’s learning, imitation, and compliance. This said, children also internalize and make use of the symbol system in which they have been existentially thrown. Thus, symbol systems (e.g., narratives and rituals) and practices are first encountered in a child’s family. The adoption of language and the particular narratives of one’s family and culture means that the child is dependent on a particular semiotic system or social imaginary for constructing his/her experience, making meaning, and interpreting and understanding social interactions, etc. These narratives and accompanying social practices comprise intersubjectively shared and internalized values, beliefs, rules, roles, and expectations that become part of the child’s emerging identity and way of being in the world. Moreover, the internalized values, beliefs, and expectations help the child engage in routine, meaningful social interactions. To be sure, the child in adopting and using these narratives makes his/her own unique constructions of experience, though the child’s construction of experience cannot be radically different from the culture’s symbols, which s/he has internalized.

In childhood, internalization of the market society's ethos is aided by the thousands of advertisements children watch and read in watching TV or using other electronic devices.⁵ These advertisements induce people to buy products, acting on their desires or self-interests but not necessarily their needs (see McGowan, 2016). More importantly, advertisements inform and instruct us regarding what our desires *should* be if we are to be happy or fulfilled (Sung, 2007). Children (and adults) internalize these messages and are lulled into becoming acquisitive (Weber, 1992), confusing needs with desires and wants. And sadly, children learn quickly that anything and anyone can be commodified (Sandel, 2012).

It is not only through advertisements and other media that we internalize the capitalistic ethos in childhood. Internalization of this ethos comes about, in part, through family expectations and practices. In middle and working class families, children are often taught that labor (household chores) is remunerated (allowance) – a portion of which must be saved. Children may also be enticed to obtain better grades by rewarding them with money. We learn, then, that behaviors and achievements are monetized. In late adolescence and as adults, we are constantly faced with the realities of the economic system and we learn to play by its rules, whether in the course of buying clothes, a car or house, paying rent, utilities, etc. Moreover, many adults watch or read the daily news, a large part of which includes economic information (e.g., Dow, Nasdaq, S&P). Indeed, the financial section may become increasingly important as working-class and middle-class adults try to save for their children's education and for retirement. All of this is to say that, as children and adults, there are numerous ways that we internalize the market ethos.

The concept of internalization vis-à-vis adulthood is further understood in terms of Foucault's idea of disciplinary (and justificatory) regimes – regimes that facilitate and enforce the process of internalization. Foucault (2004), in his 1979 lectures, uses the notion of disciplinary mechanisms and regimes to account for how collective beliefs maintain their power to organize behavior. Building on Foucault, Hardt and Negri (2000) contend that a "disciplinary society is that society in which social command is constructed through a diffuse network of dispositifs or apparatuses that produce and regulate customs, habits, and productive practices. Putting the society to work and ensuring obedience to its rules and its mechanisms of inclusion and/or exclusion are accomplished through disciplinary institutions (the prison, the factory, the asylum, the hospital, the university, the school and so forth)" (p.23). Coupled with myriad daily economic exchanges, the corporate media, think tanks, non-governmental organizations (e.g.,

American Legislative Exchange Council or ALEC), educational institutions, political leaders and institutions, judicial system, and religious communities (e.g., prosperity gospel churches), etc. are some of the disciplinary and justificatory mechanisms that function to instill, enforce, and defend market beliefs and practices.⁶ These disciplinary and justificatory regimes of a market society have three aims. First, they function to exclude a critical analysis of the market order by restricting the field of action and calculation to the order itself (Dardot & Laval, 2013, p.169). That is, critical examination of markets depend on the rules of the market. This means that by using market criteria for analysis and critique, the market ethos is reproduced and reinforced. Second and relatedly, disciplinary regimes function to increase the number of market interactions (privatization) so that “individuals accept the market situation as imposed on them as ‘reality’” (p.170). This is seen in Margaret Thatcher’s political slogan, “There Is No Alternative,” that the media repeated daily (hooks, 2000, pp.45-47). We see here that disciplinary regimes function both to normalize and justify the market society. Third, a system of incentives and disincentives “replace market sanctions in guiding individual choices and conducts,” which functions to discipline societal members to serve the market (Dardot & Laval, 2013, p.170). These aims can be understood as furthering the internalization of the market society’s core beliefs and goals.

The process of internalizing the neoliberal capitalistic ethos, therefore, means that citizens use it to interpret their experience and social world. When this semiotic system becomes dominant, it becomes not only more difficult to imagine an alternative system, but also it can restrict individuals’ abilities to interpret their experience. This is analogous to what Nandy (1983) remarked about colonized peoples’ internalization of the imperialists’ system. He noted that colonization “creates a culture in which the ruled are constantly tempted to fight their rulers within the psychological limits set by the latter” (p.3). This is because they have internalized the colonizer’s ethos. For Fanon (2008), this also means that the colonized misinterpret the sources of their suffering. Likewise, the internalization of the market ethos leads people to misinterpret and misidentify the sources of their suffering or struggles. Recall Silva’s (2013) recent study of working-class young people who, having internalized the market ethos, misinterpreted their experiences and misattributed the source of their suffering. Silva notes that many of these young people have difficulty finding jobs and, when they do, they are often underpaid and receive no benefits. Other working-class young people have accrued significant debt in the process of obtaining an education, yet still find themselves employed in low-wage jobs. Among the people

she interviewed, most interpreted their struggles in terms of their own failures (to get an education, work hard enough, etc.), as well as failures associated with their childhood vis-à-vis their parents. These young people have internalized capitalistic tenets of meritocracy, individualism, self-reliance, and the “rational” pursuit of one’s interests. In so doing, they critically interpret their struggles and experiences as emanating from themselves. None of the young people Silva interviewed questioned the economic system that led to reduced benefits, lack of healthcare, soaring tuition costs, poor education, greater inequality, etc. In this way, internalization of this dominant symbol system led to hermeneutical mystification whereby young people misinterpret their maladies, believing themselves to be solely at fault while overlooking the hidden fist of the market.

Internalization is a concept that provides one way to understand the psychosocial process of adopting an ethos and, correspondingly, the ways people use it as an interpretive framework to construct experience and account for success or failure. The limit of this concept is that internalization refers to psychosocial processes that are common to all human beings and is, thus, not considered a psychological defense. In other words, internalization simply accounts for how a person comes to adopt a dominant ethos and uses it to interpret experience, at times, incorrectly. It omits the possibility of understanding hermeneutical misattribution as a defense that screens unconscious affects and representations and skews agency. To address this I turn to Stern’s notion of weak dissociation.

It is important to begin with a preliminary and general overview of dissociation. Dissociation, first developed by French psychologist Pierre Janet, is a defense whereby a representation and affect “escape the control of consciousness and develop independently” (Ellenberger, 1970, p.371). Meares (2000) contributes to this by noting that dissociation entails “a contraction of the field of consciousness” (p.45). This contraction can be understood as unformulated experience – experience constructed presymbolically and outside of awareness. While dissociation represents unformulated experience that escapes consciousness and symbolization, it is important to point out that the person is “organizing his mind in a way that protects the good self and other from persecution and dread of annihilation” (Keylor, 2003, p.219). It is, therefore, not uncommon to see dissociation in patients who have suffered traumatic experiences, using this defense to keep horrific (unformulated) experiences from becoming conscious.

While dissociation became primarily associated with trauma, Donnel Stern (1997) argued for a type of dissociation that is more common and not the result of trauma or an attempt to keep annihilation anxiety at bay. This type of dissociation, Stern noted, followed closely with Herbert Fingarette's (1969) philosophical analysis of routine self-deception in human life. Fingarette wrote, "it is when we judge that there is a purposeful discrepancy between the way the individual really is engaged in the world and the story he tells himself that we have the complex but common form of self-deception in which we are interested" (p.62). This self-deception, from Fingarette's perspective, results from not spelling out (narrating) one's engagement in the world or, better, spelling out one's engagement such that one misinterprets the action, while also disavowing one's actions or the consequences of these actions. Stern (1997), building on Fingarette's analysis of self-deception, argued that some non-pathological forms of spelling out are illustrations of weak dissociation. Weak dissociation, for Stern, involves narrative rigidity, which means that one organizes his/her experience such that one's actions and consequences are narrowly spelled out, leaving out actions, consequences, meanings, and affects that do not "fit" the dominant story. Inflexible narration, in other words, means that those ideas, meanings, values, and affects that are unconsciously perceived to contradict the dominant-conscious narrative are excluded or unformulated and, therefore, outside awareness. In weak dissociation, Stern argued, we spell out only what "we believe we can tolerate, or that furthers our purpose, or that promises a feeling of safety, satisfaction, and the good things in life; we dissociate the meanings that we believe we will not be able to tolerate, that frighten us and seem to threaten the fulfillment of our deepest intentions" (p.128). As a result "of so insistently turning our attention elsewhere...we never even notice alternative understandings. Focal attention under these conditions is controlled by the intention to enforce narrative rigidity" (p.132).

The notion of weak dissociation differs from internalization in that there is a psychological defense associated with the misinterpretation of sources of suffering and the skewing of agency. In other words, the misinterpretation and skewing of agency associated with internalization may simply be attributed to human reality. We often make incorrect interpretations and our resulting actions (agency) miss the mark all of which may have nothing to do with psychological defense. By contrast, the narrative rigidity of weak dissociation is not a mere mistake: it is a defense, which means that there are unconscious aspects of a person's psyche s/he wishes to avoid. In terms of the narrative rigidity associated with the market ethos, I

first consider the narrative rigidity itself before highlighting possible unconscious features, misinterpretations, and the skewing of agency.

Where do we see narrative rigidity vis-à-vis neoliberal capitalistic ethos? Above, I identified some of the disciplinary and justificatory regimes of the market society. The corporate media, for instance, can function as a societal organ for the internalization of a market ethos, but it can also serve as a defender, reinforcing weak dissociation's narrative rigidity. The media's deliberate exclusion of, marginalization of, or attacks on people who criticize capitalism indicates the presence of the narrative rigidity of weak dissociation. This narrative rigidity can include the use of other narratives (e.g., religion, nationalism) that further reinforce and defend the dominant narrative. For example, Michael Novak (1982), a conservative Catholic apologist for neoliberal capitalism, wrote a chapter on a theology of economics, which finds further support in his later book, *A Theology of the Corporation* (1987). In these books, Novak asserted the belief that Christians are to accept the world as it is and not pine for some kingdom of God on earth. As an apologist for capitalism, he said, "If God so willed his beloved Son to suffer, why would He spare us" (1982, p.341). What he is referring to are people who are suffering economically. Capitalism, in Novak's view, provides great wealth and there will always be winners and losers. Losers – the poor – need to accept the reality of capitalism and accept their suffering. Novak's comment exemplifies not only the underlying sadistic nature of his kind of God – a cruel god fitted to be the deity of capitalism's hidden fist – but also a clear communication that the poor who suffer are to accept responsibility for their suffering. Narrative rigidity, in this case, involves using religious ideas to support and defend the cultural dominance of neoliberal capitalism.

We do not need the theological grounding of capitalism to see narrative rigidity. Thomas Frank (2000) and Robert Nelson (2001) discuss the near dogmatic or religious hold many people have regarding capitalism. For Nelson and Frank, it is very difficult to offer alternatives to or critiques of capitalism when people accept the market ethos as natural, unquestionable, or American. This dogmatic or religious adherence to capitalism reflects a kind of narrative rigidity where "it is easier ... to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism" (Jameson, 2016, p.3).

If one agrees that weak dissociation is a factor in maintaining the market ethos, how then are we to understand what is being defended against and what its role is in skewing agency? The

answers to these questions are tricky, not simply because we are dealing with millions of people, but also because there are different classes. Accepting these challenges means that my answers are both general and heuristic. To begin, I consider weak dissociation in relation to middle and upper classes. A commonly held interpretation regarding people who are poor (economic losers) is that they are lazy, idle, incompetent, and without motivation (see Desmond, 2016; Ehrenreich, 2011; Isenberg, 2016; Macdonald, 2010). To be sure, this belief can be held by people who are poor, but by and large, it is held by individuals who are the economic beneficiaries of capitalism. Novak, for instance, acknowledges that capitalism has “losers” who suffer, but he rationalizes this by blaming the victims and admonishing them to accept their suffering. This is a misinterpretation because it locates the source of failure in individuals and not in social, political, and economic structures, programs, and policies that make it difficult for people to succeed. Recall Baldwin’s (1960) comment above regarding “how extremely expensive it is to be poor.”

The apotheosis of individual responsibility and, therefore, agency is also supported by the American myth of meritocracy (narrative rigidity), which informs individuals that their success is the result of their hard work, skills, and intelligence. The economically well-off person believes that he has achieved financial success through his hard work, devotion, motivation, etc. This is also a misinterpretation and misattribution of success because it completely individualizes responsibility and agency and overlooks political, economic, and social structures of power and privilege that paved the way for success. Agency is skewed because it denies one’s dependency on others (and institutions) that have been instrumental in the person’s success. Finally, agency is skewed because by holding to the belief in individual success, it denies responsibility for one’s actions – actions that are complicit in a system where one group benefits by “legitimate” exploitation of other groups. A poster boy for this is Martin Shkreli “who acquired the anti-malarial and anti-parasitical drug Daraprim – used primarily to treat children and AIDS patients – and jacked up the price from \$13.50 per pill to \$750 per pill ... 5,500 percent increase” (Pitt, 2015). Shkreli defended this legal exploitation, showing no hint of responsibility for the consequences associated with the suffering and anxiety he caused.

The skewing of agency vis-à-vis the economically successful is connected to what must be kept unconscious through weak dissociation’s narrative rigidity, namely the anxiety of dependency and guilt. People who are well-off wish to see themselves as independent and, I suggest, beneath this belief is the fear of their own dependency, as well as anxiety regarding the

loss of power, prestige, and privilege. Consider the disdain many people have for the poor who are often regarded as takers, dependent on the state and other institutions. This suggests an unconscious anxiety about their dependency. Consider also the recent cover of the *American Spectator* (June 2014) – a conservative magazine—revealing the anxiety and fear of the political-economic elite vis-à-vis the loss not simply of their lives but their power, prestige, and privilege. The illustration depicts a bespectacled and paunchy rich man being led to the guillotine. An official of the mob is raising a bloody copy of Thomas Piketty’s book *Capital in the 21st Century*. Near him is a guillotine with a bloody blade, suggesting that many other wealthy people had already been guillotined. The anxiety is associated not simply with death, but the loss of power, prestige, and privilege. To put it another way, the poor are the bearers of the unconscious of people who are well-off are people who are poor. They bear the anxiety of economic dependency and uncertainty associated scarcity and loss (Marris, 1996). The narrative rigidity of weak dissociation, which facilitates denial of responsibility and obligation, screens not simply the unconscious fear of dependency and loss, but also unconscious guilt. Unconscious guilt is associated with a nascent realization that one’s economic security and excess depends on the economic exploitation and insecurity of others. One who watched Shkreli before Congress might push back and say there is no manifest evidence for this claim and, worse, that I may be projecting guilt onto well-off people. I suggest one manifest form of evidence of unconscious guilt is the charity of the wealthy. Of course, there are many possible motivations for giving money, such as social prestige, power, etc. Yet, I submit that charitable giving is connected to unconscious guilt, which keeps awareness of guilt at bay. We might take note of this in the social pressure (guilting, if you will) placed on Bill Gates and other extremely wealthy people to use their wealth for charitable causes.

Economically successful people share the same market ethos with those on the lower end, though there are differences with regard to misinterpretation, agency, and the unconscious. People on the lower rungs of the economic ladder can also adopt this narrative rigidity, even when the system adversely impacts them. Their weak dissociation is evident in their believing in the system, which means they misinterpret the source of their economic woes. Put differently, poor and working-class people misinterpret and misattribute the source of their suffering whenever they take on the negative representations (lazy, without skills, lacking intelligence) and simply blame (guilt and shame) themselves for financial distress. Blaming themselves for failing

to reach financial success means their agency is skewed not simply because they misinterpret the source of their difficulties, but because they act against themselves by way of self-blame. Their narrative rigidity also screens feelings of helplessness in the face of the market hegemon. Better to ascribe to the belief/illusion in one's agency (having power) than face the prospect that one is helplessly in chains to the system that offers false hopes and few benefits. This accompanies skewed agency – skewed because their actions are not directed toward the source of their suffering/helplessness. A literary illustration of this is Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman*. The main character is a near-do-well salesman, Willy Loman. Toward the end of his career, Willy faces financial distress and the realization that he is a failure vis-à-vis the market society. When he is not engaging in fantasies of success, he blames himself. He succumbs to the market logic, killing himself for insurance money. Willy, in some ways, is a cheerleader for the market, unable and perhaps unwilling to see that his suffering is rooted in the market. His suicide represents a profound skewing or distortion of agency—a desperate act linked to unstated or unconscious helplessness and shame.

The concept of internalization helps us understand the complex processes whereby individuals adopt the symbol system of the market society, using it to construct experience, interpret reality, find meaning, and discern sources of success and failure. Without pathologizing individuals, the concept of weak dissociation points us in the direction of psychological defenses and the unconscious aspects in individual and social life. Both concepts show how persons can misinterpret their experiences and, in particular, misattribute the sources of their suffering (and success), which are linked to unconscious emotions and the skewing of agency.

Case Illustration

Therapists adopt and internalize therapeutic interpretive frameworks for working with patients. Like their patients, they are part of the culture and, therefore, wittingly or unwittingly internalize and embrace the dominant narratives used for ordering and interpreting daily life. In some or perhaps many instances, therapists, as Cushman (1995) and Illouz (2008) point out, collude with these dominant narratives by failing to notice the sources of the patient's suffering. Worse, we may unwittingly be involved in helping produce selves fitted for the market, serving as yet another disciplinary regime. This reality may be further complicated and exacerbated by

therapists being captive to their particular esteemed theories and methods. I am reminded of Adam Phillips' insight about psychoanalysis and cure. "With the discovery of transference," Phillips (1993) writes, "Freud evolved what could be called a cure by idolatry; in fact, potentially a cure of idolatry, through idolatry. But the one thing psychoanalysis cannot cure, when it works, is belief in psychoanalysis. And that is a problem" (p.121). A problem may be that our psychoanalytic developmental theories direct us to search for sources of suffering in the patient's childhood and unconscious. This is often the case, but if we discover this source we may fail to look elsewhere. Fanon, in my view, sought to unmask the sources of his patients' suffering not by overlooking or dismissing psychoanalytic theories of development and the unconscious, but by considering the social, political, and economic forces and institutions of French colonialism. A Fanonian approach, if you will, to psychoanalytic therapy is (a) "to '*consciousnessize*' [the patient's] unconscious, to no longer be tempted by a hallucinatory lactification," and (b) "to enable [the patient] to choose an action with respect to the *real source of the conflict*, i.e., the social structure" (Fanon, 2008/1952, p. 80; emphasis mine). Consciousness raising, then, is accompanied by what Ellison called reforging the will and what I would call the redirection of agency toward acting in relation to the real sources of suffering. More specifically, this approach would involve addressing the misinterpretations, misattributions, and skewed agency that results from both internalizing the ethos of a market society and weak dissociation.

A brief clinical example will illustrate my claims. Linda, a 35-year-old mother with two children (ages 9 and 8), came for therapy because she suffered from depression and anxiety. Both she and her husband worked full-time, while her mother and father took care of the kids during the week. Linda made clear in the first session that she grew up in an alcoholic home, though her father had been sober for the last ten years. "He was not a violent drunk, but you could not rely on him," she remarked. As a child, Linda coped by leaving the house and hanging out with friends. Her parents (like Linda and her husband) worked hard to raise her and her older brother from whom she was emotionally distant. Also, like her parents, she lived in a working-class neighborhood not far from an economically depressed and violent section of the city.

Linda, at times, expressed regret and anger at herself for not having obtained a college education, though she wondered how she would have paid for it. After high school, she immediately went to work in a factory three miles from home. Working hard, she was able to save some money, but this quickly became her lifeboat when the factory shut down (moving to

another country). Eventually, after nearly wiping out her savings, Linda found work, but at a lower wage with no benefits. It was at this job that she met her future husband. Together, with some help from their parents, they were able to purchase a house (a fixer upper, she said). Linda constantly worried about living paycheck to paycheck and hoped that she and/or her husband would advance in the company, though this often seemed doubtful. Not unlike Silva's (2013) interviewees, Linda wondered what she was doing that obstructed her from achieving a better life, which included her speculation about how her brain must be lacking a chemical that "caused" her depression. Understandably, she began therapy in hopes of confirming this so that she could get the right medication. This would mean that she would have more control of her life and advance in her job.

During the first few months of therapy, we explored Linda's early life and her marriage. While growing up, she was relatively close to her mother and emotionally distant from her father. After a long day at the factory, her father would grab some beers with his friends before coming home, usually late. Her mother and father fought often, but never physically. As a child, she remembered her mother worrying about paying the bills, as Linda was now. School, for Linda, was a place of escape, though she remembered that it was mostly about hanging out with her friends and not about the schoolwork. Neither her parents nor her school emphasized success or college. "I think it was expected," Linda said, "that when I graduated from high school I would go to work and not go to college." She was, however, determined that her kids would go to college. They would have a shot at the American dream. One of the bright aspects of her young adult life, which continued in the present, was her marriage. Linda was determined to marry a man who did not drink and who would be caring and supportive of her and her children. Unlike her father, Linda's husband, Larry, was involved in caring for the children and devoted to Linda. Indeed, it was Larry who encouraged her to get help and assured her they would find a way to pay for it. Linda loved him for this, but also felt guilty for being depressed and needing help (aversion of financial dependency).

Linda's childhood lacked any significant trauma, though it could be argued that there was cumulative trauma or at least psychic suffering vis-à-vis an absent father and the anxiety of her mother. We certainly addressed her anger, hurt, disappointment, and disillusionment with regard to her father and she recognized that she had absorbed or internalized her mother's fear and anxiety about the family's economic security. What Linda did not initially mention, but was

present, was her relatively low self-esteem. When this issue was raised and acknowledged, she understood it to be the result of two parents who also did not possess much self-worth. In other words, for Linda, low self-esteem was not constructed in terms of economic class, but rather in seeing her parents as near-do-wells with regard to the market.

Even while Linda talked about her childhood and current struggles during the first few months, I was aware that she was not considering or identifying *other* sources of her suffering. Comparable to Silva's interviewees, Linda tended to locate the sources of her suffering in herself and in her family of origin, which fits with the therapeutic model and illustrates, in my view, the presence of weak dissociation. At the same time, her self-blame was linked, in my view, to the beliefs rooted in the market ethos. That is, Linda had internalized the dominant neoliberal capitalistic social imaginary and, I suggest, further used the narrative rigidity of weak dissociation to avoid profound experiences of helplessness and hopelessness vis-à-vis the larger socio-economic-political system—experiences that were also evident in her parents' growing up. By adopting both the values and beliefs of the neoliberal capitalist narrative (e.g., individualism, self-reliance) and the therapeutic narrative (self-exploration, individual psyche, childhood development), Linda could retain a belief that her own agency was implicated in her "failure," but also that her agency—once corrected by therapy and medication— would lead to advancement and economic success. To let go of weak dissociation as a defense, Linda would have to encounter an agency that faced the realities of a dominant cultural system that undermined her agency, giving rise to feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness, which, I suspected, was part of her anxiety and depression. Put differently, in locating the source of her suffering in larger systemic economic and political forces, Linda would no longer misinterpret or misattribute the source of her depression, which would accompany an invitation to develop a sense of agency that was not defined or determined by the dominant narrative of neoliberal capitalism.

Introducing interpretations that are outside clients' narrative constructions are certainly part of the psychoanalytic therapy and, not surprisingly, patients frequently adopt the therapist's psychological interpretations of their experience. All of this is to say that therapists' interpretations are inevitable. Hopefully, our interpretations are offered for the patient to consider, correct, emend, and reject. After several months of working with Linda, and after I had a sense that she felt understood, I asked if she had considered other possible sources of her

depression and anxiety. Looking puzzled, she said no. “Well, it struck me as you talk about your parents’ growing up and even now, that there was and is an air of anxiety and depression in the household, almost a sense of futility. [She nodded.] I wonder if one source of this is their sense of being trapped in an economic system that has functioned to undermine their efforts in being economically stable.” Linda responded by asking if I was saying they were victims and I said, yes and no. I understood Linda’s response as the defense of weak dissociation, functioning to retain her own view of agency (not a victim who is without agency and power), which included blaming (perceptions rooted in market ethos) her parents for not being more economically successful. That is, she was operating out of neoliberal narratives and concomitant values that, in my view, she both internalized and used defensively.

This session began a lengthy process of exploring, at times, her sense of agency and her feelings of helplessness and powerlessness over and against the dominant social imaginary of state-corporate capitalism. At times, Linda would exclaim, “What’s the use?” This was in reference to her belief that as an individual she could do nothing about these larger forces and the obstacles they erected. Her sense of futility was closely allied with anger (sometimes at me) at the system, and for becoming more aware of her helplessness. Around the same time, though, Linda grew more empathic in relation to her parents’ suffering. She understood her mother’s anxiety as emerging in relation to powerful systems that made it difficult to find economic (and emotional) security and her father’s alcoholism as a way to medicate his own experiences of helplessness and meaninglessness. This interpretive exploration, however, did not diminish her previous interpretations and narratives regarding her childhood, but it did expand her understanding of herself and her parents.

As Linda worked through and with these painful experiences of helplessness and hopelessness, her depression largely abated, though she continued to struggle with anxiety. That said, it would be a mistake to say that working through her helplessness, depression, and anxiety resulted simply from therapy. Less than a year into therapy, Linda told me that she had been going with her children to the local library and reading books about the city and poverty. Around the same time, Linda and her husband became more involved in their part of the city, advocating for better wages and benefits for people at their places of work. Her actions in relation to the real sources of her suffering, then, was not simply the work of therapy. It was also her own efforts with others outside of therapy. At the end of her work, Linda’s agency was not

defined or determined by helplessness and isolation, but rather one founded on using aggression with others in addressing social, political, and economic ills. If I had not addressed in some fashion these other sources of her suffering, I would have colluded with the dominant culture of a market society and worse, exacerbated Linda's suffering by implying it resided simply and solely in her and her family of origin.

Conclusion

Linda's story is reminiscent of Fanon's patients and Ellison's comments about African American patients in Harlem – patients who, more often than not, unwittingly internalized powerful cultural, political, and economic forces and ideas. In a neoliberal capitalistic culture or market society citizens are subject to various disciplinary regimes that promote and enforce ideas, beliefs, and values, which most people internalize. For some people the sources of their psychological suffering are hidden or obscured by the reigning ethos of a neoliberal culture or market society. The misinterpretation and misattribution of suffering, which accompanies skewed agency, can be explained in terms of the psychoanalytic concepts of internalization and weak dissociation. Following Fanon, I contend that, for some patients, analytic therapy needs to include exploration and naming of the economic and political sources of their psychosocial distress. The aims of this exploration are insight and consideration of actions directed toward the real sources of suffering.

Notes

1. Of course, wealthy people can experience psychological distress. For instance, Ben White (2014) writes about the anxieties and fears that wealthy persons experience in a market society. While not minimizing their distress, it is clear that the sources of their distress are different and, moreover, they have more resources to handle the distress than those individuals of lower economic classes.
2. I will forego the question regarding how we have become a market society. For those interested, I would recommend the following sources; Dardot & Laval, 2013; Harvey, 2005; Jones, 2012.
3. This is not to say that the top 10% do not experience psychological maladies resulting from the market society (Winter, 2016), but my focus is on those who have fewer resources to deal with their struggles.
4. In Schafer's depiction of internalization he includes introjection and identification, though I will not use these terms in this article.
5. Illouz (2008) points out the role of psychologists in relation to the burgeoning effect of advertising on shaping subjectivity and social relations. She wrote, "Psychologists were present in the realm of advertising in two main ways: they served as advisors to the new profession of advertising and helped advertisers

package products as bundles of meaning that could tap into the unconscious desires of consumers. Moreover, advertisers used psychological themes to justify the sale of their products” (p.54).

6. Certainly, families can serve as a source of internalization of the market ethos as a child develops. A child may be required to do chores and his/her work is remunerated (allowance), teaching him/her that labor is valued economically. I am reluctant to count the (good enough) family as a social institution that operates as a disciplinary regime, because of its focus on care and love.

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