The Outsiders: Societies Inability Of The Main Characters

S.E. Hinton’s “The Outsiders,” comments on Ponyboy’s, Johnny’s, and Darry’s societies inability to meet their needs. Their society is unsupportive and unsustainable, as it fails to give them safety, trust, and a sense of connection with others. The injustices that they have faced, have lasting negative effects on their lives. Hinton wrote “The Outsiders” in the 1960s, based on the two gangs she lived amongst, the Socs and the Greasers.

The society that Ponyboy lives in, deprives him of a sense of safety and connection with others. This leads to Ponyboy having sleepless nights and prevents him from connecting with his peers. When Ponyboy awakens, a comparison is made between his sleep and Sodapop's, “I had awakened in a cold sweat and shivering but Soda was dead to the world.” A metaphor is used to compare Sodapop to being dead, to represent his peaceful slumber. There is a stark difference between the two brothers sleep, Ponyboy awakens in a cold sweat and shivering, two things associated with fear. Ponyboy’s sleep is interrupted due to fear, when he must be asleep in a state of tranquility like Sodapop. Ponyboy is not provided with enough safety to feel comfortable. Ponyboy’s family is unsustainable, as he lacks a sense of safety and reassurance. Due to his society depriving him of this, his physiological needs are not met, as sleep is a basic and essential need that everyone requires. It is placed at the bottom of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Without sleep, all other needs are considered secondary. Although, due to Ponyboy’s family being socially unsustainable, he cannot obtain a peaceful nights sleep. During the Vietnam war in the 1960s, many Americans lived in fear due to the thought that no one was safe. Both Ponyboy and the citizens did not receive reassurance on their safety, like they required. They lacked a sense of comfort in their society, the fear that Ponyboy is experiencing is similar to the other American citizens.

When Ponyboy and Cherry are speaking, symbolism is used when Ponyboy says “We saw the same sunset.” Ponyboy and Cherry come from different social classes, gangs, and even live in separate areas. Despite that, Ponyboy and Cherry see the same sunset, it symbolizes their similarities. The sunset brings them together. At first, they both believe that the two gangs do not have any correlation with another, but after speaking with each other, the two teens do find similarities. Although, due to their unsustainable society, they feel like they cannot connect with each other. This enhances Ponyboy’s feelings of loneliness, as he cannot connect with his peers. Their society sets them apart, and leads them to believe that the two gangs cannot associate with another. S.E. Hinton lived amongst the Greasers and the Socs, in the 1960s. While The Outsiders were written, the Greasers and the Socs had the same mindset as Cherry and Ponyboy. The two gangs did not have a sense of connection between them. Ponyboys unsustainable society has left him feeling unsafe, and causes him to have a lack of connection with others, especially with the Socs.

Johnny society does not give him a sense of belonging or trust that he requires. Resulting in feelings of betrayal and fear from Johnny. After Ponyboy insults Johnny, he realises the impact of his actions, and uses a simile when he states “Johnny's eyes went round and he winces as though I belted him.” Ponyboy compares the shock displayed in Johnny's eyes when he insulted him, to Ponyboy physically hurting him. This emphasises his pain towards the comment, allowing the audience to understand Johnny's close relationship with Ponyboy. When

insulted by Ponyboy, Johnny feels betrayed, as his gang has disregarded him. Due to Johnny's parents neglecting him, the gang becomes Johnnys family, displaying his reliance on them. Johnny's emotions of betrayal make society unsustainable, as he no longer has a sense of belonging from his friends and family. Johnny feels like he does not belong anywhere, and is left out due to his society. When Johnny was talking about turning himself in to the police, Ponyboy mentions “Johnny had a deathly fear of cops.” With the use of hyperbole, Ponyboy exaggerates Johnny’s fear of the police, as he would not die if he actually met them. This exaggeration shows the extent of Johnny's fear. Johnny does not trust the police, as he has an underlying fear of them. Johnny's society is unsustainable, as he cannot trust the justice system, due to him being a Greaser. Therefore, he has no one to protect him. In the 60s, there were various movements, such as the racial rights movement. This had resulted in protests and riots. To control these, police often had to used violence. Like Johnny, people did not have good relations with the police, and often did not trust them. Johnny society is unsustainable, as he feels an absence of belonging, causing him to feel betrayed by the people he depends on. His society has caused him to be wary and untrusting to the police.

The society that Darry lives in does not allow him to express emotion, and has forced many responsibilities on him. Darrys society results in him struggling to connect with others, and to lose a sense of freedom. When describing Darry, Ponyboy says “He’s got eyes exactly like frozen ice.” A simile is used to compare Darry's eyes to ice. It shows that Darry is presented to be harsh and cold hearted. Someone with eyes like ice is not perceived to be understanding. Ponyboy’s description allows the audience

to see the strain in their relationship. Darry is depicted to be closed off, restricting his ability to communicate. Later on, this causes other problems. Darry feels a need to be harder on Ponyboy, due to his society. He knows that Ponyboy has a chance to leave the Greasers, so he pushes Ponyboy. This discipline is Darry's way of showing love. Darry can not show love in a traditional manner, and is unable to connect with others, as they do not understand this. Darry's unsustainable society results in him being unable to communicate with his family. Darry wants Ponyboy to escape the Greaser society, to have a better life, causing him to be harsh. This leaves the brothers with a tense relationship, and Darry cannot connect with his brother. Ponyboy makes an observation about Darry, “But then, Darry's gone through a lot in his twenty years, grown up too fast.” A hyperbole is used to overstate how fast Darry has matured. Darry is only twenty years old, although due to his parents passing, he has taken up many responsibilities. He had taken up the parental role for his brothers, sacrificing his chance to go to college, and has taken up two jobs to support their family. These events have forced him to mature in his twenties, stopping him from pursuing his dreams. Due to Darry going through many hardships, it has stripped his youth from him. Darry making these sacrifices and being forced to take these responsibilities is what makes his society unsustainable. He is unable to make his own life choices, as his society forces these duties on him. He loses a sense of freedom, and can no longer make spontaneous choices, due to his responsibility as the head of the family. Darry does not receive any support from his society, resulting in him making various sacrifices for his family. He also wants Ponyboy to leave their society, leading to a strained relationship between brothers.

The unsupportive society that Ponyboy, Johnny, and Darry live in is socially unsustainable, as it can not accommodate to their needs of safety, belonging, and trust. This affects their relationships with others, physiological needs, and ability to pursue their dreams. As a result, the characters live in a negative environment.