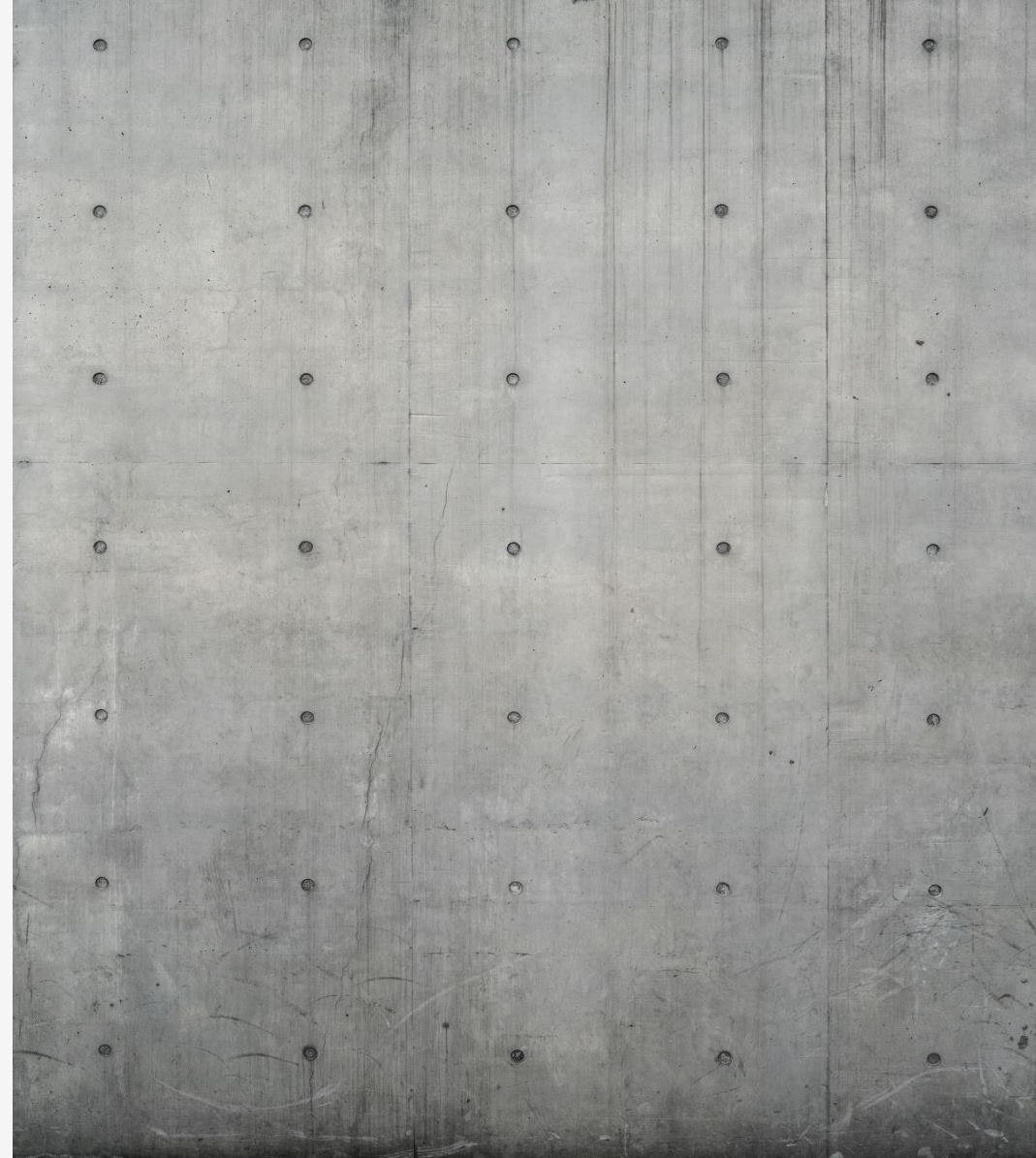


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**Alienation and emotions in modern societies: “toxic” relationships as a social construct and emotional practice**

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# Presentation plan

- **How did the idea for the research appear: virus spreading of the characteristic "toxic" applying to relationships, individuals and emotions in Russian segment of Internet in last decade**
- **"Toxic" in general is about psychological violence, harmful, discomfort, addictive relationships**
- **Preliminary qualitative research of the content of texts about "toxicity" and "toxic" relationships**
- **Examples from the Russian segment of the Internet**
- **Conclusions**

# **"Toxicity" as a socio-psychological phenomenon**

- **Why is the term so widespread? What are the causes and social consequences?**
- **A kind of fashion?**
- **What is the need for it? What is meant by it?**
- **What does the term reflect in everyday life?**
- **What are the types of toxic relationships?**
- **Is it a type of emotional practice?**
- **Is it a type of "emotional regulation"?**
- **What do this phenomenon can say about alienation?**

# Why should we think about and study it?

- The emergence and spreading of this fashion word or type of explanation is not accidental, but a **consequence of the nature of late modern societies**
- **Toxicity denotes some kind of understanding by modern people of the state of social bonds:** alienation, isolation, atomization.
- Toxicity becomes a source of moral evaluation
- From this perspective, it is interesting to explore the consequences of the acceptance of this kind of relational characteristic
- Initially the word "toxic" appeared in Russian context at times with the recognition and moral disapproval of psychological violence and domestic violence, primarily against women and children

## Research method

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**Qualitative research of Internet content, social phenomenology of the use of the term “toxic” / “toxicity” in relation to relationships, people and emotions: everyday judgments, “recipes”, “self-help” culture, etc.**

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**The aim was to explore by means of informal content analysis the definitions, classifications of "toxic" relationships, people and emotions, and the ways of recognizing and coping with them.**

**Internet discourse  
about toxic  
relationships, people  
and emotions: core  
dimensions/thematic  
focus – discomfort or  
addiction**

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**Personal stories about toxicity**

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**Signs or traits of toxic people,  
relationships and emotions**

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**Classifications of "toxic" relationships,  
people, situations, emotions**

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**Ways to recognise "toxic" relationships,  
people, situations and emotions**

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**Tips and techniques for coping with  
toxicity**

# **"Popular/folk-psychological" classifications of toxic relationships**

- **Relationships of physical and psychological abuse between people (most often - spouses);**
- **Forms of psychological dependency or addictions;**
- **Child-parent relationships;**
- **Intimate and/or romantic relationships;**
- **Between employees;**
- **Relationships with superiors;**
- **Friendship;**
- **All uncomfortable or addictive relationships?!**



# Toxic relationships: "folk definitions", examples

- **"Any relationship we have with other people should only bring us positive emotions, help us to improve ourselves and raise our level of consciousness. But sometimes relationships with a loved one, parents, friends, colleagues, or bosses make us feel insignificant and unhappy. These relationships are called toxic, because they literally poison our lives and make them unbearable".**
- **"Toxic relationships are unhealthy interactions between people in which one of them brings nothing but emotional pain ... In the process of such communication one person is constantly morally poisoning the other person's life, making hi,/her feel negative emotions, feel scared, insignificant, depressed".**
- **"A person who feels uncomfortable in a relationship experiences apathy; continuous stress; nervous breakdown; depression; a steady decline in self-esteem; panic attacks, psychiatric disorders, suicide attempts in the future".**



# Internet Discourses: Definitions, Descriptions of Toxic Relationships

## Signs of a toxic relationship:

**Unhealthy** – lack of an emotional support.

**Unfavorable** – these relationships are not balanced, lacking of moral, ethical or positive principles.

**Harmful** – toxic, leading to emotional, psychological exhaustion and possibly even physical death.

**Dangerous** – often based on risky behavior and emotions.

**Poisonous** – toxic to all involved persons, extremely painful for all who are touched by the relationship.

**Deadly** – toxic relationships can be dangerous to health, they are aimed at destroying the self.

**Detrimental** – toxic persons are often immoral and unwilling to recognize the needs or well-being of others

# Toxicity: markers of "toxic" relationships

## The irrational markers

- Vampirism
- Negativity
- Poisoning
- Offending
- Loss of energy
- Exhaustion
- Unhappy
- Guilt
- Humiliation

## The rational markers

- Lowering of self-esteem
- “Gaslighting”
- Blocking of self-expression and self-realization
- When someone forces you to self-improvement
- When you are forced to defend yourself in a relationship
- When you have to cope with shame all the time
- When you have to cope with weakness

- **Inability to talk openly about problems**
- **In a toxic relationship quarrels happen all the time**
- **Lack of plans for the future**
- **Teasing**
- **Manipulation**
- **Emotional exhaustion**
- **Feelings of being used**
- **Feelings of guilt and helplessness**

**Example from the internet:  
9 symptoms of a toxic relationship**

# Example: Types of toxic people and their traits

## Types of "toxic" people

- The critics
- The victims
- Alarmists
- Hypocrites
- Egoists
- Talkers
- Conservatives
- Touchy-feely people
- Envious people

## The "toxic" person. Traits

1. He always sure that he is right.
2. Pessimism
3. He loves over-dramatize
4. He likes to show up suddenly and take up time.
5. He doesn't know what empathy is.
6. Constantly criticizes.
7. Likes to talk but doesn't like to listen.
8. Lies without remorse.
9. talks trash about about other people.
10. Likes to talk only about himself and his problems.
- 11 Loves to control and manipulate.
12. Always playing the victim.
13. Being rude to strangers.
14. Very often stops controlling him/herself.
15. Has a negative energy.

# Toxic intimacy and parenting: examples from the internet discourse

## The main signs of a toxic relationship with a man:

1. He constantly controls you
2. He forbids you to hang out with your friends
3. He gets angry and resentful if you do the things you like to do
4. He is insanely jealous of you, even though you have given him no reason to be
5. He does not tell you what bothers him, and begins to play the silent game or say meaningless phrases
- ...
7. He avoids adult constructive dialogue
- ...
9. You cannot talk to him about your concerns
10. he/she is constantly criticizing you
- ...

## "Toxic" parents

1. They emotionally attack their child
2. They want the child to be responsible for their actions
3. They expect the child to do the best they can
4. They use the information against the child
5. They intimidate the child
  - Hypocrite parents
  - Inadequate Parents
  - Controlling Parents
  - Alcoholic Parents
  - Critical Parents
  - Abusive Parents

# Recognizing and "working" with "toxic" relationships

## Recognition: an example

How to get out of a toxic relationship: advice from Internet.

"Getting out of a toxic relationship is difficult, but possible!"

In order to do so, you need to

- ❖ not ignore reality, but live in the "here and now"
- ❖ change yourself, start treating you with respect, etc.;
- ❖ focus on your own emotions
- ❖ ...
- ❖ take care of yourself. You should stop feeling sorry for someone who negatively affects you and start developing self-compassion.
- ❖ concentrate on your own interests.

## Work with toxicity: recovery

- To recover from a relationship break up with a loved one, a friend, a relative or a colleague, you need to give yourself time to re-evaluate your own life and your inner self
- You should only start a new relationship when you realize that you have completely freed yourself from the previous relationship
- Devote the time you have left to yourself, your needs, your family and friends, to an activity you enjoy
- Let go hatred, empty fears and frustrations that prevent you from recovering from a toxic relationship
- Do not be afraid of loneliness. First you have to love yourself and resolve your inner problems
- Do not be afraid to seek help from professionals if you realize that you cannot cope with your problems on your own

# **“Toxic” love and attachment: tips from the Internet discourse (website AdMe.ru)**

**We at [AdMe.ru](https://adme.ru) have collected warning signs that indicate the beginning of an unhealthy attachment:**

- 1. You immediately think you've found the love of your life**
- 2. You idealize your partner too much**
- 3. You can't say no to him/her**
- 4. You neglect your friends in favor of your partner**
- 5. You have abandoned your hobbies**
- 6. You are blind to the warning signs**
- 7. You unconditionally trust your partner's opinion**
- 8. You are wildly jealous of every little thing**
- 9. You feel extremely lonely when your partner isn't around**
- 10. You make excuses for your partner's unpleasant behavior**



# "Toxic" shame: "How not to be poisoned by toxic shame?" //

<https://pogodin.academy/blog/shame>

- "Toxic shame is a life failure, total and universal" (Psychologist's website <https://psychologytoday.ru/public/toksichnyy-styd/>).
- Toxic shame is an emotional state in which you feel bad and worthless. The shame is called toxic when it has no reasonable cause, whereas healthy shame occurs when we act immorally.
- The reason for "toxic shame" is: "An inner image of a disapproving parent", this is a "rejection of self" (<https://econet.ru/articles/170841-toksichnyy-styd>)
- From toxic shame to creative shame: It is worth distinguishing between creative shame and toxic shame. The first is a natural reaction to failures in the contact, the other is a way of interrupting contact due to the intolerability of the experience. Toxic shame destroys contact very quickly. (<http://value-psychology.com/ot-toksicheskogo-styda-k-tvorcheskomu-stydu/>).

# Coping with 'toxic shame'

<https://pogodin.academy/blog/shame>

- If you feel ashamed, it means one important thing - you want something
- If you ask yourself what you want, at some point you will realize that you want recognition, love, just the warmth of others, admiration and pride
- The challenge is to stop at that point and ask yourself - what am I like? Do you know what other people think of you? Perhaps the first step is to ask what other people think of you.
- Most people with toxic shame don't even have the courage to check what people around them think of them.
- You have to redefine the self, and then shame will lose its toxicity.
- Often the therapist turns out to be such a significant person...

# Toxic relationships, people and emotions: some conclusions

- Toxic relationships are treated as a dependent/addictive and painful/discomfortable, but it refers both to violence in relationships, and to **relationships that are perceived as uncomfortable, unpleasant, that does not confirm our self-identity.**
- If we exclude the cases of moral and physical violence from the definition of "toxic relationships", any complicated relationships that can be defined as toxic.
- New sensitivity, individuation/individualization as characteristics of late modernity **make 'normal' relationships as disturbing, costly, toxic.**
- "Toxicity" as a representation of moral individualism, normalization of loneliness, atomization, new vulnerability – **toxicity as a base of avoidance of any relationships.**
- "Toxic" relationships as private social form of the culture of political correctness : ordinary relationships can be recognized as toxic.

# Some conclusions: toxicity as a sign of weakening of social bonds and alienation

- Emotions as part of the awareness of toxic relationships: listening to one's own feelings in order to realize what's going on: relationships can be toxic!
- Emotional practices of an "anxious society": the case of 'ego-emotions' (Barbalet, 2019). **The moral right to be free from "toxic" emotions through personal alienation the breaching the social bonds or avoiding them.**
- The idea of protecting inner space, personal borders, people feel the insecurity of their personal identity and inner world.
- **"Toxicity culture" and self-help culture** within the promotion of political correctness – isolation, maintaining the boundaries of personal space as a consequences of "toxicity culture".
- **Toxicity as the way of asserting subjectivity in today's world:** breaking up relationships and protecting the self as something that can be controlled.

# Some conclusions: hidden narcissism, hidden commodification, a hidden form of shame, a hidden form of isolation

- **Toxic relationships** - evidence of further personal alienation, distancing, isolation, individuation/individualization, loneliness, shaming, resentment.
- **Deep narcissism:** "being yourself, being authentic, being confident, you can't cloud your joy", anything that brings negative emotions is "toxic".
- **Emotional practices associated with toxicity:** anticipation, recognition, distancing, withdrawal, recovery, encouragement to see a specialist (hidden commercialization of therapy and self-help culture).
- **Toxicity and addiction:** inability to manage one's own life, fear of intimacy, vulnerability
- **A latent form of shame** in modern society - a latent form of shame or fear of shame from failure in relationships.

# What to do further with it?

## How to research it?

- **Analysis of texts in social media: websites, forums, posts, media articles regarding toxicity - a quantitative study using textual analysis of Internet resources.**
- **The objective of the research – to fix the prevalence of texts and topics about "toxicity" in the Russian-language segment of the Internet:**
  - **to identify more accurately the genres of sources that write about "toxicity";**
  - **to find latent topics that are raised alongside the topic of "toxicity" (e.g., alienation);**
  - **the frequency with which the topic of emotion appears in texts about toxicity.**
- **The exploration of emotions in this research is related to the fact that coping with a toxic relationship is about managing emotions.**

**Thank you for your kind attention!  
I'm will be grateful for a feedback!  
I hope my presentation was not  
toxic for you)))**