



CHAPTER 6

PSYCHOSOCIAL THEORIES

PSYCHOLOGICAL literature uses a variety of classifications for the personality theories discussed in Chapters 4 through 6 of this volume. The same theory may be labeled social-psychological, neo-Freudian, analytic, or sociocultural.

In my judgment, Adler's theory, because of its new social emphasis in personality development, deserved a detailed explanation, particularly since other theorists followed Adler's leadership. Horney and Sullivan show a commonality of purpose in their work. They clarify, each in a unique way, the specific roles that interpersonal relationships have in the shaping of personality. Likewise, Fromm and Erikson share mutual characteristics – (1) a post-Freudian orientation and (2) an interest in sociocultural factors that influence personality adjustment. Their theories are viewed as psychosocial in nature.

ERICH FROMM (1900-1980)

Erich Fromm was born in Frankfurt of orthodox Jewish parents. As a young boy he experienced the sting of anti-Semitic attitudes prevalent among Germans of various Christian faiths and also the clannishness of Jewish people. Early in life he became interested in psychology, which he chose as his major field of studies at the university while maintaining an interest in philosophy and sociology. He earned his doctoral degree in psychology at the University of Heidelberg.

As a young man he began reading Marx and Freud and was greatly influenced by their ideas. He tried to develop a synthesis of the two theories, using the social concepts of Marx as a general framework and supplying needed psychological elements from Freud's work. Although



his interest in Marxist socialism remained strong through his life, he preferred to be called a “dialectic humanist” rather than a Marxian theorist.

Fromm received formal psychoanalytic training in Munich and Berlin, where he became acquainted with Karen Horney. He utilized the psychoanalytic approach in treating patients and considered himself always committed to Freud’s basic concepts, even when he eventually deviated from classical psychoanalysis. After his emigration to the United States in the mid-1930s, he stayed in Chicago for a short time before settling in New York, where he became associated with various institutions of higher learning. As lecturer and analyst at the American Institute of Psychoanalysis, he again met Horney, who held a similar position there. The friction that developed between them eventually led to Fromm’s departure from the institute.

In 1949, Fromm moved to Mexico to help alleviate the arthritic problems of his wife in the dry climate of Cuernavaca, and he stayed there even after she died. In 1957, he initiated a major research project focusing on the impact of industrialization on Mexican rural society. When he was in his mid-seventies, Fromm moved to Switzerland and remained involved in professional work until his death in 1980.

MAIN EMPHASIS IN FROMM’S THEORY

Fromm was as much a sociologist, historian, and philosopher as he was a psychologist. Since he perceived the lives of individuals in a global perspective of society, he was often critical of the pathogenic, dehumanizing influences of modern culture on people. He tried to counteract this negative impact by making people aware of their selfhood and inner worth. Although freedom is essential to human nature, many people are unwilling to use it and thus pave the way for dictatorial systems. To assert one’s freedom, every person needs to make value choices, develop a productive orientation, and discover the beauty and power of caring attitudes (Fromm, 1962, 1969).

Fromm’s Marxian bent is evident from the choice between “robotism” and “humanistic communitarian socialism” that he viewed as the prevalent issue in modern society. He defined humanistic communitarian socialism as a system “in which every working person would be an active and responsible participant, where work would be attractive and meaningful, where capital would not employ labor, but labor would em-



ploy capital” (Fromm, 1955, p. 248). This concept of Fromm parallels Adler’s vision of society as a “cooperating community.”

THE CONCEPT OF PERSONALITY

Fromm (1947) defined personality as “the totality of inherited and acquired psychic qualities which are characteristic of one individual and which make the individual unique” (p. 59).

He differentiated two components of personality—**temperament and character**:

The difference between inherited and acquired qualities is on the whole synonymous with the difference between temperament, gifts, and all constitutionally given psychic qualities on the one hand and character on the other. While differences in temperament have no ethical significance, differences in character constitute the real problem of ethics; they are expressive of the degree to which an individual has succeeded in the art of living. (Fromm, 1947, p. 59.)

Temperament is the basic tool of personality, constitutional in nature and fairly permanent. Character, however, is formed according to value choices of the individual modified by sociocultural influences in the environment.

PRODUCTIVE AND NONPRODUCTIVE CHARACTER

According to Fromm, personality adjustment is achieved in the domain of a person’s character. In describing the various blends of character orientations, Fromm (1947) recognizes two basic patterns: the **nonproductive character**, which is eager to receive and exploit; and the **productive character**, which concentrates on giving to others through love and work: “One loves that for which one labors, and one labors for that which one loves” (p. 99).

Two basic processes underlie the nature of a person’s character: one is **assimilation**, by which one acquires or assimilates desired objects; the other is **socialization**, by which a person relates to others and oneself. A well-adjusted person possesses a character based on a fairly permanent pattern in which the two processes are properly blended.

Fromm described the productive character orientation in these terms:

An active person, not only in physical work but also in feeling, in thinking,

in his relationships with people. He approaches the world as the possessor in an active manner, and all the expressions of his being are authentic; that is, they are genuinely his, and are not put into him by an outside influence, such as a newspaper or a movie. (Evans, 1966, p. 15.)

The productive and nonproductive orientations are interlocked within every person's psyche. If the productive orientation is predominant, the nonproductive character modalities listed below lose their negative connotations and become growth-promoting.

Under the heading "Nonproductive Orientations," Fromm (1947) listed four modalities:

1. **The receptive orientation.** A person with this orientation expects all material and psychological support from external sources.
2. **The exploitative orientation.** A person with this orientation not only expects all support to come from external sources but is also determined to get whatever is needed by grabbing or stealing it. Fromm termed such behavior "essentially cannibalistic."
3. **The hoarding orientation.** A person with this orientation wants to keep accumulated goods, displays social aloofness, and has developed strong defenses against intrusions from the outside world.
4. **The marketing orientation.** A person with this orientation is committed to the principle that everything one needs is generated through the process of exchange.

The market provides the final evaluation of things. In addition to traditional marketing, modern society has added a new variation—the personality market. Individuals are not respected for who they are but rather what impression they make. People's personalities are for sale like other commodities:

Success depends largely on how well a person sells himself on the market, how well he gets his personality across, how nice a "package" he is; whether he is "cheerful," "sound," "aggressive," "reliable," "ambitious"; furthermore what his family background is, what clubs he belongs to, and whether he knows the right people. (Fromm, 1947, p. 77.)

HUMAN NEEDS AND LOVE

Fromm (1947) postulated five basic needs in every human being: (1) the need for **relatedness**, (2) the need for **transcendence**, (3) the need for **rootedness**, (4) the need for **identity**, and (5) the need for a **frame of orientation**.



A mature, well-adjusted person is characterized by the ability to integrate these needs, particularly the needs of relatedness and identity. Such a person is capable of intimately relating to another person without loss of identity. The force that fosters relatedness while preserving identity is mature love; it flows from the productive character orientation:

In contrast to symbiotic union, mature love is union under the condition of preserving one's integrity, one's individuality. Love is an active power in man; a power which breaks through the walls, which separate man from his fellow men, which unites him with others; love makes him overcome the sense of isolation and separatedness, yet it permits him to be himself, to retain his integrity. (Fromm, 1962, pp. 20-21.)

Fromm (1950) applied the principle of the healing power of love to therapy, which he defined as **“an attempt to help the patient gain or regain his capacity for love. If this aim is not fulfilled, nothing but surface changes can be accomplished”** (p. 87).

APPLICATIONS TO COUNSELING

Fromm proposes several concepts that may be useful in counseling practice, e.g.:

1. Character formation through personal choices
2. The processes of assimilation and socialization that influence character formation
3. The distinction of productive and nonproductive character orientations and specific modalities of the latter
4. The role of mature love (caring) in the therapeutic process

ERIK ERIKSON (B. 1902)

Erik Erikson was born in Germany of Danish parents. Prior to his birth, however, his parents became estranged and separated. A few years later, Erik's mother remarried. Her new husband, Doctor Homburger, was a Jewish pediatrician, and he adopted Erik. This was a mixed blessing for the boy; his Christian classmates ostracized him as a Jew, while he was disliked in the synagogue because of his Scandinavian features. He experienced an identity crisis that profoundly influenced his thinking and eventually was incorporated in his personality theory.

Erik went to school in Karlsruhe and followed a carefully structured curriculum that would prepare him for university studies. After passing



be it offspring, material goods, works of art, or creative ideas. The virtue of this stage is **care**, a willingness to make a constructive contribution to society.

8. Ego integrity vs. despair. Unless a person can look back in old age at his or her life with a sense of accomplishment and personal fulfillment, despair sets in. Erikson (1950) saw a relation between infantile trust and adult integrity: “Healthy children will not fear life if their parents have integrity enough not to fear death” (p. 133). The virtue of this stage is **wisdom** — the embodiment of the entire developmental cycle of the individual.

APPLICATIONS TO COUNSELING

Erikson offers numerous practical ideas that can be used by counselors in the 1980s. Among them are:

1. The concept of epigenetic development of personality
2. A detailed analysis of psychosocial processes in childhood
3. The central role of ego identity throughout the life span
4. The view of life as a series of unavoidable conflict situations that need to be resolved
5. The extension of Freud’s stages to adulthood and old age

CHAPTER REVIEW

1. What are the highlights of Fromm’s life?
2. What do you perceive as the main emphasis of Fromm’s personality theory?
3. In Fromm’s view, personality is composed of two factors. What are they?
4. What processes underlie the formation of a person’s character?
5. Can you define the productive character orientation and the four main modalities of the nonproductive orientation?
6. Which human needs, in Fromm’s view, can be reconciled only through mature love?
7. What interested you in Erickson’s biography?
8. Which are the main points of emphasis in Erikson’s personality theory?



9. What is meant by epigenetic stages, and what does Erikson call the outcome of each stage?
10. What do you remember of the individual stages of development, and which stage does Erikson view as most important?
11. Which of the concepts of Fromm and Erikson do you see as useful for counseling practice?

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A REVIEW OF PERSONALITY THEORIES

By

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To provide a better understanding of the diverse interpretations of human behavior and the dynamic forces within personality, this work explores the major theories of personality. It covers the theories of Freud, Jung, and Adler; of Pavlov, Hull, Skinner, Dollard and Miller, and Cattell; of Horney, Sullivan, Fromm, and Erickson; of Lewin and Allport; of Husserl, Combs and Snygg, Rogers, Maslow, Goldstein, and Frankl. Each chapter contains a study guide to review the salient points of the personality theory discussed and suggestions to apply these concepts to professional counseling practice. Lending a degree of concreteness to the abstract ideas are ex-natory drawings used throughout the text—a feature particularly benefiting ally-oriented learners.

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