



## **Are Toxic Work Environments in the CAF a Reflection of Unconscious Personal Trauma?**

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Lieutenant-Commander Tiffani Carrat

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## **ABSTRACT**

As the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) seeks to evolve and maintain relevancy in today's complex battlespace, organizational culture is pivotal to maintaining our operational effectiveness. Currently, the CAF does not have a Trauma-Informed approach to leadership, and this is contributing to a toxic organizational culture in which unconscious personal trauma is going undetected and unresolved. In order to increase the health of service members and the overall health of the institution, the CAF must adopt Trauma-Informed Leadership and a Trauma-Informed approach to Care (TIC) that goes beyond service-related PTSD to address other forms of pre-existing trauma, such as childhood trauma.

This paper draws on seminal research into trauma, organizational culture, and leadership (destructive, authentic, and trustworthy). It contends that holistic wellness and a focus on personal development leading to self-actualization should be implemented in order to bring awareness and resolution to personal trauma in service members. This will help to eradicate toxic environments and will create resilient, well-balanced warfighters who are prepared to meet the CAF's operational demands and who are less likely to release from the CAF.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This research would not have been possible without me having lived my life, the good the bad, and the ugly, all of those experiences have become the underpinnings of who I am and the person I want to become. So, in pursuing this topic, I am doing it for the sixteen-year-old me who would have never been bold enough to open this can of worms and the thirty-four-year-old me who wants closure.

Thanks to the support of my academic advisor for letting me pursue this topic and open everyone's hearts and minds. I do not believe everyone is broken; I believe to evolve as an organization, the CAF needs to do better for its people.

To my editor Andy Perry. Thanks for always being there for me and reviewing countless papers, being my voice of reason, and reigning me in when I got off track...in this life and the next life, I hope we come back to haunt each other.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Prevalence and Relevance of Trauma

There is a common misconception that trauma is only used to describe catastrophic life events; however, “trauma pervades our culture, parenting, popular culture, [and] economics.”<sup>1</sup> Every person carries trauma, consciously or subconsciously, throughout their day-to-day lives, and CAF members are no exception. Levels of trauma within the CAF, similar to the United States Army, are likely higher than the average population<sup>2</sup> as a result of physical and psychological injuries as well as the fact that the CAF, as an institution and lifestyle, may attract recruits with pre-existing trauma.<sup>3</sup> Whether trauma in service members stems from childhood, adult life, or from service, the CAF would benefit from adopting a Trauma-Informed approach to leadership. Understanding personal and generational trauma would allow the CAF to create a working environment more conducive to overall health, which promotes self-awareness and self-actualization for all service members. This would not only increase the CAF’s operational effectiveness, it would also aid in retaining service members. This paper will examine the CAF through the lens of trauma, providing research that describes the types of wounds CAF members may carry and how these wounds may contribute to unhealthy work environments. Wounded individuals create dysfunctional environments which in turn attract or create more wounded individuals. Padilla, Hogan and Kaiser (2007) describe this feedback loop through the image of a ‘toxic triangle,’ in which destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments continuously and negatively reinforce each other.<sup>4</sup> In order to counter toxic cultures, the CAF must implement a Trauma-Informed leadership style, centered around personal development, using a holistic wellness approach. This will improve the overall health and longevity of service members, increasing retention and operational effectiveness.

### Methodology and Basic Assumptions

Through a qualitative analysis of various research surrounding leadership styles (destructive, authentic, and trustworthy) as well as current trauma studies related to intergenerational trauma, childhood attachment and detachment, Adverse Childhood Effects (ACEs), and Identity Theory models, this paper will review how unconscious personal trauma may affect identity creation and shape the adult behaviour of service members, resulting in destructive leadership and susceptible followership. If these unhealthy behaviours are not managed by self-regulation and institutional norms and practices, it can create and sustain a toxic work environment. This subject matter is pertinent to the current cultural evolution that the CAF is undertaking, as it identifies key factors in the creation of toxic environments and offers a potential way ahead for breaking the toxic cycle. The main criteria used to select the literature

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<sup>1</sup> Maté, Gabor and Maté, Daniel, *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness & Healing in a Toxic Culture*, (New York: Ebury Publishing (2002), Ch. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Stone, Debra, “Predictors of Military Enlistment: Analysis of Adverse Childhood Experiences, Socioeconomic Status, Educational Achievement, and Delinquency,” 77.

<sup>3</sup> Stouthamer, Lober, Magda, Wei, Loeber and Masten, “Desistance from Persistent Serious Delinquency in the Transition to Adulthood,” *Development and Psychopathology* 16, no. 4 (2004): 900.

<sup>4</sup> Padilla, Art, Robert Hogan, and Robert B. Kaiser, “The Toxic Triangle: Destructive Leaders, Susceptible Followers, and Conducive Environments,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (2007): 176.

supporting this paper was based on concepts and theories related to trauma, organizational culture, and leader development more broadly. A significant portion of this study is based on current United States Army and Special Forces research, as they are actively undertaking a dramatic change in how they manage trauma (pre-existing and service-related trauma) and are using Trauma-Informed approaches to create better warfighters. One key assumption used for this study is that many CAF recruits enroll with pre-existing trauma that does not meet the threshold to flag them as ‘not fit for service’ during the enrollment process. While there is no CAF-specific data to support this assumption, an American dissertation on ‘Predictors of Military Enlistment’ found ACEs to be more prevalent among military personnel than their civilian counterparts.<sup>5</sup> While this trauma is deeply seeded and often subconscious, it may still impair the overall health and operational effectiveness of service members and therefore the overall health and operational effectiveness of the CAF as a whole. This paper does not argue that these individuals should be barred from service; rather it argues that a holistic wellness approach and a change to the current stigma surrounding mental health should be adopted in order best serve the institution and to promote self-awareness and self-actualization within service members.

## CHAPTER 1: THE TOXIC TRIANGLE AND THE CAF

In *The Leadership Quarterly* (2007), Padilla et al. introduced the concept of the ‘toxic triangle,’ which describes the cyclical, mutually reinforcing relationship between conducive environments, destructive leaders, and susceptible followers. These three components working together create the conditions for toxic environments to exist.<sup>6</sup> The toxic triangle is an apt model for understanding the relationship between personal trauma and toxic organizational culture because personal trauma may lead to adults who behave as either destructive leaders or susceptible followers. Both of these types of individuals may be intrinsically drawn to the profession of arms due to the conducive nature of the military environment to support these individuals’ identities and behavioural traits; and, once enrolled in the military, these individuals may contribute to the further entrenchment and toxicity of the initial conducive environment. Chapter 1 will define each element of the toxic triangle, and Chapter 2 will explore the links between personal trauma and destructive leadership and susceptible followership.

Figure 1. Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser’s Toxic Triangle

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<sup>5</sup> Stone, Debra, “Predictors of Military Enlistment,” 3.

<sup>6</sup> Padilla, Art, Robert Hogan, and Robert B. Kaiser, “The Toxic Triangle: Destructive Leaders, Susceptible Followers, and Conducive Environments,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (2007): 176.

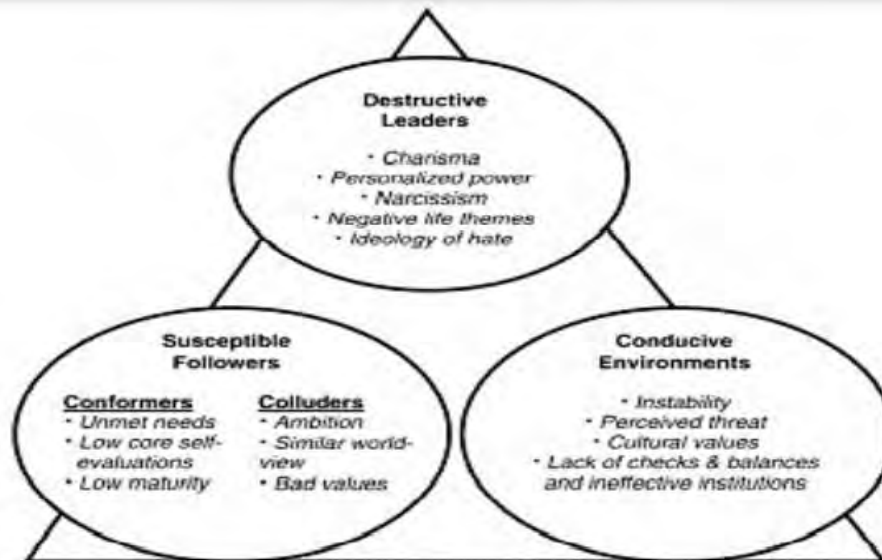


Figure 1. The toxic triangle illustrating the connection between destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments. Reprinted from “The Toxic Triangle: Destructive Leaders, Susceptible Followers, and Conducive Environments,” by A. Padilla, R. Hogan, & R. Kaiser, 2007, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 18(3), p. 178. Reprinted with permission (See Appendix H).

## Conducive Environments

In Padilla et al.’s toxic triangle, all three components of the triangle work together to create the ongoing, mutually reinforcing cycle of toxicity. While destructive leadership is on the top of the triangle, and is arguably the most influential component, this paper will examine conducive environments as the first component of the triangle because the profession of arms has unique characteristics that make it especially conducive to toxicity.

What is it about an institution that makes it a conducive environment for susceptible followers to exist and destructive leaders to thrive? An institution’s mission or purpose and its organizational goals determine how it conducts its business and organizes itself, such as how it selects its members, assigns leadership roles, distributes power, establishes a core ethos, and the oversight mechanisms or lack thereof that it employs. Padilla et al. notes that: “perceived threats, cultural values, instability, and the absence of checks and balances” are four institutional characteristics that allow destructive leadership to exist and thrive.<sup>7</sup> These four factors are present in the current CAF organizational structure, primarily as a natural result of military requirements during war. As a defence and war-fighting entity, the CAF relies on the existence of an external enemy (i.e. a security threat to Canada) in order to establish and maintain its purpose and relevance. Its cultural values are tied to its role as an institution of defence. During war, instability and uncertainty are ever-present, as war is a naturally insecure and unpredictable

<sup>7</sup> Padilla, Art, Robert Hogan, and Robert B. Kaiser, “The Toxic Triangle: Destructive Leaders, Susceptible Followers, and Conducive Environments,” 185.



environment. And, with a battlefield mindset, checks-and-balances may be limited or streamlined in order to prioritize operational or mission command and the quick execution of orders.<sup>8</sup>

While these are all valuable and necessary traits for the CAF to adopt in order to fulfill its defence and war-fighting mandate, they may be detrimental if applied at all times, such as in garrison or during peace time activities. If service members carry over these traits to the everyday work environment, their behaviour may become destructive rather than constructive and necessary. For instance, Padilla et al. explains: “Instability demands quick action and unilateral decision making ... But once decision-making becomes centralized, it is often difficult to take back.”<sup>9</sup> Power imbalances are exacerbated by a perceived threat. When individuals feel threatened, they are more enthusiastic to follow an assertive, direct leader to ensure survival.<sup>10</sup> “One study found that when people were made more aware of their death, their preference for charismatic leaders increased and preferences for participative leaders declined.”<sup>11</sup> However, awareness of death may be associated with real and non-real threats: “Two points about the role of environmental threats are important. First, objective threats are not necessary; all that is needed is the perception of the threat. Second, leaders often continue the perception of threat or an external ‘enemy’ to strengthen their power and motivate followers.”<sup>12</sup> Destructive leaders may use these threats, real or not, to gain more power by pushing their followers down the hierarchy of needs, away from self-actualization, psychological, and comfort needs, toward basic safety needs, ensuring that they remain dependent on the leader for survival. This type of leadership approach, if applied in garrison, leads to service members being unable to achieve higher levels of growth and fulfillment.

Figure 2. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs



<sup>8</sup> Matthews, Michael D, “Turning Civilians into Soldiers,” *In Head Strong*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020, 40.

<sup>9</sup> Padilla, 185.

<sup>10</sup> Padilla, 185.

<sup>11</sup> Padilla, 185.

<sup>12</sup> Padilla, 185.

In addition to perceived threats, perceived instability may also create an environment conducive to destructive leadership. Perceived instability and insecurity enable leaders to leverage the increased power and authority to their benefit to achieve goals with little to no resistance.<sup>13</sup> Padilla et al. state: “Dictators exploit followers' needs for security by providing them with structure, rituals, and rules that offer easy solutions to complex problems.”<sup>14</sup> In matters of culture, the CAF centers around a culture of structure, discipline (compliance), cooperation, and group loyalty.<sup>15</sup> While these attributes may all have a positive effect on the working environment, they also create the potential for negative effects, as the absence of external control mechanisms or checks and balances makes this easy for destructive leaders to manipulate the balance of power and assert control.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, due to the strength and uniqueness of its own military culture, the Arbour report argues that the CAF as whole may perceive itself to be exempt from the influence of outside culture:

The current situation is partly the result of unyielding adherence to an impenetrable hierarchical structure that is determined to perpetuate itself, good and bad, and constant mobility as part of career progression, leading to chaotic management and a lack of accountability. It produces a leadership rooted in old ways, focused primarily on excellence in operational deliveries, but oblivious to the societal forces that have compelled changes elsewhere. The corporate world, universities, professional organizations, and much of civilian life throughout Canada has made significant inroads. Unfortunately, the very success of CAF operations, which I am not in a position to assess, reinforces its view that it is unique, and that CAF can do everything without the assistance of outsiders, as it always has.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to the four institutional characteristics stated above that may contribute to the CAF being a conducive environment for toxicity, the CAF's mission-centric adherence to the ethos of ‘mission before self’ creates further potential for a negative working environment. In a battlespace, a mission-first mindset is necessary. Service members must subordinate their own welfare (i.e. be willing to risk and to lay down their lives) in order to achieve the mission.<sup>18</sup> However, in peace time and in garrison, this mindset has the capacity to put non-critical tasks above the overall welfare of service members. Service members may become overworked to the point of burnout in order to keep the day to day functioning of the garrison in motion. This may prevent service members from maintaining a work-life balance, may be detrimental to their

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<sup>13</sup> Canada. Dept. of National Defence, *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Conceptual Foundations*, Ottawa: Published under the auspices of the Chief of the Defence Staff by the Canadian Defence Academy, Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, 2005, 50-1.

<sup>14</sup> Padilla, 185.

<sup>15</sup> McGurk, D., Cotting, D. I., Britt, T. W., & Adler, A. B. (2006), “Joining the Ranks: The Role of Indoctrination in Transforming Civilians to Service Members,” 14-15.

<sup>16</sup> Arbour, L., Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces (20 May 2022), 306, <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/dnd-mdn/documents/reports/2022/iecr-report.pdf>, accessed on December 12, 2022.

<sup>17</sup> Arbour, L., Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, 16.

<sup>18</sup> McGurk, D., Cotting, D. I., Britt, T. W., & Adler, A. B. (2006), “Joining the Ranks: The Role of Indoctrination in Transforming Civilians to Service Members,” 15.

mental and physical health, and may contribute to low job satisfaction and poor retention. Setting the primary objective to accomplishing the mission overshadows the importance of people in achieving the mission.<sup>19</sup> If the purpose is great enough (i.e. defending Canada during wartime), service members may feel fulfilled while pushing themselves to burnout and breakdown; however, if the purpose is not great enough (i.e. garrison duties), service members may not feel that their sacrifice is warranted. Even if service members do feel willing to push themselves to burnout for garrison needs, it is not a sustainable situation, as burnt-out service members will not be able to serve the institution in the long run and will not be properly fit to deploy when the need arises.

The issue of burn out and lack of concern for individual welfare may be exacerbated by destructive leaders seeking to put their own mission (such as career advancement or tasks to gain recognition) ahead of the welfare of their subordinates. In a culture where mission is paramount, service members may be unable to challenge the priorities assigned to them by destructive leaders, and they may have to subordinate themselves to the personal agendas of their leaders. The next sub-chapter will look at destructive leaders in more depth, as the second component of Padilla et al.'s toxic triangle.

## **Destructive Leaders**

In her external review, Louise Arbour highlights the central importance of leadership within the CAF:

The CAF is a complex and unique organization. Its most striking feature is the role of leadership. It is developed early and is omnipresent in a hierarchy that is broken down by numerous ranks, trades and postings under a chain of command designed to enforce the principle of 'command and control'. Numerous ranks which are filled with followers who need to be compliant to orders.<sup>20</sup>

Leadership is meant to bring people together, channel collaboration, and foster an environment where individuals unite to achieve common goals; leadership is the essence of influence. However, not all forms of leadership and influence are healthy or optimal. According to Padilla et al., "Destructive leadership is seldom absolutely or entirely destructive: most leadership results in both desirable and undesirable outcomes."<sup>21</sup> The key difference is the outcome—whether or not it is beneficial for the organization and the personnel. "Leaders, in concert with followers and environmental contexts, contribute to outcomes distributed across a destructive–constructive continuum."<sup>22</sup> Destructive leadership lives on the negative side of the spectrum whereas, constructive leadership, while it may involve negative results, lives on the positive side, oriented towards a common good. Constructive leaders prioritize legitimate goals of the organization and adopt its overall vision, all while enhancing members' attitudes, motivation and considering their

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<sup>19</sup> Government of Canada, "Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy," Ottawa: DND Canada, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Arbour, L., Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces (20 May 2022), 15.

<sup>21</sup> Padilla, Art, Robert Hogan, and Robert B. Kaiser, "The Toxic Triangle: Destructive Leaders, Susceptible Followers, and Conducive Environments," 178.

<sup>22</sup> Padilla, 178.

well-being in the execution of the organization's goals.<sup>23</sup> Constructive leaders do not put their own personal agendas ahead of the needs of the group or institution; their intentions are proper, although the execution and follow-on results may be misaligned.

On the other side of the continuum, destructive leadership involves, "Dominance, coercion and manipulation rather than influence, persuasion and commitment."<sup>24</sup> Fear and other tactics are often used as a means of control. According to Padilla et al, destructive leaders exhibit distinct common characteristics: charisma, personalized use of power, negative life events, narcissism, and an ideology of hate.<sup>25</sup> In his research into the dark side of leadership, Conger states that charisma is comprised of vision, self-presentational skills, and personal energy.<sup>26</sup> Charisma involves motivating and influencing others by the strategic use of personality and charm. Using charisma to achieve goals also occurs on a continuum that can be seen as either constructive or destructive depending on the intent behind it, whether selfless or selfish. House & Howell, in their research on the ethics of charismatic leadership, argue that constructive charismatic leaders "offer a vision that emphasizes benefits to social institutions whereas destructive [charismatic] leaders articulate visions that enhance their personal power."<sup>27</sup> In terms of self-representational skills, destructive charismatic leaders have exceptional communication skills but are self-promoting and concerned with building support for themselves rather than for pro-social causes.<sup>28</sup>

The personalized need for power is distinguished by personal motivations, and ethics are the determinant factor in whether or not the leader's actions are constructive versus destructive.<sup>29</sup> Ethical leaders use their position and its associated power as a platform to help and serve others, whereas unethical ones use this platform to personally benefit and for self-aggrandizement.<sup>30</sup> While self-promoting leaders often appear extremely confident, their behaviour is actually rooted in insecurity. Their drive to control and to gain power is a means of coping with their insecurities. In an article titled "People Want Power Because They Want Autonomy," Beck argues:

Power is a force that needs an object: To have power, a person has to have it over something, or someone...One would think that this would be the appeal of power—to be able to control things, to change them to fit your vision of reality. But a new study suggests that people who desire power are mostly looking to control one thing—themselves.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Einarsen, S., Aasland, M. S., & Skogstad, A. (2007), "Destructive leadership behaviour: A definition and conceptual model," *The Leadership Quarterly*, 18(3), 207–216.

<sup>24</sup> Padilla, 177.

<sup>25</sup> Padilla, 180.

<sup>26</sup> Padilla, 180 from Conger, J. (1990), *The Dark Side of Leadership*. Organizational Dynamics, 19, 44-5.

<sup>27</sup> Padilla, 180.

<sup>28</sup> Howell, J. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1992), "The Ethics of Charismatic Leadership: Submission or liberation?" *Academy of Management Executive*, 6, 45.

<sup>29</sup> Howell, J. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1992), "The Ethics of Charismatic Leadership: Submission or Liberation?" 49.

<sup>30</sup> Howell, 45-6.

<sup>31</sup> Beck, J, "People Want Power Because They Want Autonomy," accessed March 27, 2023, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2016/03/people-want-power-because-they-want-autonomy/474669/>.

This type of deep insecurity and need to control oneself is often the result of personal trauma, especially childhood trauma, which will be discussed in depth in Chapter 2.

A major consequence of destructive leadership is that prevents the development, empowerment, and involvement of followers.<sup>32</sup> If leaders mentored and enabled their followers, they would risk losing personal power, praise, credit and influence. To a destructive leader, if their followers are seen as capable it would threaten their role as the leader, essentially their identity, their purpose in the organization, and potentially their position of authority, making them further insecure. Unethical leaders prefer to employ coercion to complete objectives and suppress other's opinions.<sup>33</sup> The effects destructive leaders have on personnel include detachment, lack of motivation or interest in completing deliverables or objectives, reduced quality of life, and ultimately complete erosion of trust in the organization. This is perpetuated by leaders who are oblivious to their impacts on others, and who are focused solely on pleasing their bosses and getting results at any cost for their own personal benefit, in matters of career or otherwise. By limiting the growth and empowerment of followers, destructive leadership restricts subordinates to the lower levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Figure 3: Leadership Types and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.<sup>34</sup>

**Table 2.2**

**Leadership Types and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

| Leadership Type       | Maslows Level  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Trustworthy Leaders   | Level 5: Self-Actualization needs<br>Level 4: Esteem Needs |
| Transactional Leaders | Level 3: Social Needs                                      |
| Toxic Leaders         | Level 2: Security Needs<br>Level 1: Survival Needs         |

Whicker argued that, not only do destructive leaders restrict their subordinates to lower levels of need, destructive leaders are themselves operating from the lower levels of Maslow's Hierarchy. Negative life events, or personal trauma has prevented these individuals from meeting their basic psychological needs, and instead of developing a healthy identity and adopting evolved behaviour, these leaders are stuck in coping and defense mechanisms designed to protect

<sup>32</sup> Conger, J. (1990), *The Dark Side of Leadership*. Organizational Dynamics, 19.

<sup>33</sup> Howell, J. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1992), "The Ethics of Charismatic Leadership: Submission or Liberation?" 45.

<sup>34</sup> Whicker, Marcia Lynn, *Toxic Leaders: When Organizations Go Bad*. Westport, CT: Quorum, 1996, 59.

them from experiencing more adverse experiences.<sup>35</sup> Again, this will be examined more in depth in Chapter 2.

In Arbour's external review, she noted, "allegations of incidents of inappropriate behaviour by senior CAF members –allegations of complicity of inaction throughout the chain of command, and concerns about the quality of leadership development in the CAF."<sup>36</sup> As with individuals who are operating from a place of defensiveness, this institutional complicity and inaction resulted from selfish, self-preservation, and defense mechanisms to try to preserve the institution's credibility and permit willful blindness towards an environment enables these types leaders to use fear and control to garner and maintain power.

Narcissism, the fourth common trait of destructive leaders identified by Padilla et al is also a result of personal trauma and unmet lower-level survival needs. "Narcissistic leaders are self-absorbed, attention-seeking, ignore other's viewpoints and welfare."<sup>37</sup> They have learned in their lives in order to get what they need from their environments they must create it, often at the expense of others. They tend to view the surrounding environment as adversarial and are self-absorbed to the point of being unable to perceive or respond to the needs of others. As mentioned previously, narcissism is closely linked to the methodical use of charisma to gain personal power to meet personal objectives. These leaders often claim special knowledge or privilege and demand unquestioning obedience and their sense of entitlement often leads to self-serving abuses of power.<sup>38</sup> They may control information to ensure they are the only ones who have the power, which is also a form of self-preservation and personal protection, attempting to achieve a feeling of security by having a purpose, being irreplaceable and vital to an organization. Self-serving individuals are blind to the repercussions of their actions as they only see what is important to them and their success. "Their grandiose dreams of power and success cause narcissists to ignore the external environment or test their judgment, and their grand visions often defy successful implementation."<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, it has been seen that using this type of coercive control and manipulation technique to achieve goals is closely associated with childhood experiences of powerlessness.<sup>40</sup> Any challenges to their power, status or success can make these leaders lash out as a defense mechanism (reactionary response).

The fifth common trait of destructive leaders listed by Padilla et al is an ideology of hate: "Rhetoric, vision, and worldview of destructive leaders contain images of hate—vanquishing rivals and destroying despised enemies...Childhood hardships seem to lead to an ideology of hate—and perhaps a reaction formation in which self-hatred is turned outward."<sup>41</sup> This outward hate is evident in how a destructive individual engages and interacts with others and how their own sense of self can be projected onto their followers. In wartime, there may be valid external

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<sup>35</sup> Whicker, Marcia Lynn, *Toxic Leaders: When Organizations Go Bad*, 59.

<sup>36</sup> Arbour, L., Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces (20 May 2022), 13.

<sup>37</sup> Howell, J. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1992), "The ethics of charismatic leadership: Submission or liberation?" 43–54.

<sup>38</sup> Padilla, Art, 180-1.

<sup>39</sup> Padilla, Art, 181.

<sup>40</sup> Goodstadt, Barry E. and Larry A. Hjelle, "Power to the Powerless: Locus of Control and the use of Power," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 27, no. 2 (1973): 190.

<sup>41</sup> Padilla, Art, 182.

enemies; however, an ideology of hate that persists during peace time is a sign of self-hatred and destructive leadership.

Complementing Padilla et al's research into destructive leadership, Kathie Pelletier conducted an empirical study on Leader Toxicity, in which she defined toxic leadership as, "Those leaders that use abhorrent actions against members of an organization that cause considerable long-lasting damage to individuals and the organization."<sup>42</sup> The study notes that military members' primary objective is to accomplish the mission, but this is difficult when they serve under toxic leaders. Focusing on the ends and not the means puts members at high risk of being treated poorly to ensure mission success. As mentioned previously, this is particularly true during peace time operations, when operational objectives may not warrant the high risk to individual welfare. Pelletier states that, "Toxic leadership has long been a prevalent problem in many organizations and institutions."<sup>43</sup> The CAF is no exception; the institutional structure, power hierarchy, and hyper-focus on operational objectives can cast a significant shadow where toxic leaders not only hide but thrive.<sup>44</sup> Louise Arbour's external review agrees, concluding that, "One of the dangers of the model under which the CAF continues to operate is the high likelihood that some of its members are more at risk of harm, on a day to day basis, from their comrades than from the enemy."<sup>45</sup>

In 2015, George Reed conducted a study on toxic leadership in the US military and found similar results as Pelletier and Arbour. Reed states,

Toxic leadership in the military is not a new phenomenon, but it is a new topic of research concerning the overall culture of the armed services...Destructive leaders have thrived in the military service due to the nature and environments that tolerate—if not encourage—their behaviour. However, with the increased attention on service member suicides, attrition rates, and morale, many top military leaders have begun to seek explanations for these disturbing trends.<sup>46</sup>

Reed goes on to conclude that destructive leaders in the military pose a great threat to its organizational climate and overall effectiveness.<sup>47</sup>

Due to the intensely hierarchical structure of militaries, two key behaviours typical of destructive leaders include the use of intimidation (i.e. coercion or manipulation) and one-way communication.<sup>48</sup> When used, these methods exacerbate the existing institutional power hierarchies as members are not able to resist, further exploiting subordinates' powerlessness.

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<sup>42</sup> Pelletier, Kathie, L, "Leader toxicity: An Empirical Investigation of Toxic Behavior and Rhetoric Leadership," 374.

<sup>43</sup> Pelletier, Kathie, 374.

<sup>44</sup> Saideman, S., "Culture Change Isn't a Distraction from Canadian Military Effectiveness," *Globe and Mail*, 2023, accessed on March 30, 2023, <https://twitter.com/smsaideman/status/1641070753301839874>.

<sup>45</sup> Arbour, L., Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, 9.

<sup>46</sup> Reed, George E., *Tarnished: Toxic Leadership in the U.S. Military*. Lincoln, Neb: Potomac Books, 2015, 49.

<sup>47</sup> Reed, George E, 16-17.

<sup>48</sup> Howell, Jane M. and Bruce J. Avolio, "The Ethics of Charismatic Leadership: Submission Or Liberation?" 43.

Fear is another tactic destructive leaders often employ as a means of control.<sup>49</sup> This can be a deliberate or subconscious tactic, done in concert with the surrounding conducive environment of battlefield mentality. Fear is an important concept to analyze when we look deeper into the issues the CAF is having as, the notion of war, unlimited liability, and the constant threat of death can drive the institution to rely on fear tactics to demand obedience and discipline from members at all levels. This may be useful for short periods during wartime, but it can be destructive if service members are unable to turn off their ‘fight or flight’ responses. Being in constant ‘flight or flight’ has fall out impacts on behaviour (reliance on reactionary responses rather than higher-level thinking) and it can have detrimental mental and health consequences.<sup>50</sup> It is paramount that members are able to consciously revert back to peace-time mindsets, access treatment if needed, and be able to respond vice react.

Similar to self-hatred turned outward, destructive leaders relying on fear tactics to control others are often reacting to their own internalized fears. For example, a member may be motivated towards self-interest out of personal fear of failure and cannot control themselves because they fear being seen as weak or inadequate.<sup>51</sup> This fear of failure or perceived weakness may push them to adopt behaviours that support the institution, their own aspirations, and to achieve the best results at any cost. Along with a work environment that rewards and praises these sorts of behaviours for the effects they achieve, the components of destructive leadership and conducive environment will continue to reinforce each other.

It is important to note that not all bad leaders are destructive. The motivations behind a leaders’ actions are critical to delineating between bad leadership and destructive leadership. Walker et al.’s case studies into toxic leadership provide some key traits that characterize the motivations of destructive leaders: narcissism, dominance, grandiosity, arrogance, entitlement, and the selfish pursuit of power.<sup>52</sup> Reed further states that impact is important when defining toxic leadership, “To count as toxic these behaviours and qualities of character must inflict some reasonably serious and enduring harm on their followers and their organizations.”<sup>53</sup> While there has been a breadth of research into the traits of toxic leadership, there has been little analysis as to the effects it may have on military performance overall and how service members may be impacted by such a leader.<sup>54</sup> However, there have been studies conducted on the impact of toxic leadership on employees in the business world, and the results may be extrapolated for a general comparison. Consistent exposure to micro-aggressions, negative leader attitudes, and incessant destructive behaviours is detrimental to the wellness of members. This can lead to not only the triggering of previous trauma and aggravation of existing mental and health issues, it may also create new health issues, which decreases work performance and increases job dissatisfaction.

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<sup>49</sup> Webster, Vicki, Paula Brough, and Kathleen Daly, “Fight, Flight Or Freeze: Common Responses for Follower Coping with Toxic Leadership,” *Stress and Health* 32, no. 4 (2016), 346.

<sup>50</sup> Webster, Vicki, Paula Brough, and Kathleen Daly, “Fight, Flight Or Freeze: Common Responses for Follower Coping with Toxic Leadership,” 346.

<sup>51</sup> Aasland, Merethe Schanke, Anders Skogstad, Guy Notelaers, Morten Birkeland Nielsen, and Ståle Einarsen, “The Prevalence of Destructive Leadership Behaviour,” *British Journal of Management* 21, no. 2 (2010), 443.

<sup>52</sup> Walker, Steven M. and Daryl Watkins, *Toxic Leadership: Research and Cases*, Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2022, doi:10.4324/9781003202462, 20-21.

<sup>53</sup> Reed, George E., *Tarnished: Toxic Leadership in the U.S. Military*, 20-21.

<sup>54</sup> Sparks, George, Patricia Wolf, and Andryce M. Zurick, “Destructive Leadership: The Hatfield and McCoy Feud,” *American Journal of Business Education* 8, no. 4 (2015): 311.



Members who serve under destructive leaders have two choices: either they remain in the organization or they depart, and a significant amount choose to depart.<sup>55</sup> In the 2019 CAF Regular Force Retention Survey, service members cited job satisfaction, senior leadership and unit leadership among their top reasons for departing the CAF.<sup>56</sup>

If members choose to stay rather than leave, it can create an unhealthy cycle wherein individuals working under destructive leaders inherit these contagious negative attitudes and behaviours as members opt to emulate the destructive behaviour themselves as means of survival.<sup>57</sup> The outcomes and follow-on effects of destructive leadership inevitably shape the social fabric and leadership style inside an institution, feeding back into the conducive environment component of Padilla et al.'s toxic triangle.<sup>58</sup> If they do not choose to emulate, service members may instead choose to withdraw from reality or numb themselves via various unhealthy coping mechanism, such as drugs and alcohol or risky behaviour.<sup>59</sup> Withdrawal (or dissociation) as a survival mechanism will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 2.

### **Susceptible Followers**

While accountability and authority are charged to the leader, as set out in their authority vested to them on their commissioning scrolls or via unit appointments, followers have a unique power and opportunity to break the toxic cycle. However, many followers are unable to do this, as they fall into the category of susceptible followers. Destructive leaders make it difficult for followers to challenge the entrenched power hierarchy of the institution, but “followers must consent to, or be unable to resist, a destructive leader.”<sup>60</sup> Why would service members be susceptible to these destructive leaders and conducive environments? What conditions are embedded in their psyche to motivate them to not dissent when they believe their institution and leaders are failing them? Is it a need to fit into the organization or an escape from something else? This sub-chapter will explore these questions and the role of susceptible followers in sustaining Padilla et al.'s toxic triangle.

Padilla et al. describe two categories of followers who will support destructive leadership: conformers and colluders. “Conformers passively allow bad leaders to assume power because their unmet needs and immaturity make them vulnerable to such influences. Colluders support destructive leaders because they want to promote themselves in an enterprise consistent with their worldview.”<sup>61</sup> It is important to note the differences between the two: “The vulnerability of conformers is based on unmet basic needs, negative self-evaluations, and psychological immaturity... In contrast, colluders are ambitious, selfish and share the destructive leader's world views.”<sup>62</sup> The CAF is an especially conducive environment for conformity and collusion, as these behaviours are not only prevalent, they are an institutional necessity to ensure

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<sup>55</sup> Akca, Meltem, “The Impact of Toxic Leadership on Intention to Leave of Employees,” *International Journal of Economics, Business and Management Research*, September 2017, 286.

<sup>56</sup> “The 2019 CAF Regular Force Retention Survey,” *Defence Research and Development Canada*, Department of National Defence, Ottawa, November 2019, 8.

<sup>57</sup> Reed, George E., *Tarnished: Toxic Leadership in the U.S. Military*, 107.

<sup>58</sup> Padilla, Art, 177.

<sup>59</sup> Padilla, Art, 185.

<sup>60</sup> Padilla, Art, 179.

<sup>61</sup> Padilla, Art, 185.

<sup>62</sup> Padilla, Art, 183.

indoctrination into the organization. The CAF, as an institution, demands that members respect the chain of command, obey orders, and fully commit themselves to a hierarchical power structure from their very first day in the military.<sup>63</sup>

Complementing Padilla et al.'s research, Kellerman's 2004 study titled 'Bad Leadership: What it is, How it Happens, Why it Matters,' concludes that certain followers are unable or unwilling to resist domineering and abusive leaders because the followers need safety, simplicity, security, belonging, and predictability in uncertainty.<sup>64</sup> This supports Padilla et al.'s assertion that destructive leaders lead through control, and their control can be "overt, ...or it can be a subtle appeal to follower needs for authority, security, belongingness in a safe community, or fear of isolation, imprisonment, or death."<sup>65</sup> There is also a, "natural tendency for people to obey authority figures (Milgram, 1974), imitate higher-status individuals (Baharody & Stoneman, 1985), and conform to group norms (Asch, 1951)."<sup>66</sup>

In the CAF, service members may emulate leader behaviours in order to fit in, especially if the results are favourable to their own goals and progression. This type of socialization enables the members to assume the identity being manufactured for them and assimilate into the present environment. In the CAF, this is better known as 'like promotes like,' a common phrase touted over the years to hint at the requirement to fit in. In order to fit into a group, it is common for members to hide what they think and feel because they want so badly to fit into the identity that was chosen to succeed and to integrate into the chosen group. Self-determination theory posits, that "individuals are active organisms who will attempt to integrate themselves into their larger social environment to make contextually required behaviors congruent with an existing self."<sup>67</sup> This is dangerous territory to operate in, because the CAF as an institution does not authorize its members to act as a challenge function to its leadership or to deviate from the standard expectations of how to act, behave and think. Free-thinking is not a common trait correlated with susceptible followership.

Common traits that are correlated to susceptible followership include low maturity, high ambition, congruent values and beliefs, and unsocialized values.<sup>68</sup> Low maturity can make someone more prone to external influence. Destructive leaders often use the immaturity and inexperience of their followers to create the conditions to manipulate them to do what they want them to do.<sup>69</sup> CAF members are generally quite young when they join and are conditioned to respect the chain of command. They observe and learn from their environments the characteristics that produce favourable results. In this, charismatic leaders are particularly powerful at influencing followers and manipulating members to support their own vision and personal objectives. Members learn how effective these behaviours are and will strive to emulate them, as imitation is the highest form of flattery, and they too want to succeed. This is further

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<sup>63</sup> McGurk, D., Cotting, D. I., Britt, T. W., & Adler, A. B. (2006), "Joining the Ranks: The Role of Indoctrination in Transforming Civilians to Service Members," 222.

<sup>64</sup> Kellerman, B. (2004). *Bad leadership: What it is, how it happens, Why it matters*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 22.

<sup>65</sup> Padilla, Art, 181.

<sup>66</sup> Padilla, Art, 183.

<sup>67</sup> Leroy, Hannes, F. Anseel, W. Gardner, and L. Sels, "Authentic Leadership, Authentic Followership, Basic Need Satisfaction, and Work Role Performance: A Cross-Level Study." *Journal of Management* 41, no. 6 (2015): 1681.

<sup>68</sup> Padilla, Art, 184.

<sup>69</sup> Walker, Steven M. and Daryl Watkins, *Toxic Leadership: Research and Cases*, 36.

compounded by immaturity and being in an organization that is primarily focused on results rather than the process by which those results are achieved.

Ambition is a trait of susceptible followership because, “Ambitious people seek to bolster their status and sometimes engage in exploitative relations with destructive individuals so they can further their own agendas.”<sup>70</sup> Under-socialized and ambitious followers are more likely to engage in destructive activities if condoned or encouraged by a leader.<sup>71</sup> The closer the individuals are to the leader, the more influence and benefits they will obtain if they comply with the destructive leader’s agenda. When followers believe a destructive leader’s vision, for a variety of reasons, predominantly because of ambition, power dynamics, insecurity, or to fit into an organization and to ensure that the identity they chose succeeds, conformers can become colluders.<sup>72</sup> Sharing congruent values and beliefs means that, “Individuals whose beliefs are similar to that of the leader are more likely to commit to their cause...Specifically, individuals who endorse unsocialized values such as greed and selfishness are more likely to follow destructive leaders and engage in destructive behavior themselves.”<sup>73</sup>

Susceptible followers may also feel low self-worth and may behave in a way that is consistent with the leader's vision in order to complete the follower's concept of self, thus bolstering self-esteem and self-efficacy.<sup>74</sup> Individuals who have experienced trauma often lack self-confidence, security, and a sense of self-efficacy, so they do not share the same intrinsic values and beliefs when compared to control groups. It is more difficult for these members to have solidified core values as they suffered from instability which led to feelings of rejection, abandonment, humiliation, betrayal, and injustice (discussed in depth in Chapter 2), and they have become a product of their experiences. Therefore, these members are more likely to adopt the values and beliefs they are socialized to accept as they prioritize fitting in, and if they are conditioned from childhood to do what is necessary to survive in their environments they will do so regardless of the risks. Thus, they are less likely to challenge the status quo or the destructive behaviours being exhibited for fear of reprisal or being ostracized from the group.

Follower fear is engrained in new recruits as it is used as a primary means of motivation in the CAF.<sup>75</sup> Negative reinforcement is compounded by learned experience in basic training and stems from a desire to avoid punishment, harsh treatment, and making mistakes.<sup>76</sup> If a member can avoid punishment by following a destructive leader, they may opt for self-preservation over higher values. This ties back to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, as destructive leaders prevent their followers from meeting their esteem needs, as a means to control and stymie them into conforming as they fear repercussions and remain at the level of basic safety and security.

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<sup>70</sup> McClelland, D. C. (1975), *Power: The Inner Experience*, New York: Irvington.

<sup>71</sup> Padilla, Art, 185.

<sup>72</sup> Padilla, Art, 184.

<sup>73</sup> Hogan, R. (2006). *Personality and the fate of organizations*. Reference and Research Book News 21, no. 4 (11, 2006).

<sup>74</sup> Weieter, Stuart J. M, “Who Wants to Play Follow the Leader? A Theory of Charismatic Relationships Based on Routinized Charisma and Follower Characteristics,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (1997): 171-193.

<sup>75</sup> McGurk, D., Cotting, D. I., Britt, T. W., & Adler, A. B. (2006), “Joining the Ranks: The Role of Indoctrination in Transforming Civilians to Service Members,” 17.

<sup>76</sup> McGurk, D, 19.

Followers who were raised under similar tyrannical behaviours may believe that this is normal behavior within their ‘chosen’ environment (i.e. the military) and may not be conscious that an environment is toxic until they are posted to one that is not. Susceptible followers may feel dependent on the destructive leader because of the position the leader holds and the sense of security they provide, even if it is not ideal. Due to the lack of available growth and the rigid structure of the chain of command, susceptible followers have limited recourse to challenge authority. This impacts personal growth and job satisfaction, which is currently a main driver of retention.<sup>77</sup> If an environment does not allow for personal growth and development, the individual will outgrow the institution and move on. Or, on the contrary, they will remain and further feed the toxic environment they have been conditioned to accept and support.

The toxic triangle is self-perpetuating as susceptible followers have more influence than they believe, and their leadership influence, learned skills, and work behaviours set the conditions for future member development and endorsement of the work environment. This sets the baseline of the CAF’s organizational culture. Eventually, these susceptible followers (i.e. conformers and colluders) will assume higher leadership positions within the organization, and if they are mentored and socialized to be destructive leaders themselves they will perpetuate the existence of toxic environments, although unwittingly, and they may contaminate the development of future leaders and susceptible followers. In this way, the toxic triangle reinforces and sustains itself.<sup>78</sup>

In contrast, fundamental identity and core beliefs, if well developed, can offer a counter-balance to negative influence.<sup>79</sup> However, the CAF’s reliance on indoctrination challenges members’ fundamental identities and belief structures in order to integrate and socialize them using Baron’s Stage Model of Intense Indoctrination outlined in Table 2.1 below.<sup>80</sup> This serves to create warfighters and to form or create an entirely new identity which aligns with that of the organization. From this new-formed identity, role, and sense of purpose, personal ambitions are shaped and are key to understanding the motivations behind susceptible followers.

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<sup>77</sup> “The 2019 CAF Regular Force Retention Survey,” Defence Research and Development Canada, Department of National Defence, Ottawa, November 2019, 8.

<sup>78</sup> Padilla, Art, Robert Hogan, and Robert B. Kaiser, “The Toxic Triangle: Destructive Leaders, Susceptible Followers, and Conducive Environments,” 183-4.

<sup>79</sup> Illies, J.J. & Reiter-Palmon, R. (2008), “Responding destructively in leadership situations: The role of personal values and problem construction,” *Journal of Business Ethics*, 82, 253.

<sup>80</sup> McGurk, D., Cotting, D. I., Britt, T. W., & Adler, A. B. (2006), “Joining the Ranks: The Role of Indoctrination in Transforming Civilians to Service Members,” 22.

**Table 2.1**  
**Baron's Stage Model of Intense Indoctrination Applied to the Military**

| Stage of Indoctrination  | Critical Features   | Military Application   |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| Stage 1: Softening-up    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-isolation from family/friends</li> <li>-exposure to stress (physical, psychological)</li> <li>-instigation of fear</li> </ul>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-service member (SM) isolated from outside world</li> <li>-SM trains for long, intense hours</li> <li>-some emphasis on fear of drill instructor</li> </ul> |
| Stage 2: Compliance      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-recruit tries out new behaviors</li> <li>-done for extrinsic reasons</li> <li>-social pressure may be primary motivator</li> </ul>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-SM quickly "falls into line" and performs expected behaviors, even if for fear of reprisal</li> </ul>  |
| Stage 3: Internalization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-identity of recruits incorporates new values</li> <li>-behaviors performed out of intrinsic desire to please group members</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-SM incorporates military values into value system</li> <li>-role of SM takes on central importance</li> </ul>  |
| Stage 4: Consolidation   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-recruit allegiance to group solidified</li> <li>-recruit totally accepts new values/beliefs</li> </ul>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-SM completely committed to values of service</li> <li>-SM willing to kill and be killed in service of unit and country</li> </ul>                          |

Source: Baron, 2000.

## CHAPTER 2: TRAUMA AND IDENTITY: THE ORIGINS OF DESTRUCTIVE LEADERS AND SUSCEPTIBLE FOLLOWERS

### Hurt People Hurt People

Having defined each component of Padilla et al.'s toxic triangle, it is important to understand where destructive leaders come from in the first place. To understand the origins of destructive leaders, we must first go back to the origins of human interaction. Human behaviour is inextricably linked to relationships, integration into our environments, and acceptance by a group. Group acceptance ensures survival, as does adapting to a threatening surrounding environment.<sup>81</sup> As with the origins of human behaviour, distinct individual behaviour is the result of acceptance-seeking and environmental adaptations that may have been developed prior to enrollment or while serving. For the purposes of this paper, the focus will remain on behavioural adaptations developed prior to enrollment.

Destructive leaders are not born destructive, but they may be born into traumatized lineages and adverse environments that shape the person's early development and influence their future behaviour. O'Connor et al., who conducted a historiometric study into charismatic leaders and destructiveness, argued that negative life themes were the most valuable leader variables when it came to delineating between constructive and destructive leaders.<sup>82</sup> Negative life themes

<sup>81</sup> McGurk, D., Cotting, D. I., Britt, T. W., & Adler, A. B. (2006), "Joining the Ranks: The Role of Indoctrination in Transforming Civilians to Service Members," 17.

<sup>82</sup> O'Connor, Jennifer, Michael D. Mumford, Timothy C. Clifton, Theodore L. Gessner, and Mary Shane Connelly, "Charismatic Leaders and Destructiveness: An Historiometric Study," *The Leadership Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (1995): 539.

are, “the extent to which the leader had a destructive image of the world and his or her role in the world.”<sup>83</sup> They include but are not limited to: coming from a lower socioeconomic background, family criminality, parental dissonance, psychiatric disorders, and child abuse.<sup>84</sup> House and Howell, in an article on the ethics of charismatic leadership, state that destructive leaders may be impulsive, irresponsible, and extraordinarily punitive because they have experienced a lack of control and emotional regulation during childhood.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, Strange et al., when writing about unhealthy manifestations of charismatic leadership, state that, “The struggle for personal power existed from the outset of their lives. This lack of power exists because of how life has unfolded and the circumstances that forced them to adopt these behaviours in order to adapt to their surroundings.”<sup>86</sup>

When we view destructive leadership as the result of an evolutionary process and as a survival strategy meant to protect the individual from dangerous or impoverished environments, instead of viewing it as a syndrome involving arrogance, selfishness, and self-importance, it not only sheds light on the origins of destructive leadership, it implores us to recognize destructive behaviour as a call for help being made by a hurt individual.<sup>87</sup> Gabor and Daniel Maté, researchers specializing in healing within toxic cultures, state that:

Understanding the source of suffering – trauma (development), adversity (experiences), and stress (from Attachment/Mother relationship) – as the social conditions of living...Within this new framework, sick bodies and minds are more like a siren: we might look at what disease and mental illness are expressing about the life and social context they emerged from.<sup>88</sup>

When understood within this context, addressing destructive leadership within the CAF should not focus on blame and punishment, rather it should focus on awareness and healing.

### **The Stigma and Complexity of Trauma**

Due to the stigma associated with ‘mental health,’ seeking help, and the inherent perception of weakness when one does so, the CAF has not yet properly examined the presence and effects of trauma among its servicemembers. Trauma is one of the most complex and misunderstood areas of the CAF leadership paradigm, and CAF leadership doctrine does not address pre-existing trauma or underlying, non-service-related trauma. General well-being is mentioned in doctrine as a means to ensure leaders understand how morale is critical to

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<sup>83</sup> O'Connor, Jennifer, Michael D. Mumford, Timothy C. Clifton, Theodore L. Gessner, and Mary Shane Connelly, “Charismatic Leaders and Destructiveness: An Historiometric Study,” 539.

<sup>84</sup> Padilla, “The Toxic Triangle: Destructive Leaders, Susceptible Followers, and Conducive Environments,” 180.

<sup>85</sup> Howell, Jane M. and Bruce J. Avolio, “The Ethics of Charismatic Leadership: Submission Or Liberation?” *The Executive* 6, no. 2 (05, 1992): 45.

<sup>86</sup> Strange, Jill M. and Michael D. Mumford, “The Origins of Vision: Charismatic Versus Ideological Leadership,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (2002): 343.

<sup>87</sup> Rosenthal, Seth A. and Todd L. Pittinsky, “Narcissistic Leadership,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 17, no. 6 (2006): 628.

<sup>88</sup> Maté, Gabor and Maté, Daniel, *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness & Healing in a Toxic Culture*, (New York: Ebury Publishing (2002), Ch.1.

maintaining influence and enabling institutional outcomes;<sup>89</sup> and the doctrine mentions a ‘Comprehensive Approach’ that states, “looking after your people’s well-being involves looking after their physical, intellectual and emotional health.”<sup>90</sup> However, no further guidance on this comprehensive approach or how to achieve it is provided, nor is there any mechanism in place to teach this method of Trauma-Informed Leadership.

When addressed, the subject of trauma within the CAF tends to center on service-related trauma in the form of PTSD. PTSD from battlefield experiences explains why some veterans who are struggling, post-conflict, with extrinsically manifested behaviours like substance abuse, anger, depression, grief, and marital or family problems are behaving the way they are.<sup>91</sup> However, this broad-brush disorder approach to mental health among servicemembers is highly limited. Trauma is not a one size fits all, much like the CAF uniform. Trauma, in its Greek origin, means ‘wound’.<sup>92</sup> Wounds may be pre-existent in servicemembers due to the presence of intergenerational trauma or because of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), discussed in the following sub-chapters. Even wider parameters of trauma include, but are not limited to, direct exposure (i.e. abuse, neglect, or betrayal from dependent caregivers or close family members), greater societal (social) trauma (i.e. poverty, war, natural disasters, physical assaults, car accidents), or any other event that has impacted how an individual responds to their environment.<sup>93</sup> Jamie Hackett, in a study on trauma and epigenetics, states that, “Traumas, not only from war but from any event significant enough to disrupt the emotional equilibrium—a crime, a suicide, an early death, a sudden or unexpected loss—can lead to our reliving of trauma symptoms from the past.”<sup>94</sup> Trauma may be buried deep in an individual and be re-lived or re-experienced via any number of environmental triggers in everyday life. Gabor and Daniel Maté describe trauma as:

(Trauma) is not what happens to you, but what happens inside you. Likewise, trauma is a psychic injury, lodged in our nervous system, mind, and body, lasting long past the originating incident(s), triggerable at any moment. It is a constellation of hardships, composed of the wound itself and the residual burdens that our woundedness imposes on our bodies and souls: the unresolved emotions they visit upon us; the coping dynamics they dictate; the tragic or melodramatic or neurotic scripts we unwittingly but inexorably live out; and, not least, the toll these take on our bodies.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Canada. Dept. of National Defence. *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Leading People*. Ottawa: Published under the auspices of the Chief of the Defence Staff by the Canadian Defence Academy, Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, 2007, 5.

<sup>90</sup> Canada, “Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Leading People,” 66.

<sup>91</sup> Canada, “Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Leading People,” 253-4.

<sup>92</sup> “Trauma,” accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trauma>.

<sup>93</sup> A wide range of events, such as child abuse, sexual assault, medical traumas, and natural disasters, meet the PTSD Criterion A1 for a traumatic event. Some of these events (such as some child abuse, sexual assault) involve social betrayals.

<sup>94</sup> Hackett, Jamie, “Scientists Discover How Epigenetic Information Could Be Inherited,” *Research*, University of Cambridge, January 25, 2013, [www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/scientists-discover-how-epigenetic-information-could-be-inherited](http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/scientists-discover-how-epigenetic-information-could-be-inherited).

<sup>95</sup> Maté, Gabor and Maté, Daniel, *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness & Healing in a Toxic Culture*, (New York: Ebury Publishing (2002), Ch. 1.

The majority of traumatized individuals would pass the enrollment criteria for mental health and would not qualify for a diagnosis of PTSD, as they suffer subconsciously from trauma that is either repressed or forgotten. While the effects of this type of trauma may be less outwardly noticeable than battlefield PTSD, it is a deep seed planted within an individual, affecting who they are on a fundamental level and manifested in their behaviour as well as their identity.<sup>96</sup> This type of trauma can be classified under false, more obvious, and overtly symptomatic psychiatric diagnoses (such as Narcissistic Personality Disorder, Dependent Personality Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive or Attention Deficit Disorder<sup>97</sup>), or it may be undiagnosed altogether. However, even when undiagnosed, unconscious personal trauma should not be overlooked as part of the CAF's leadership paradigm or as a significant contributing factor to the CAF's organizational culture.

Due to their specific relevance to the CAF, this paper will focus on intergenerational trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences. Intergenerational trauma may affect military families, while ACEs affect every subset of the human population, including service members. Robert Anda, in a study that examines the link between childhood trauma and early death in adults, argues that child abuse is the largest public health issue facing the world. It is the gravest and most costly health epidemic—costlier than cancer or heart disease. His studies found that addressing childhood trauma could eradicate depression by half, reduce alcoholism by two-thirds, and reduce suicide, intravenous drug use and domestic violence by three-quarters.<sup>98</sup> Knowing this, the CAF may be able to significantly improve the overall health of its servicemembers by adopting a Trauma-Informed approach to leadership and well-being.

### **Military Families and Intergenerational Trauma**

Trauma in servicemembers that does not stem from battlefield PTSD may be the result of intergenerational trauma or ACEs. Dr. David Sack in *Psychology Today* reported, “Children of a parent struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder can sometimes develop their own PTSD, called secondary PTSD.”<sup>99</sup> He reports that about 30 percent of children with a parent who served in Iraq or Afghanistan and developed PTSD struggle with similar symptoms. He says, “The parent’s trauma becomes the child’s own and behavioural and emotional issues can mirror those of the parents.”<sup>100/101</sup> Rachel Yehuda, a researcher focusing on the prevalence of PTSD among the offspring of holocaust survivors, states that the children of PTSD-stricken mothers are three times more likely to be diagnosed with PTSD than children in control groups. She also finds that children of survivors are three to four times more likely to struggle with depression and anxiety,

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<sup>96</sup> Van der Kolk, Bessel A., Susan Roth, David Pelcovitz, Susanne Sunday, and Joseph Spinazzola, “Disorders of Extreme Stress: The Empirical Foundation of a Complex Adaptation to Trauma,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 18, no. 5 (2005): 389-390.

<sup>97</sup> van der Kolk, B, “Disorders of Extreme Stress: The Empirical Foundation of a Complex Adaptation to Trauma,” 390.

<sup>98</sup> Felitti, V.J., Anda, R.F., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D.F., Spitz, A.M., Edwards, V., Koss, M.P., Marks, J.S., “Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults,” *The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study*. Am J Prev Med. 1998 May;14(4): 245.

<sup>99</sup> Sack, David, “When Emotional Trauma Is a Family Affair,” accessed December 18, 2022, Where Science Meets the Steps (blog), *Psychology Today*, May 5, 2014, [www.psychologytoday.com/blog/where-science-meets-the-steps/201405/when-emotional-trauma-is-family-affair](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/where-science-meets-the-steps/201405/when-emotional-trauma-is-family-affair).

<sup>100</sup> Sack, David, “When Emotional Trauma Is a Family Affair,” accessed December 18, 2022.

<sup>101</sup> Wolynn, Mark, *It Didn't Start With You*, New York, New York, Penguin Books (2017), 32.



or engage more in substance abuse, when either parent suffered from PTSD.”<sup>102</sup> Gabor and Daniel Maté explain that, “Trauma is multi-generational, we pass onto our children what we were not able to resolve in ourselves;”<sup>103</sup> and Castro-Vale et al., researchers into the intergenerational transmission of war-related trauma agree, stating that historical or intergenerational trauma is passed down from parents to children unconsciously.<sup>104</sup> Understanding the existence of intergenerational trauma is important because a large number of CAF recruits come from military families and are therefore at a higher risk of having been exposed to family members with PTSD.

When looking at the impact of intergenerational trauma within military families, Castro-Vale et al. go so far as to suggest that the children of veterans should be comprehensively supported as part of veterans’ mental health care systems:

Significant associations between veterans’ war exposure intensity and their respective offspring’s psychopathological symptoms 40 years after the war ended should be considered when designing veterans’ mental health care systems, which should include providing extended care to the offspring into adulthood.<sup>105</sup>

While healthcare for family members outside the military is beyond the scope of this paper, the research surrounding this topic serves to underscore the prevalence and severity of intergenerational trauma. Evolving research into intergenerational trauma also indicates the presence biological and epigenetic factors, which means that trauma is passed on not only through children’s exposure to the behaviour and psychological patterns of their parents, but also through the children’s gene expression.<sup>106</sup> Considering the significance of this, the CAF should be motivated to promote the healing of its servicemembers not only to benefit the present-day CAF, but also to benefit potential future generations of recruits.

### **Adverse Childhood Experiences Shape Adult Behaviour**

Besides or in addition to intergenerational trauma, servicemembers may suffer from unconscious personal trauma as a result of ACEs. ACEs have a formative and long-lasting impact on individuals, shaping their identity and behaviour into adulthood. Many of the characteristics of destructive leaders and susceptible followers described in Chapter 1 as part of Padilla et al.’s ‘toxic triangle’ may be traced back to negative life themes or ACEs; therefore understanding ACEs is key to understanding the origins of toxic behaviour as well as potential solutions for toppling the triangle and ushering in a new state of wellness for servicemembers and a new era of healthier organizational culture.

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<sup>102</sup> Yehude, Rachel, et al., “Low Cortisol and Risk for PTSD in Adult Offspring of Holocaust Survivors,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 157(8) (August 2000): 1255.

<sup>103</sup> Maté, Gabor and Maté, Daniel, *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness & Healing in a Toxic Culture*, Ch. 1 (1:16).

<sup>104</sup> Castro-Vale, I., Severo, M., Carvalho, D., and Mota-Cardoso, R., “Intergenerational transmission of war-related trauma assessed 40 years after exposure,” 1-10.

<sup>105</sup> Castro-Vale, I., Severo, M., Carvalho, D., and Mota-Cardoso, R., “Intergenerational transmission of war-related trauma assessed 40 years after exposure,” 1-10.

<sup>106</sup> Bombay, Amy, Kimberly Matheson, and Hymie Anisman, “The Intergenerational Effects of Indian Residential Schools: Implications for the Concept of Historical Trauma,” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 51, no. 3 (2014): 324.

As mentioned earlier, adults who display destructive behaviour and who hurt others are expressing their own wounding and survival coping mechanisms, which often stem from childhood. Examples of ACEs include childhood neglect, abuse, and violence. These early experiences shape an individual's mental schematic in which all information is stored, understood, and organized. This information becomes a person's reference library that they refer back to unconsciously to comprehend and interact with their environment. Trauma creates the cataloguing system of experiences which then develop into unique behavioural manifestations and character traits later in life. Van der Kolk, when researching complex adaptations to trauma, concluded that, "Complicated adaptations to severe and prolonged trauma are not confined to children; research has shown significant long-term problems in the areas of attention, self-regulation, and personality structure."<sup>107</sup>

ACEs, viewed broadly, depend on the impact of a particular experience or environment on the child. According to van der Kolk, "What renders an experience traumatic is its failure to fit into existing conceptual schemata: Trauma overwhelms one's capacity for cognitive processing of experience, and leaves one in a state of "unspeakable terror."<sup>108</sup> In children, such an experience significantly impacts their ability to develop appropriate coping mechanisms, especially if compounded by a home environment that is not conducive to the child developing the emotional regulation skills needed to understand what is happening to them and how to overcome it. Children learn either a hyperarousal response or a dissociative response to process stressful situations.<sup>109</sup> When a child adopts a response of hyperarousal it may come across as a display of defiance (i.e. willful opposition), resistance or aggressiveness, or a persistent state of 'fight or flight,' from which they cannot escape.<sup>110</sup> On the other end of the spectrum, "the dissociative response involves avoidance or psychological flight, withdrawing from the outside world and focusing on the inner. The intensity of dissociation varies with the intensity of the trauma."<sup>111</sup> Children who become detached, numb, and may withdraw into a fantasy world are often compliant (i.e. robotic).<sup>112</sup> Bruce Perry, a medical doctor specializing in the maltreatment of children, found that, "Dissociation is more common in young children, females, and during traumatic events characterized by pain or inability to escape."<sup>113</sup> In most traumatic events, a combination of both hyperarousal and dissociation is used.<sup>114</sup> Once the event has passed, what matters is how effectively the child can return to a normalized state. This learned self-regulation becomes critical to calming the nervous system.

In comparison to their calm counterparts who are not subject to ACEs, constant fear changes how a child retrieves information from their environments. When children are calm, they use the "higher and more complex parts of their brains to process and act on

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<sup>107</sup> van der Kolk, B, "Disorders of Extreme Stress: The Empirical Foundation of a Complex Adaptation to Trauma," 390.

<sup>108</sup> van der Kolk, B.A., and Charles P. Ducey, "The Psychological Processing of Traumatic Experience: Rorschach Patterns in PTSD," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 2, no. 3 (1989): 270.

<sup>109</sup> Perry, Bruce D, M.D., Ph.D, "Maltreatment and the Developing Child: How Early Childhood Experience Shapes Child and Culture," 1-2.

<sup>110</sup> Perry, Bruce, 1-2.

<sup>111</sup> Perry, Bruce, 1-2.

<sup>112</sup> Perry, Bruce, 1-2.

<sup>113</sup> Perry, Bruce, 1-2.

<sup>114</sup> Perry, Bruce, 1-2.

information.”<sup>115</sup> When in a state of fear, the lower, more primitive areas of the brain are activated. The higher the threat, the more reactionary the thinking, which often results in more emotionally driven responses.<sup>116</sup> Continued activation of this fear driven response fundamentally alters a child’s baseline state of arousal and leads to children being incapable of higher processing or learning from their surroundings. Bruce Perry explains that, “The traumatized child lives in an aroused state, ill-prepared to learn from social, emotional, and other life experiences. She is living in the minute and may not fully appreciate the consequences of her actions.”<sup>117</sup> Van der Kolk agrees, stating that, “many studies of traumatized children find problems with unmodulated aggression and impulse control; attentional and dissociative problems; and difficulty negotiating relationships with caregivers, peers, and subsequently, marital partners.”<sup>118</sup>

Early ACEs are also linked to the inability of individuals to form long-term attachments in adulthood.<sup>119</sup> A child’s first interactions with their parents builds the framework that shape’s the child’s ongoing life narrative. Physical closeness and care-giver responsiveness lays the foundation of emotional connection and structure, which enables children to cope with stress and properly manage their emotions as adults. In *The Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Bannister et al. examined attachment orientations among American military veterans and linked these adult orientations back to childhood: “In parent-child attachment theory, the regulation of emotions and stress response development determine exactly how human beings build the skills necessary to interact with their environments. Attachment relationships are very important for a child’s functioning throughout life.”<sup>120</sup> Flaherty et al. looked specifically at mother-child attachment and determined that, while programmed in infancy, mother-child attachment can have tremendous impacts on future behaviours and how a person attracts and interacts with others later on in life.<sup>121</sup> Home environments and child-adult interaction develop emotionality (i.e. self-awareness, self-regulation, self-control, and empathy). If these emotional tools are not accessible to a child, the child and future-adult will adopt survival-based strategies to cope with relationships and unpredictable environments that they are ill-prepared to encounter.

Children who grow up in adverse environments and who are not exposed to anything different will believe what is happening to them is normal; much like susceptible followers, until these individuals discover that what they have experienced is actually abnormal, they will not be able to understand what healthy is. Unbeknownst to these individuals, their ACEs form the underpinning of their personality and behaviour. Their survival strategies, or defence mechanisms, shape their behaviours and drive their life narratives. Unless and until they become

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<sup>115</sup> Perry, Bruce, 1-2.

<sup>116</sup> Perry, Bruce, 5-6.

<sup>117</sup> Perry, Bruce, , “Maltreatment and the Developing Child: How Early Childhood Experience Shapes Child and Culture,” 3.

<sup>118</sup> van der Kolk, B, “Disorders of Extreme Stress: The Empirical Foundation of a Complex Adaptation to Trauma,” 390.

<sup>119</sup> Anda, Robert F., Vincent J. Felitti, J. Douglas Bremner, John D. Walker, Charles Whitfield, Bruce D. Perry, Shanta R. Dube, and Wayne H. Giles, “The Enduring Effects of Abuse and Related Adverse Experiences in Childhood. A Convergence of Evidence from Neurobiology and Epidemiology,” 180-81.

<sup>120</sup> Bannister, Jenny A., Frederick G. Lopez, Deleene S. Menefee, Peter J. Norton, and Jill Wanner, “Military and Premilitary Trauma, Attachment Orientations, and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Severity among Male and Female Veterans,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 31, no. 4 (2018): 558-567.

<sup>121</sup> Flaherty, S.C., Sadler, L.S., “A review of attachment theory in the context of adolescent parenting,” *J Pediatr Health Care*, 2011 Mar-Apr 25(2): 114-5.

conscious of their trauma, they will be stuck on auto-pilot navigating what they believe is normal, and they will not be able to achieve self-awareness and self-actualization.

In servicemembers, the pattern of adult behaviour created by ACEs may appear as either susceptible follower behaviour or destructive leader behaviour. Both types of behaviours may result from the two types of responses individuals exhibit in response to trauma that were mentioned previously in this sub-chapter: hyper-arousal or dissociation. Hyper-arousal leads to anxiety, worrying and not wanting to do wrong.<sup>122</sup> Susceptible followers experiencing hyper-arousal may seek to avoid punishment and harsh treatment by agreeing to follow the direction of destructive leaders, against the follower's own better judgement, in order to avoid reprisal. In the case of dissociation, which involves a person disconnecting from the 'self' in order to distance themselves from the discomfort of stressful situations,<sup>123</sup> a destructive leader may be unaware of how their actions are impacting others and the surrounding environment. Early exposure to trauma distorts an individual's view of the world and can make a person disassociate their role in reality and make them justify their wrongful actions. These are two of many possibilities in which susceptible follower or destructive leader behaviour can result from ACEs. The next sub-chapter will use a specific framework to examine more closely this link between ACEs and the behaviour of destructive leaders and susceptible followers.

### **Bourbeau's Five Wounds**

Lise Bourbeau, a specialist in ACEs as they relate to personal growth and well-being, examines ACEs within the framework of five wounds. Using Bourbeau's five-wound framework, this sub-chapter will examine how specific ACEs lead to foundational personality and behavioural traits characteristic of susceptible followers and destructive leaders. Understanding the origins of the ACE, or the 'wound', sheds light on how trauma may manifest as destructive or susceptible behaviours and personality traits within conducive environments. Understanding this connection between childhood wound and wounded adult will better enable CAF leadership to address health challenges related to unconscious personal trauma in servicemembers.

Echoing Robert Anda, who argued that childhood trauma is the greatest public health issue facing the world, Bourbeau contends that, "Trauma is the most avoided, ignored, belittled denied, misunderstood, and untreated cause of human suffering."<sup>124</sup> Bourbeau lists five types of wounds that result from Adverse Childhood Experiences. The five wounds are: rejection, abandonment, humiliation, betrayal, and injustice. Although classifications of wounds and type vary from researcher to researcher, Bourbeau has distilled her research into these categories, stating that, "all problems of a physical, emotional or mental order come from the five sources of hurt."<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Perry, Bruce, "Maltreatment and the Developing Child: How Early Childhood Experience Shapes Child and Culture," 1-2.

<sup>123</sup> Perry, Bruce D, M.D., Ph.D, "Maltreatment and the Developing Child: How Early Childhood Experience Shapes Child and Culture," 1-2.

<sup>124</sup> Levine, P., "EMDR and Somatic Experiencing," accessed on December 18, 2022, <https://www.hopeinhealing.org/emdr-and-somatic-experiencing/>.

<sup>125</sup> Bourbeau, L. *Heal your wounds and find your true self*, Editions ETC Inc., (July 7, 2020), 5-6.

The first wound evaluated under Lise Bourbeau's construct is rejection, which occurs when thoughts or feelings of rejection, knowingly or unknowingly are passed on to a child.<sup>126</sup> This oftentimes makes the child feel like a burden or not wanted by their parent. People who carry this wound may avoid making deep connections, may question their existence, become depressed, avoid confrontations, and oftentimes spend their time in imaginary places (i.e. disassociating). Having felt rejected by their parents, the people who brought them into the world, these individuals often do not believe in their right to exist.<sup>127</sup> They may experience feelings of self-disappointment, meaninglessness, the need to constantly defend oneself, and a lack of self-respect. Individuals experiencing the wound of rejection may constantly strive to earn the worthiness of the ones by whom they felt rejected, and as they age, they may expand this search for worthiness to other people beyond their parents.<sup>128</sup> Perfection becomes an obsession as these individuals work tirelessly to earn the recognition and love that they feel was not given to them. These individuals tend to work extraordinarily hard to be noticed by others and will do anything to fit into an organization and to feel needed.

A service member experiencing the wound of rejection may drive themselves and their subordinates to work hard for the wrong reasons: to receive the validation of higher echelons of command rather than seeking to achieve the mission for the sake of the mission. This is destructive leader behaviour. These service members may also be risk avoidant because they fear failure and fear disappointing their superiors; and being too risk avoidant may compromise their operational effectiveness. Being risk avoidant or unwilling to disappoint superiors is susceptible follower behaviour. These service members may conform to a destructive leader's vision so they can feel accepted and feel as though their life has meaning, even if the institution they are conforming to is not healthy. Lastly, due to a profound lack of self-worth, individuals experiencing the wound of rejection may wish to be anyone but themselves; so they may find it appealing to join the military, where they can put on a uniform every day and get to be someone new with a purpose, acceptance, and a defined role in the world.

The second wound in Bourbeau's framework is abandonment. In abandonment, while the child does not feel outright rejected by their parent, they experience a lack of attention and emotional support from the parent. This wound occurs when a parent is absent and the child feels as if it is their fault. The feeling of blame and the lack of attention and emotional connection may lead to problems with independence, a fear of being alone, suffering from deep unknown sadness, a lack of emotional regulation skills, development of a victim persona, joining with others to attract attention, being 'self-interested,' and poor decision-making skills.<sup>129</sup> An individual experiencing the wound of abandonment may be unable to end toxic relationships for fear of being alone. These individuals may also adopt a dependent personality, where the individual will depend on others for their 'purpose' and 'existence' on this earth; or, they may develop a 'savior complex,' which allows them to feel as though they are needed, irreplaceable, and that others depend on them.

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<sup>126</sup> Bourbeau, L, *Heal your wounds and find your true self*, 29.

<sup>127</sup> Fallahi, N, "An Empath's Guide to Self Care: For Healing, Nourishment and Peace," accessed on November 4, 2022, <https://spiritualgrowthevents.com/events/empaths-guide-self-care-dr-natasha-fallahi/>.

<sup>128</sup> Bourbeau, Lise, *Heal your wounds and find your true self*, 30.

<sup>129</sup> Bourbeau, Lise, *Heal your wounds and find your true self*, 30.

In service members, the inability to end toxic relationships may manifest as susceptible followers being unable to counter destructive leaders for fear of being alone. Susceptible individuals may follow the higher echelons of destructive leadership as they are dependent on the leaders for support, safety, purpose, and validation. Similarly, destructive leaders may seek the validation of higher echelons rather than the well-being of their subordinates. This is a relentless pursuit of affection to account for the affection that was not received in childhood.<sup>130</sup> Marcia Lynn Whicker, in her study on toxic leadership and unhealthy organizations, describes this transactional leadership style as 'The Busybody' who is affection and attention craving.<sup>131</sup> These individuals,

deeply want to belong to the group as they find meaning and a sense of importance. Outside groups, they find nothing...Busybodies are particularly afraid of being excluded from the group. The sources of fear may vary from individual to individual and likely lie buried deeply in childhood.<sup>132</sup>

As a result, these service members may be extremely susceptible to 'group think' and to the influence of leadership, good or bad.

These service members may also be loyal to the institution in a way that is unhealthy rather than healthy. If they feel dependent on the CAF for self-affirmation, belonging, and for the confirmation of their purpose and identity, they may be unable to critically examine the institution. As destructive leaders, these individuals may continually challenge 'outside of the box opinions' and suppress dissenters, due to a perceived threat to the organization, thereby preventing subordinates from expressing initiative and creativity and from providing novel solutions.

The third wound identified by Bourbeau is humiliation. Humiliation occurs when a child experiences shame surrounding a physical or sensual behaviour.<sup>133</sup> This can lead to a self-harming adult who believes they are constantly being observed, who feels unworthy of love, serves others before self, restrains their words, and feels the need to justify their actions. Their adult behaviour can take the form of dissociation, separation, and denial.<sup>134</sup> These individuals are typically known for being people-pleasers, self-harming, and for exuding constant self-doubt. These individuals may have an intense sense of duty, which may prevent them from enjoying moments or things for themselves.

Service members with a wound of humiliation may behave as dedicated over-achievers, as they feel consistently unworthy and seek external validation; however it is never enough, because in truth the person is seeking their own validation, which cannot come from others or from an institution. As destructive leaders, these service members may work relentlessly at the risk of burnout and may push their subordinates to exhibit the same behaviours, reaching for unattainable goals. As susceptible followers, these service members may be unable to challenge destructive leadership because their own self-esteem is not high enough to give them the required

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<sup>130</sup> Bourbeau, Lise, *Heal your wounds and find your true self*, 54.

<sup>131</sup> Whicker, Marcia Lynn, *Toxic Leaders: When Organizations Go Bad*, Westport, CT: Quorum, 1996, 83-84.

<sup>132</sup> Whicker, Marcia Lynn, *Toxic Leaders: When Organizations Go Bad*, 91.

<sup>133</sup> Bourbeau, Lise, *Heal your wounds and find your true self*, 75.

<sup>134</sup> Bourbeau, Lise, *Heal your wounds and find your true self*, 75.

confidence. Also, they may doubt their own experiences and perception of events, making them unable to identify destructive behaviour in the first place.<sup>135</sup>

The fourth wound in Bourbeau's framework is betrayal, which occurs when parents make promises that are not kept, or when parents lie.<sup>136</sup> This may make children mistrusting of others and of their environment, and it may make them unsure of reality. Adults with a wound of betrayal may seek to impose their will and point of view onto others in order to control situations and maintain their own perception of reality. With this comes a lack of sensitivity, a need to demonstrate personal strength in everything they do, and the constant pursuit of self-improvement. These individuals seek to improve and to be the best at everything to avoid feeling weak and to avoid exhibiting the weakness they observed in their parent. Recognition and reputation may be very important to these individuals, and they may hold themselves to unreasonably high expectations.

Bourbeau states that betrayed individuals may become preoccupied with control. "Controllers control to make sure they keep their promises, are faithful and responsible, or to make sure other people keep their commitments."<sup>137</sup> Marcia Whicker, in her study on toxic leaders and toxic organizations, further describes 'controller personalities' as, "Rigid transactional leaders who are traditionalists and perfectionists. Their need to command others leads them to micromanage organizational affairs...Controllers manipulate followers predominantly through the control of information."<sup>138</sup> Furthermore, when things do not go to plan, these individuals routinely exhibit a lack of flexibility.<sup>139</sup>

As service members, individuals with the wound of betrayal may become destructive leaders due to their tendency to micromanage, which stifles the growth of their subordinates, preventing subordinates from achieving job fulfillment and self-actualization. Their need for control and lack of flexibility may also contribute to decreased operational effectiveness, since 'no plan survives first contact.' These leaders cannot adapt and cannot depend on others for input as they have restrained decision making, controlled information, and eliminated mission command. Lastly, their inability to trust others and their intolerance for weakness and for contradictory opinions may make these leaders very unpleasant individuals to work for or with.

The final wound identified by Bourbeau is injustice. This wound occurs when a child is treated in a way that they believe is cruel or unfair, and the child feels as if an injustice has been done to them.<sup>140</sup> In the *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Boals et. al published an article focusing on injustice that concluded that perceived injustices are much greater when experienced through close relationships, such as parent to child, vice greater societal or world injustices; however

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<sup>135</sup> Padilla, Art, Robert Hogan, and Robert B. Kaiser., "The Toxic Triangle: Destructive Leaders, Susceptible Followers, and Conducive Environments," 185.

<sup>136</sup> Bourbeau, Lise, *Heal your wounds and find your true self*, 105.

<sup>137</sup> Bourbeau, Lise, *Heal your wounds and find your true self*, 106.

<sup>138</sup> Whicker, Marcia Lynn. *Toxic Leaders: When Organizations Go Bad*, 65.

<sup>139</sup> Bourbeau, Lise, *Heal your wounds and find your true self*, 110.

<sup>140</sup> Bourbeau, Lise, *Heal your wounds and find your true self*, 135.

each type of injustice may cause deep-seeded trauma.<sup>141</sup> Adults with a wound of injustice may be abnormally harsh or rigid, as they are reacting to what they perceive to be a cruel world. In the *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, Ellenbogen et al. note that, “Children who are subjected to harsher maltreatment are more at risk of developing aggression problems.”<sup>142</sup> The harshness or aggression serves to balance the scales of injustice, by inflicting the individual’s own, undeserved pain onto someone else; and the rigidity acts as a defense mechanism against a cruel world, protecting the individual from experiencing future hurt.

In service members, wounds of injustice may take the form of destructive leaders who treat their subordinates harshly or unfairly. These leaders may be unable or unwilling to promote the full welfare of their subordinates, as they subconsciously do not want others to succeed or to flourish. If others were to receive proper care and support, it may further exacerbate the leader’s feeling that they were treated unfairly by not receiving their own share of care and support.<sup>143</sup>

Susceptible followers with a wound of injustice may be unable to identify destructive leadership and toxic environments, since they already perceive the world to be cruel and unfair and may believe that toxic environments are normal and acceptable. Susceptible followers may not believe that better treatment and healthier environments are possible.

### **The Authentic Self, Identity, and Enlistment**

The woundedness, or trauma, described above not only influences adult behaviour, it also impacts how an individual creates their own identity, or sense of self in the world. Wounds make tiny fractures in who we are, who we become, and our understanding of ourselves. If we understand the ‘why’ of how this happens, it can help us to heal these unintentional fractures in our character. Identity itself is defined as, “the condition of being oneself and not another...condition or character as to who a person or what a thing is: the qualities, beliefs, etc., that distinguish or identify a person or thing.”<sup>144</sup> The foundation of our identity is constructed by our first interactions with our surroundings, and this foundation is built upon as we age. Our birth, raising, education, chosen profession and work environments all shape how we see ourselves and our place in the world. Identity grows and shifts throughout an individual’s life, through the ebbs and flows of interaction.<sup>145</sup>

The mechanisms by which an individual develops into the person they want to be can be broken into four categories: the continuity of self over time, distinctiveness, self-esteem, and self-efficacy.<sup>146</sup> All of these are skills developed in infancy to understand needs, desires, and the

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<sup>141</sup> Boals, Adriel., Trost, Zina., Warren, Ann Marie., and Evan E. McShan, “Injustice is Served: Injustice Mediates the Effects of Interpersonal Physical Trauma on Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms and Depression Following Traumatic Injury,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 33, no. 3 (2020): 205.

<sup>142</sup> Ellenbogen, Stephen., Trocmé, Nico., and Christine Wekerle, “The Relationship between Dimensions of Physical Abuse and Aggressive Behavior in a Child Protective Services Involved Sample of Adolescents,” *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma* 6, no. 2 (2013): 94-5.

<sup>143</sup> Bourbeau, Lise, *Heal your wounds and find your true self*, 139.

<sup>144</sup> “Identity,” accessed December 19, 2022, <https://www.dictionnaire.com/browse/identity>.

<sup>145</sup> Sneed, J. R., & Whitbourne, S. K., “Identity Processing and Self-Consciousness in Middle and Later Adulthood,” 313.

<sup>146</sup> Stone, Debra M, “Predictors of Military Enlistment: Analysis of Adverse Childhood Experiences, Socio-Economic Status, Educational Achievement, and Delinquency,” 40.



interactions of self in the environment. The continuity of self over time is the notion of one's place in the world and what their place looks like in the future. Distinctiveness is remaining different from others and having a defining characteristic, or offering something to the world to define an individual's role in the eco-system that is culture. Self-esteem is feeling competent and confident in belonging and comfortable being distinct and having an idea of one's identity or role. Self-efficacy begins very young, and it is the sense of being capable to do and exist on one's own terms.<sup>147</sup>

If an individual suffers early traumas, one or all of the above categories may be affected. If parents do not allow their children to grow up feeling loved, worthy, or that they belonged, these children may be unable to create a healthy core identity. Instead, they may adopt the identity that allowed them to fit into their dysfunctional family or social hierarchy, to the detriment of their distinct and further development; or they may develop an unstable identity.<sup>148</sup> An identity shaped from traumatic raising can lead to issues in determining an individuals' core identity and may make the individual especially susceptible to adopting organizational socialization and influence.

Identity over time is formed through three mechanisms: assimilation, accommodation, or evaluation. Assimilation involves following what the environment does, accommodation involves adopting characteristics that are beneficial to solidify a role in an organization, and evaluation is trial and error to determine which qualities and characteristics are more favoured by the institution.<sup>149</sup> Identity Process Theory (IPT) proposes that in order to adjust identity, three processes are used: identity assimilation (maintaining self-consistency), identity accommodation (making changes in the self), and identity balance (maintaining a sense of self but changing when necessary).<sup>150</sup> Social learning theory focuses on agency, self-efficacy, locus of control, and self-regulation.<sup>151</sup> Whereas, humanistic or existential theory is focused heavily on reaching self-actualization, personal constructs, meaning, responsibility, and personal myths.<sup>152</sup>

The model hypothesized below posits that authenticity is centered around self-worth; and in order to be an authentic leader, the basic needs and self-efficacy in the chosen role must be met at the individual level. This is achieved through making sure individuals know their role and purpose in an organization and empowering members to achieve self-worth and other higher-level needs.

Persons with fragile self-esteem may engage in inauthentic behaviors that serve to protect their ego, such as rationalizing when they fail to live up to espoused values or lying to

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<sup>147</sup> Stone, Debra M, "Predictors of Military Enlistment: Analysis of Adverse Childhood Experiences, Socio-Economic Status, Educational Achievement, and Delinquency," 40.

<sup>148</sup> McGurk, D., Cotting, D. I., Britt, T. W., & Adler, A. B. (2006), "Joining the Ranks: The Role of Indoctrination in Transforming Civilians to Service Members," 22.

<sup>149</sup> Sneed, J. R., & Whitbourne, S. K., "Identity Processing and Self-Consciousness in Middle and Later Adulthood," 314.

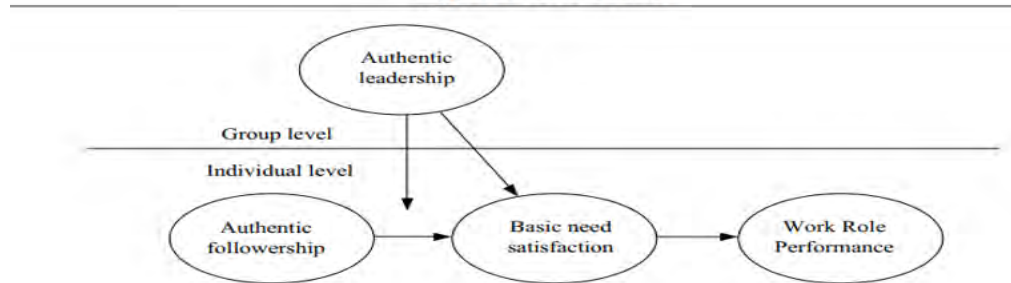
<sup>150</sup> Sneed, J. R., & Whitbourne, S. K., 313.

<sup>151</sup> Hauge, Åshild Lappegard, "Identity and Place: A Critical Comparison of Three Identity Theories," *Architectural Science Review*, 2007, 50:1, 46.

<sup>152</sup> Hauge, Åshild Lappegard, "Identity and Place: A Critical Comparison of Three Identity Theories," 46.

foster a positive image. In other words, fragile feelings of self-worth foster ego-defensive behaviors that hinder personal growth.<sup>153</sup>

**Figure 1**  
**Hypothesized Model**



The CAF challenges these four principles of authenticity, as it relies on indoctrination and conformity to sustain obedience and discipline.<sup>154</sup> These challenges to identity are experienced from the first moments of basic training, where members are expected to sacrifice the notion of self for the greater institution, something bigger than one's self. Continuity of self over time and distinctiveness are challenged by stripping each member of their civilian titles, clothing, and role in society. Whereas self-esteem and self-efficacy are challenged by the military's daily operating environment. Uniform, routine, and discipline are tools used to socialize expected norms through assimilation, accommodation and evaluation. If these severely contradict a person's identity, or if they do not align with the individuals core beliefs, the member will leave the forces, unless they have no other options and remain in uniform constantly grappling with assimilating, accommodating, or challenging the new identity.

The CAF must strike a balance between the requirements of conformity and the personal needs of its members. This approach is not typically associated with the military, as self-actualized individuals challenge norms with their own personal constructs, meanings, and intrinsic responsibility to ensure they are in line with their moral compass. If individuals are not able to conform, this can lead to a constant challenging and internal struggle of one's personal identity. On the other hand, when a person is shaped to not be self-actualized and lacks the personal construct necessary to challenge negative influences (destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and environments), they assimilate or adopt the identity which challenges their raising least (susceptible followers).

Identity not only influences an individual's behaviour while serving in the forces, it is also a driving factor in initial enlistment. One study proposed that military enlistment can be explained as an identity coping strategy for young adults struggling with the negative effects of four independent variables: Low socio-economic status, underachievement in school,

<sup>153</sup> Leroy, Hannes, F. Anseel, W. Gardner, and L. Sels, "Authentic Leadership, Authentic Followership, Basic Need Satisfaction, and Work Role Performance: A Cross-Level Study," *Journal of Management* 41, no. 6 (2015): 1680.

<sup>154</sup> McGurk, D., Cotting, D. I., Britt, T. W., & Adler, A. B. (2006), "Joining the Ranks: The Role of Indoctrination in Transforming Civilians to Service Members," 16.

delinquency, and ACEs.<sup>155</sup> Individuals struggling with these variables were more likely to enlist to solidify or find their place in this world.<sup>156</sup> Identity process theory (IPT) and the Threatened Identity Model (TIM) explain that an occupational identity is one of the most crucial developmental milestones for young adults to achieve and for those with a history of delinquency and/or ACEs, occupational choice is significantly restricted. In congruence with IPT and TIM, military enlistment can be used as an important social coping mechanism for those suffering from the negative effects of ACEs and/or delinquency as a consequence of ACEs, and the data seems to validate this theory.<sup>157</sup> The military is one of the few and perhaps the only institution available for some young adults attempting to end past negative behaviors or abuse and form an occupational identity.<sup>158</sup>

Occupational identity is very important because the occupation becomes the social and psychological organizing structure for an individual.<sup>159</sup> In the Easterbrook study, “Overwhelmingly, participants said that their occupations had become a critical part of their identity... The inability to escape the perception that their sole identity was as military.”<sup>160</sup> In addition, young adulthood is characterized as a stage of developmental crisis where external threats to identity, such as unemployment, lack of education, or lack of job training, have the greatest impact on long term adult health and welfare. Arnett (2000) explains that, “While the emerging adult passes through this stage of development, there is much emotional and relational upheaval relative to finding a suitable occupational identity.”<sup>161</sup> Military enlistment offers young adults facing threats to identity an immediate resolution and provides a positive internal sense of self, which will be necessary to improve their position in adulthood. Peer group is often used as, “an intermediary stage between reliance on family for support and the point of emotional maturity, and the army, in particular when exposed to war...maximizes the impact of peer group cohesion.”<sup>162</sup>

Military enlistment may be a particularly attractive option for individuals whose identity challenges are related to personal trauma. In her PhD dissertation on ‘Predictors of Military Enlistment,’ Debra Stone found ACEs to be more prevalent among military personnel than their

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<sup>155</sup> Stone, Debra M, “Predictors of Military Enlistment: Analysis of Adverse Childhood Experiences, Socioeconomic Status, Educational Achievement, and Delinquency,” 77.

<sup>156</sup> Teachman, J., & Tedrow, L. (2014), “Delinquent behavior, the transition to adulthood, and the likelihood of military enlistment,” *Social Science Research*, 5, 46-7.

<sup>157</sup> Blosnich, J., Dichter, M., Cerulli, C., Batten, S., & Bossarte, R. (2014), “Disparities in adverse childhood experiences among individuals with a history of military service,” *Journal of the American Medical Association Psychiatry*, 71(9), 1047.

<sup>158</sup> Teachman, J., & Tedrow, L. (2014), “Delinquent behavior, the transition to adulthood, and the likelihood of military enlistment,” 46-7.

<sup>159</sup> Erikson, E. (1968), *Identity youth and crisis*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

<sup>160</sup> Easterbrook, Bethany, Brown, Andrea., Millman, Heather., Van Blyderveen, Sherry., Lanius, Ruth., Heber, Alex., McKinnon, Margaret., and Charlene O’Connor, “Original Qualitative Research - the Mental Health Experience of Treatment-Seeking Military Members and Public Safety Personnel: A Qualitative Investigation of Trauma and Non-Trauma-Related Concerns,” *Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention in Canada* 42, no. 6 (2022): 255.

<sup>161</sup> Arnett, J. J. (2000), “Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties,” *American Psychologist*, 55(5), 469 – 480.

<sup>162</sup> van der Kolk, Bessel A, “Adolescent Vulnerability to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder,” *Psychiatry* (Washington, D.C.) 48, no. 4 (1985): 365.

civilian counterparts.<sup>163</sup> Furthermore, Sneed and Whitbourne's research into identity processing found that exposure to trauma is linked to shifting self-identity and awareness.<sup>164</sup> The parameters of identity researched include an individual's leadership identity: "The scale of non-violent trauma and the effect on identity and self-esteem are closely related. As a result, self-identity and leader awareness can change after exposure to non-violent trauma."<sup>165</sup> It is therefore important to view military enlistment as not only an occupational selection, but as an identity choice that may be influenced by an individual's personal trauma.

Early trauma not only influences adult behaviour in the form of adopted coping strategies and defence mechanisms, as explained previously in this chapter, early trauma also impacts identity creation, which in turn impacts adult behaviour. Glynis Breakwell's (1986) research into coping with threatened identities states that, "action is the social expression of identity" and that "identity is the primary motivator of behavior."<sup>166</sup> It is important to understand that actions, including emotional response, are supported by values, knowledge, attitudes and social structures. While identity is expressed through, "action upon the environment,...the environmental stimuli are interpreted through values and belief systems that are then mediated by identity processes."<sup>167</sup>

While there is an, "innate, unconscious human motivation to maintain one's identity,"<sup>168</sup> IPT and TIM asserts that identity is also a continual, non-static process that changes throughout the life span as intra- and inter-personal situations dictate. IPT and TIM view identity development as a non-linear process that can be transformed to change behavior.<sup>169</sup> This is fundamental to understanding why certain individuals choose the military and how they may be changed when exposed to various environmental conditions through different values and beliefs systems that run counter to their pre-existing values and beliefs system. People are malleable and adaptable, so if an environment can change, so can the people, and toxicity can be eradicated.

The impact of the environment and social surroundings can shift identity in both positive and negative ways. Therefore the CAF, as a social environment, has the power to positively and negatively affect the identity of service members. Debra Stone states, "For adolescents with multiple ACEs, compliance with the warrior identity and breaking away from victimization can have profound positive effects on self-esteem, self-efficacy, and distinctiveness."<sup>170</sup> Furthermore, Stone argues that, "Military enlistment offers relief from the negative psychological consequences of growing up in a neglectful or abusive environment because it immediately produces a hero's identity or the notion that they are a 'good person', and geographically takes them out of a bad situation."<sup>171</sup> On the other hand, Breakwell explains that identity development may be restricted by the social stereotypes associated with military personnel: "An individual

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<sup>163</sup> Stone, Debra M, "Predictors of Military Enlistment," 3.

<sup>164</sup> Sneed, J. R., and Whitbourne, S. K., "Identity Processing and Self-Consciousness in Middle and Later Adulthood," 6-7.

<sup>165</sup> Sneed, J. R., and Whitbourne, S. K., 6-7.

<sup>166</sup> Breakwell, G. M. (1986), *Coping with threatened identity*, New York, NY: Methuen & Co, 43

<sup>167</sup> McGurk, D., Cotting, D. I., Britt, T. W., & Adler, A. B. (2006), "Joining the Ranks: The Role of Indoctrination in Transforming Civilians to Service Members," 24.

<sup>168</sup> Stone, Debra M, "Predictors of Military Enlistment," 29.

<sup>169</sup> Stone, Debra M, "Predictors of Military Enlistment," 30.

<sup>170</sup> Stone, Debra M, "Predictors of Military Enlistment, 37.

<sup>171</sup> Stone, Debra M, "Predictors of Military Enlistment, 36-7.

coping strategy implemented to manage self-esteem, continuity, distinctiveness, and self-efficacy is limited by the social stereotype attached to the identity choice.”<sup>172</sup> This means that group think and group value systems can have a significant impact on already vulnerable individuals. Stereotypes of the military identity include toughness and aggressiveness, attributes that are useful on the battlefield but do not leave room for vulnerability or perceived weakness, which makes it difficult to openly address and rectify personal trauma.

Other characteristics of the military environment have a similar ability to positively or negatively impact identity. While the military may foster an environment of teamwork, discipline and friendship, it can also extend adolescence due to its culture and hierarchy.<sup>173</sup> Soldiers are instructed and micromanaged throughout their training: “Told when to get up, what to wear, what to look like, how to speak, how not to speak, and whom to support or kill, which stunts the development of higher levels of abstract thinking and problem-solving.”<sup>174</sup> This limits individuality and thinking for oneself, which is dangerous when destructive leaders are put in positions of power and susceptible followers under their control are unable to challenge orders or behaviours that are contrary to the follower’s moral compass or belief system.<sup>175</sup> As a result, susceptible followers may adopt fundamentally flawed beliefs and values of compliance, which shape their new identity to align with the person controlling the environment. Young adults with multiple ACEs must be encouraged to think critically, solve problems, and become insightful in order to counter and question toxic environments. They must be able to move from lower-level survival needs to higher-level self-actualization needs so that their identities can develop fully and authentically.

### **CHAPTER 3: TOPPLE THE TRIANGLE: TRAUMA-INFORMED LEADERSHIP AND HOLISTIC WELLNESS**

#### **Awareness, Accountability, and Trauma-Informed Leadership**

So far, this paper has described the three components of Padilla et al.’s toxic triangle as a model to understand current CAF organizational culture, and it has examined how unconscious personal trauma may perpetuate the triangle through behaviours and identity processes related to destructive leaders and susceptible followers. In the final chapter, this paper will examine how to topple the triangle and usher in new possibilities for a healthier (and by extension more operationally effective) CAF culture.

Jackson et al, in a study that applied the toxic triangle model to military sexual trauma in the US, note that, “These interactions (the full toxic triangle), must be in operation to obtain the undesired outcomes.”<sup>176</sup> Therefore, influencing one component of the triangle has the power to

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<sup>172</sup> Breakwell, G. M. (1986). *Coping with threatened identity*. New York, NY: Methuen & Co.

<sup>173</sup> Wang, L., Elder, D. H., & Spence, N. J. (2012), “Status configurations, military service and higher education,” *Social Forces*, 91(2), 397–422.

<sup>174</sup> Stone, Debra M, “Predictors of Military Enlistment,” 38.

<sup>175</sup> Stone, Debra M, “Predictors of Military Enlistment,” 36.

<sup>176</sup> Jackson, Robert J., Douglas R. Lindsay, and Alicia A. Matteson, “Military Sexual Trauma: An Application of the Toxic Triangle Model,” *Military Behavioral Health* 2, no. 1 (2014): 64-66.

break the negative feedback loop and topple the triangle. While this paper has discussed some negative consequences resulting from the CAF's intensely hierarchical structure, the CAF's hierarchy also presents an opportunity to influence positive change through a top-down approach. Fittingly, destructive leadership sits at the top of the toxic triangle; and if destructive leadership is addressed, there is potential to eliminate toxic working environments.

Beginning at the top, leaders must be held accountable. However, for destructive leaders, they may be unable to self-reflect and identify their own destructive behaviour. Whether from narcissism or dissociation (discussed in Chapter 2), destructive leaders may be unable to perceive the impact of their actions on their followers and their environment. Therefore, the entire leadership echelon must be Trauma-Informed in order to identify the signs of destructive leadership and to hold these individuals accountable and assist their healing and growth. Destructive leaders must be made aware of their issues, poor attitudes, behaviours and impacts. They may require treatment, mentoring and coaching to become self-aware, address their issues, and develop into the constructive leaders their subordinates and the institution need them to be.

To create better leaders, as every service member is a leader in their own right, every CAF member experiencing issues should be counselled and held accountable through various institutional controls. Upon recruitment, all members should receive trauma awareness training and be tested for Emotional Intelligence (EQi). This would enable not only leaders but all members to be more conscious of their start state and what they need to actively work on to be better. EQi evaluates the following 5 factors: self-perception (i.e. self-regard, self-actualization, emotional awareness, self-awareness and boundaries), self-expression (i.e. emotional expression, assertiveness, independence, confidence, authority, transparency and openness), interpersonal skills (i.e. empathy, social responsibility and maintenance of personal relationships), decision-making (i.e. problem solving, reality testing, impulse control and responsiveness to change), and stress management (i.e. flexibility, adapting to change, stress tolerance, resilience and optimism).<sup>177</sup> Based on this paper's earlier discussions of trauma, it is easy to see how an individual's EQi qualities can be impacted by their various sources of trauma and life experiences.

The great thing about EQi is that it can be learned, developed, and improved upon; however, an individual must be conscious and willing to acknowledge their flaws, limitations and areas requiring improvement for any coaching to be valuable. In addition to implementing baseline testing of EQi for all members joining the forces, the CAF should conduct routine follow-ups as the members reach critical leadership milestones throughout their careers. This should not be used as a punitive measure but as a personal development tool to arm all members with the skills required to be successful in the organization and to contribute positively to the organizational culture.

Besides EQi testing, the CAF can improve leadership accountability at all levels by implementing mandatory annual 360-degree assessments, where a leader's **entire** staff is given the freedom to evaluate their leadership and provide unfiltered feedback. Individuals who require more coaching will be identified and will then be able to access the coaching or treatment they

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<sup>177</sup> "What is EQi?" accessed on January 20, 2023, <https://www.risingeq.com/rising-eq-provides-emotional-intelligence-test/>.

need. 360-degree evaluations would increase oversight of management and transparency by not permitting destructive leaders to hide in plain sight. Once these evaluations and subsequent coaching are completed, if a deeper dive into underlying personal issues is required, it can be offered. This requires oversight and direction, since people who need help the most are often not the ones actively seeking it out.

Members experiencing behavioural, emotional, and conduct issues that cannot be corrected by coaching or mentoring should be directed to mental health treatment. As previously discussed, mental health in the CAF carries a significant stigma with it. However, with a Trauma-Informed Leadership that understands the complexity and breadth of trauma beyond the current focus on service-related PTSD, it will reduce the stigma associated with seeking treatment. Moreover, the stigma of therapy can be lessened through a more holistic approach to overall health and wellness. Mental, emotional, and spiritual health can be addressed in tandem, not only as a means of treating specific disorders, but as a means of optimizing health for all service members. Ideally, treatment should be made available outside of the confines of the CAF medical system. This would allow members to access various forms of holistic wellness, and it would provide an alternative means of treatment for service members who may be wary of the CAF medical system, either due to past negative experiences or due to a fear of the stigma and perceived career repercussions associated with seeking treatment within the military. Mental health should become a routine tune-up, and members should be empowered to seek whichever practitioner or wellness guide best meets their needs. Making treatment available outside of the CAF would ensure that members who want help get it, and if rehabilitation is unsuccessful, members can choose other employment better suited to them. The CAF must allow its members to seek help before firing them, as sending an already vulnerable person out the door can further exacerbate symptoms down the road.

While the greatest impact may be made by identifying and rehabilitating destructive leaders, it is also important for the CAF to identify and rehabilitate susceptible followers. A Trauma-Informed Leadership will be able to see the signs and symptoms of trauma-related susceptible followership and provide the care needed to these individuals. As explained in Chapter 2, personal trauma may not be highly obvious or visible, rather it is likely to be hidden in habits, actions, and core behaviours. One subtle yet indicative symptom is persistent stress even when external conditions are not particularly stressful, which indicates that an individual may be stuck in ‘fight or flight’ responses, living in a constant state of amygdala activation.<sup>178</sup> Another symptom is withdrawal or avoidance, a reversion to the learned childhood response which in an adult may take the form of behaviours such as excessive alcohol consumption, risky behaviour, or detachment.<sup>179</sup>

It should also be noted that serving in a toxic environment under destructive leaders may itself be a form of trauma. Persistent exposure to toxic environments and destructive leaders may leave service members feeling frightened, humiliated, rejected, abandoned, under constant threat, invalidated, unsafe, unsupported, ashamed, trapped, and ultimately powerless. It is imperative that after being exposed to trauma that followers are able to take a step back to re-assess or

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<sup>178</sup> Shaw, Beth, “When Trauma gets stuck in the Body,” *Psychology Today*, accessed on January 23, 2023, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-the-body/201910/when-trauma-gets-stuck-in-the-body>.

<sup>179</sup> Perry, Bruce D, M.D., Ph.D., “Maltreatment and the Developing Child: How Early Childhood Experience Shapes Child and Culture,” 1-2.

evaluate themselves and to access the care they need to properly and fully recover. In addition to individual care, the CAF can help reduce susceptible followership by instituting a culture that promotes personal development at all levels. If all service members are encouraged to seek personal growth and to engage in creativity and higher-level thinking (achieve self-actualization), all followers will be better able to maintain authentic identities and stand up for themselves in the face of destructive leadership. Again, a holistic wellness approach may be useful here, as followers will be empowered to pursue paths of personal wellness and growth. They will not be confined to the lower-level survival and safety needs of Maslow's hierarchy.

Besides providing opportunities for followers to engage in personal growth and move toward self-actualization, if the CAF is going to have any success in countering destructive individuals, we must also create an environment that empowers all service members to speak out, be open, honest, and transparent. By giving followers a sense of power and control over the leadership through transparent 360-degree leader assessments, this will create a balance of power in the institution, enabling followers to address issues quickly. This will not only hold the leader and institution accountable, but the follower as well; if they collude and follow a destructive leader, they will be held accountable by others who speak out. 360-degree evaluations should be an explicit criterion for promotion to any leadership position. The CAF should not fear willful and principled dissent as it enables and reinforces transparency.<sup>180</sup>

In addition to creating transparency and holding destructive leaders accountable, a culture of empowerment will also improve the overall health of the institution by giving followers opportunities to take initiative, work to actively improve the organization, and lead in their own right. Development of subordinates is imperative to the future successes of any organization. Many followers do not get the opportunity to lead because destructive leaders are not actively engaged in follower progression due to fear that the leader may one day lose control over that individual. This must be turned around by leadership that employs influence rather than control.

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<sup>180</sup> Webster, Vicki., Brough, Paula., Daly, Kathleen., "Fight, Flight or Freeze: Common Responses for Follower Coping with Toxic Leadership," *Stress and Health*, 2016, 348.



Figure 3.1 Leader **Influence** Behaviours



Conversely, transformational leadership relies much more on influence behaviours towards the right side of the spectrum. Second, the appropriateness of an area of the spectrum depends on the level of development and training of those led. Followers who lack necessary skills, knowledge, attitude and motivation for the task at hand will need to be led in accordance with the influence behaviours that are more to the left on the spectrum. The most effective leaders are those who can shift between the two styles as required by circumstances and the characteristics of followers.<sup>181</sup>

While the CAF does not currently have a model of Trauma-Informed Leadership and a Trauma-Informed approach to care, we can look to the US military for guidance. The US Special Operations Command-Africa implemented a Trauma Informed approach with the support and top cover of the chain of command. Command, in consort with the requisite medical support, “established a three-day assessment, evaluation, and tailored treatment program for every service member on deployment.”<sup>182</sup> The Commander of the force noted that in order for this to be effective the members had to be reassured that whatever the results of this process they would all keep their jobs and position on deployment. The Commander noted that senior leaders need,

to realize the powerful impact that a change in their mindset would have on the resiliency, readiness, morale, and quality of life of their service members while serving and as veterans...If a leader cannot take care of himself/herself they have no business taking care of anybody else.<sup>183</sup>

The results over the 26-month timeframe were significant: “Alcohol and drug issues decreased, inappropriate behavior in the workplace decreased, suicidal ideations decreased, family issues

<sup>181</sup> Canada. Dept. of National Defence, *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Leading People*, 31.

<sup>182</sup> Bolduc, Don, accessed on December 8, 2022, “The Time for Military Senior Leadership to Adopt a Trauma Leadership Model is Now,” 1.

<sup>183</sup> Bolduc, Don, accessed on December 8, 2022, “The Time for Military Senior Leadership to Adopt a Trauma Leadership Model is Now,” 1.

decreased, and trust in the chain of command increased significantly.”<sup>184</sup> Increasing morale, quality of life, and institutional trust is vital for the CAF, as it may aid retention by reducing the exodus of members who cite job satisfaction and unit and senior leadership as their reasons for departing.

Outside of the military, there are also Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) approaches being implemented by other workforces. Resmiye Oral et al., in a study on US nationwide efforts for TIC, stated that:

Core features of trauma-informed systems include the integration of trauma-informed concepts and principles into policies, procedures, and practices, and building awareness, recognition, and implementation of screening, assessment and treatment services for trauma. Thus, to provide TIC, there must be a commitment to these tasks throughout the entire organization with a resultant paradigm shift. This shift, then, facilitates the identification of trauma and creates pathways to holistic well-being, assessment, and intervention.<sup>185</sup>

Oral et al. go on to offer six principles to include in TIC: (1) Safety – conscious organizational effort to promote physical and emotional safety of all members, (2) Trustworthiness and Transparency – organization makes decisions with transparency and engenders trust up and down the chain of command, (3) Peer support network –experienced individuals with trauma are engaged as a critical support resource, (4) Collaboration and Mutuality – all members contribute equally to the healing of those impacted by trauma, (5) Empowerment, Voice and Choice – patient-centered approach to healing, (6) Culture, Historical and Gender Issues – efforts are free of prejudices from biases or stereotypes.<sup>186</sup> The CAF could use these principles as a guide to shape its own policy. Since underlying personal trauma is the foundation for the creation of both destructive leaders and susceptible followers, implementing Trauma-Informed Leadership and a TIC would help topple the toxic triangle and shift the CAF toward a healthier organizational culture.

## **A Holistic Wellness Framework for Personal Development**

The CAF’s current approach to health is body centric, with a focus on physical training (PT). In terms of medical care, the focus is on treatment of symptoms (i.e. service members will go to the MIR if they are ill, or they may be recommended to mental health if they are suffering from service-related PTSD). While physical health and symptom treatment are very important, there are other components of health that can and should be addressed in order to maximize the well-being of all service members, especially those who may be suffering from unconscious personal trauma. A holistic wellness approach would address these other areas of health and

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<sup>184</sup> Bolduc, Don, accessed on December 8, 2022, “The Time for Military Senior Leadership to Adopt a Trauma Leadership Model is Now,” 1.

<sup>185</sup> Resmiye, Oral et al, “Nationwide efforts for trauma-informed care implementation and workforce development in healthcare and related fields: a systematic review,” *Turk J Pediatr* 2020; 62(6): 907-8.

<sup>186</sup> Oral, Resmiye et al, “Nationwide efforts for trauma-informed care implementation and workforce development in healthcare and related fields: a systematic review,” 908.

would not only help heal current trauma but would also encourage service members to pursue self-actualization.

While there are many possible frameworks for holistic wellness, this paper will put forth one framework as an example to illustrate how holistic health may provide a path forward for the CAF. This four-pillared approach is described by Robin Sharma in his wellness guide, *The 5am Club*.<sup>187</sup> If applied by CAF, this approach would address underlying trauma and the associated destructive and susceptible behaviours and would encourage personal development toward self-actualization. The first health pillar is Mindset, which involves reframing current patterns of thought and reinforcing good habits, while countering or correcting bad habits. It includes an element of observation and awareness, where individuals notice their thought patterns and begin to learn to identify when they may be reacting (i.e. from a defence mechanism or ‘fight or flight’ response) vice responding to a situation. Mindset, or awareness of the mind, will help service members to quiet the reactive aspect of their psyche and strengthen the observant and responsive aspect of their psyche. In this way, service members are healing old trauma-induced patterns of thought while at the same time increasing their self-awareness, which will propel them toward self-actualization.

The second health pillar is Heartset, or an awareness of the emotions. Emotionality is not a realm of treatment commonly considered or available in the CAF, yet it can be very valuable. Similar to observing the mind, a Heartset approach will help individuals to observe and become aware of their emotions (i.e. fear, anger, sadness). By understanding their emotions, service members may be able to react more consciously to situations rather than reacting emotionally. For instance, if a member is experiencing a fear of uncertainty due to underlying trauma, and their typical response is to attempt to seize control of a situation or follower in order to ease that fear, perceiving and identifying the emotion may help them to make conscious choices rather than respond subconsciously to the fear. Furthermore, as stated in Chapter 1, individuals with underlying trauma often seek to control others and control situations while, at a deeper level, what they really want is to control themselves. Learning to control their emotional reactions would be a great and healthy way to achieve this aim and remove the learned helplessness they are experiencing.

The third health pillar is Soulset. Spirituality has been the foundation of warrior training for martial arts and samurai soldiers, among others, for centuries, and the CAF can make great use of it as well. Soulset may include various activities important for grounding and stress management, such as meditation, yoga, mindfulness, and immersion in nature. These activities can have a significant return on investment when reintroducing members back into the workplace after experiencing trauma or while working through previous trauma. These activities calm the nervous system and may help service members to center themselves and feel grounded, which provides a calm foundation from which they can engage in Mindset and Heartset observations. Soulset activities could be done in a group (i.e. yoga as a unit activity), or opportunities can be provided for service members to take time for themselves (i.e. a 15-minute meditation or conscious reflection) throughout the working day.

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<sup>187</sup> Sharma, Robin, *The 5 AM Club Own Your Morning. Elevate Your Life*. New York City: Harper Collins, 2018.

The last pillar, Healthset, is an integrated approach that comes after the three previous strategies are put into place. Once members have an awareness of their mind and emotions, and when they feel grounded and centered, they will be in a better place to assess their overall health and take any steps necessary to improve. This can involve reducing their tendencies to overwork themselves (as a trauma-induced response to seeking recognition and validation), limiting alcohol, drugs, or risky behaviours as a means of dissociation, or choosing unit appointments that serve their overall health rather than choosing appointments to satisfy attachment needs, etc.

The total mind-body-spirit approach to health should include time for self-reflection, working out, and professional self-development opportunities. These tools and opportunities should be made available to all members and readily accessible as part of daily life in the CAF, and they should be taught throughout integration into service. By making holistic health part of the everyday CAF culture, rather than focusing on specific treatment of symptoms, it will have the dual effect of removing stigma surrounding mental health and the treatment of trauma, and it will ensure the well-being of all service members, not just those who actively seek treatment.

### **Resilience and Well-Balanced War Fighters**

Given some of the typical military stereotypes that were discussed earlier in this paper, such as toughness and aggressiveness, it may be natural for leaders in the CAF to question whether Trauma-Informed Care and a holistic approach to wellness are an effective path forward or whether these approaches will lead to a weakened ‘warrior spirit’ and decreased operational effectiveness. The US Special Operations Command-Africa, during their 26-month trial of TIC, faced these same concerns and concluded that,

The fear in the military is that trauma treatment may interfere with the warrior spirit and have negative effects on the aggressiveness required to close with and destroy the enemy. There is no proof that treatment for mental injury negatively impacts the will to fight. My personal and professional experience is the exact opposite. Treatment supported by senior leaders results in a more resilient, ready, and productive service member.<sup>188</sup>

These findings make sense, since, as discussed earlier in the paper, service members who are suffering from unconscious personal trauma must expend significant internal resources to cope with their trauma. Being in a constant state of ‘fight or flight’ stresses the nervous system and may lead to a myriad of other health concerns in addition to poor decision making. Essentially, service members with underlying trauma are fighting a battle against themselves and against an external environment that they erroneously perceive as adversarial. They, therefore, have a reduced capacity to fight the actual battles and face the actual enemies that the CAF needs them to face. By helping these service members to heal their own trauma, it will free them to readily face operational challenges rather than their own personal challenges.

Similarly, even healthy service members who are living and working in a toxic CAF environment will have a reduced capacity for operational effectiveness. Their energy may be spent working under destructive bosses who assign non-essential tasks to fulfill the leader’s own

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<sup>188</sup> Bolduc, Don, accessed on December 8, 2022, “The Time for Military Senior Leadership to Adopt a Trauma Leadership Model is Now,” 1.

personal agenda. Or, the threat from the organization may be worse, in the form of harassment or misconduct at the hands of destructive leaders. It bears repeating Arbour's assessment that, "...members are more at risk of harm, on a day to day basis, from their comrades than from the enemy." In this case, rather than expending energy to fight internal battles, service members are being forced to fight a battle against their own colleagues, leaders, and the institution, which inevitably reduces their capacity to fulfill operational mandates. As stated previously, working in toxic environments also decreases retention, which is itself a threat to the CAF's operational effectiveness.

Given the current stigma around mental illness discussed earlier, leaders in the CAF may also fear the possibility that adopting a Trauma-Informed Leadership approach will cast a significant shadow over the CAF by revealing the amount of underlying trauma that service members are experiencing, which is currently unknown and unaddressed. In order to combat this fear and stigma, it should be stressed that service members dealing with unconscious personal trauma are not broken; they simply need to be given the tools and opportunities to understand and address their trauma. These service members should be taught how to increase their self-awareness, manage stressful situations, and how to return to a healthier baseline. Learning is a superpower, and if members are trained to control and manage the internal fight there will be nothing limiting them from becoming the most effective and efficient soldiers they can be.

By addressing their trauma and coming out the other side, these service members will have also developed great resilience, compared to individuals who have not had to face the same trials. Rachel Yehuda noted, "the purpose of epigenic change is to expand the range of ways we respond in stressful situations,"<sup>189</sup> which she says is a positive thing. "Who would you rather be in a war zone with?" Yehuda asks. "Somebody that's had previous adversity [and] knows how to defend themselves? Or somebody that has never had to fight for anything?"<sup>190</sup> In a study on 'Chronic Adversity,' Garnezy and Matsen agree with Yehuda: "Childhood adversity was sometimes associated with positive life lessons, resilience and growth for those who were able to consciously face and overcome it."<sup>191</sup> This resilience needs to be harnessed and used to improve mental hardiness in CAF members, while creating the skills to counter destructive leaders. In addition to becoming resilient and effective war fighters, if members heal their trauma and are encouraged to strive for self-actualization, they will also be happier and more fulfilled, and thus more likely to remain in the CAF.

## **Compassion and Trustworthy Leadership**

In addition to combating destructive leadership, in order to topple the toxic triangle it is also important to promote trustworthy leadership. If the CAF strives for authentic and trustworthy leadership, it will create an organization cultivated on mutual trust, which will in turn have a positive impact on operational effectiveness. Arbour argues,

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<sup>189</sup> Wolynn, Mark, *It Didn't Start With You*, 23.

<sup>190</sup> Yehuda, R., interview with Krista Tippet, *On Being*, July 30, 2015, [www.onbeing.org/program/rachel-yehuda-how-trauma-and-resilience-cross-generations/7786](http://www.onbeing.org/program/rachel-yehuda-how-trauma-and-resilience-cross-generations/7786).

<sup>191</sup> Garnezy, N., & Masten, A. (1994). *Chronic adversities*. In M. Rutter, L. H. Taylor, & E. Taylor (Eds.), *Child and adolescent psychiatry*: 191–208.

For a new culture to take root, the CAF must be prepared to undertake much more significant changes in its practices than is currently being envisaged. If it is willing to do so, I believe the leadership of the CAF will rebuild the trust it lacks today, without which it cannot operate at maximum efficiency.<sup>192</sup>

In order to achieve this, leaders must have a good level of self-awareness, which can be increased by the holistic wellness approach previously outlined. Trustworthy leaders know themselves, the external world, are motivated and driven by a common goal, can motivate others, have integrity, are persuasive, uplifting, and can unify a team. They cultivate talent and growth in their teams and share a common vision of the greater good.<sup>193</sup> According to Whicker,

The greatest antidote to toxic leadership and the organizational decline it foments is trustworthy leadership. We should seek out trustworthy leaders, encourage and support them when we find them, and seek to become them. They are our greatest hope for healthy productive workplaces.<sup>194</sup>

To be trustworthy, leaders must also sincerely care about their service members. It is not enough to attempt to be perceived as trustworthy in order to achieve institutional aims. It must be sincere, and compassion must be applied to all service members. Like primal fear responses, compassion, or love, are rooted in the origins of human behaviour and human survival strategies. In 'Love and Fear: A Special Issue,' Carter et al. state that,

Love and fear were forged by the same fundamental evolutionary processes that permitted life on earth. Both love and fear are deeply interwoven with the adaptive management of stress and disease. Love and fear share common roots and both can play a role in reproduction, survival, perceived safety and wellbeing.<sup>195</sup>

Just like fear, love is a survival strategy.

Therefore, in order to combat the fear-induced trauma patterning of service members, love, or compassion, can be applied as an alternative to fear. This compassion should be applied as an interest in understanding the suffering of service members and in their rehabilitation. Gabor and Daniel Maté state, "The willingness to seek the why, before leaping to the how, is the compassion of curiosity and understanding in action."<sup>196</sup> Lamson et al. agree, in their study that links ACEs to the health and readiness of US service members, they argue that better understanding, compassion, and empathy should be used to identify and address issues so that the institution can better manage and assist members in becoming the best soldiers possible.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Arbour, L., Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, 14.

<sup>193</sup> Whicker, Marcia Lynn, *Toxic Leaders: When Organizations Go Bad*, 27.

<sup>194</sup> Whicker, Marcia Lynn, 178.

<sup>195</sup> Carter, C. Sue and Robert Dantzer, "Love and Fear: A Special Issue," *Comprehensive Psychoneuroendocrinology* (Online) 11, (2022).

<sup>196</sup> Maté, Gabor and Maté, Daniel, *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness & Healing in a Toxic Culture*, Ch. 26 (14:06).

<sup>197</sup> Lamson, Angela, Natalie Richardson, and Erin Cobb, "The Health and Readiness of Service Members: ACEs to PACEs," *Military Medicine* 185, no. Supplement\_1 (2020): 348.

## CONCLUSION

We cannot ignore unconscious personal trauma. Whether we want to accept it or not, trauma exists as part of the underpinning of society. Trauma for service members is more than service-related PTSD and can be the result of intergenerational trauma or ACEs. ACEs are prevalent in the genetic identity of the CAF, and they can manifest in adult service members in subconscious toxic behaviour, resulting in destructive leaders and susceptible followers. Along with a conducive CAF environment because of rigid hierarchy, a battlefield mindset that persists during peace time, social stereotypes, and a lack of checks and balances, these leaders and followers create a toxic triangle that reinforces itself through continual negative feedback loops. Moreover, the conducive environment of indoctrination in the CAF may attract new recruits suffering with unconscious personal trauma, as the recruits seek to manage their identities and cope with their trauma by enlisting and adopting a new identity.

As a society, we often default to the easy solutions (i.e. take this pill, punishments, or take a day off) instead of getting to the root of our systemic issues. If the CAF truly wants to evolve as an institution and remain relevant and effective, we have to be willing to return to the roots, which means implementing a Trauma-Informed Leadership approach. Since this type of trauma is largely subconscious, awareness is key to rectifying the issue. Service members should not be blamed or punished for their traumas, rather they should be assisted to become self-aware and self-actualized, so that they may heal, topple the triangle, and become resilient war fighters likely to choose life-long careers in the CAF. Self-awareness and self-control are conscious traits; individuals who are not self-aware and have experienced adversity typically impose the same negative environments onto others, whereas those who are self-aware learn from it and use empathy and compassion towards others in similar situations or from similar backgrounds to avoid causing the same harm they experienced. Trustworthy leadership and a culture that embraces holistic wellness should be implemented to assist the necessary work of bringing awareness and healing to the pervasive issue of unconscious personal trauma. In this way, the CAF can shift its members and its organizational culture away from toxicity and toward a healthier, resilient, and more operationally effective force.

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