

## How to Become a Forgotten Intellectual: Intellectual Movements and the Rise and Fall of Erich Fromm<sup>1</sup>

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*The ideas and reputational history of German psychoanalyst and sociologist Erich Fromm are examined as a case study in the sociology of knowledge that explores how intellectual boundaries are constructed within and between disciplines in the modern academy, psychoanalytic institutes, and the journal and book reading publics and among the intellectual elite. The "rise and fall" of Erich Fromm is narrated using the foil of Michèle Lamont's analysis of how Derrida became a dominant philosopher and influence on literary criticism. The example of how Fromm became a forgotten intellectual is used to examine various models of how reputations are constructed. My analysis highlights the importance of the sectlike culture of psychoanalysis and Marxism as well as the boundary-maintaining processes of academic disciplines, schools of thought, and intellectual traditions, and suggests a research agenda on orthodoxies and revisionism within intellectual movements more generally.*

**KEY WORDS:** intellectuals; theory; sociology of knowledge; Frankfurt School; psychoanalysis; Erich Fromm; reputations.

### INTRODUCTION

The reputations of intellectuals, scholars, scientists, and artists are shaped by historical and sociological factors as well as by the content of ideas. Yet in matters so close to the hearts of intellectuals themselves, the

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sociology of knowledge literature on reputations has suffered from polemical excess and a relative dearth of carefully designed comparative empirical research. Reputation studies, moreover, tend to focus on canonized intellectuals. With few exceptions, scholars have largely ignored detailed examination of the sociological dynamics involved in the exclusion of once prominent intellectuals (but see Camic, 1992; Lang and Lang, 1988; Lang and Lang, 1990; Laub and Sampson, 1991; Tuchman, 1986). In addition, the literature generally does not attempt to build cumulative theory and research by drawing together the insights and findings in the literature on both canonized and excluded thinkers and ideas.

As a contribution to this project, the ideas and the reputational history of the German psychoanalyst and sociologist Erich Fromm will be examined. Fromm provides rich material for a case study in the sociology of knowledge. He was a major psychoanalytic thinker, sociological theorist, and public intellectual during the 1940s and 1950s. Yet since the late 1960s Fromm has become unfashionable in intellectual circles in the United States. The "rise and fall" of Erich Fromm is thus a case study in the sociology of knowledge that explores how intellectual boundaries are constructed within and between disciplines in the modern academy, psychoanalytic institutes, the journal and book reading publics and among the intellectual elite (McLaughlin, 1996b).

This paper is a preliminary report for a larger study. The story of Fromm's rise and fall will be narrated using Michèle Lamont's analysis of Derrida as a foil. Lamont's production of culture analysis looks at the legitimation of theorists in the interpretive disciplines of philosophy and literary criticism in the distinct academic settings, cultural markets, and institutional contexts of France and the United States. The case of Fromm is a useful counterexample that illustrates how ideas are excluded in the institutions of intellectual production in the social sciences, psychoanalysis, and among the market for "public intellectuals" in America. Although Fromm and Derrida are from different generations and countries as well as academic disciplines, the comparison of their reputational trajectories is illuminating. The sociological factors that Lamont isolates as central to understanding the case of Derrida also are key to both Fromm's rise as well as his fall. This admittedly selective comparative analysis is offered here as a playful heuristic device as well as an introduction to the larger and more systematic comparative case study that will be published elsewhere.

This comparative approach will allow us a preliminary examination of various models in the sociology of knowledge literature in an effort to synthesize what could be called ideational and reputational perspectives. Ideational or content-based models perspectives, rooted in the traditional humanities as well as disciplinary-based histories of science and social science,



stress the power or flaws of particular ideas as the central explanation for reputations (Camic, 1992). Traditionalist perspectives in the study of literary figures and artists, for example, suggest that "reputation and value rest almost exclusively upon . . . the work of the writer," (Rodden, 1989:ix). In the sociology of sociology literature, scholars influenced by Mertonian science studies used to argue that the recognition of work as measured by citation indexes can be used as a proxy of the inherent "quality of ideas," thus implicitly downplaying the importance of sociological accounts of reputations (Cole and Cole, 1971). According to the ideational perspective, the nature and quality of ideas largely determines the reputational fate of intellectuals. The double special issue of *Sociological Theory* on "neglected theorists," for example, contains several articles that emphasize how the content and style of ideas largely, although not exclusively, determines the reception of intellectuals (Adair-Totef, 1995; Campbell, 1995; Durig, 1994; Lengermann and Niebrugge, 1995; Sica, 1995).

In contrast to ideational models, reputational perspectives highlight historical and cultural context, geography and national traditions, institutional arrangements and connections, or charisma, character flaws, and discrimination. My study assumes that both the inherent quality of ideas and more sociological models of the formation of reputations must be taken into account when attempting to explain the recognition and renown won by particular producers of knowledge (Lang and Lang, 1988).<sup>3</sup> This paper will focus more narrowly on various sociological factors that illuminate the processes by which reputations are constructed. The social construction of intellectual reputations can be understood in terms of variants of four models<sup>4</sup>: (1) climate of times, (2) geography/national traditions, (3) institutional prestige, and (4) personal characteristics. These models are useful yet fundamentally inadequate for understanding the case of Fromm, thus raising questions for a larger research agenda on intellectuals.<sup>5</sup> Each of these four

<sup>3</sup>I have written elsewhere about the validity and contemporary relevance of Fromm's classic work *Escape from Freedom* (1941; McLaughlin, 1996a) and will be publishing work on the content of Fromm's psychoanalytic sociology

<sup>4</sup>There are specific explanations of the construction of reputations that do not neatly fit into these four models. Drawing on Alford and Friedland's discussion of levels of analysis in the social sciences however, I would argue that grouping reputational models by the extent to which they deal with macro, organizational or micro dynamics is a useful heuristic device even if it does provide a comprehensive categorization (Alford and Friedland, 1985).

<sup>5</sup>My draft manuscript *Escape from Orthodoxy: The Rise and Fall of Erich Fromm* offers a sociological explanation of Fromm's reputational trajectory using a comparative strategy. Citation data was gathered on a systematically selected sample of comparable public intellectuals from the 1950s, allowing the "testing" of various reputational models against empirical evidence on the reception of such thinkers as C. Wright Mills, Margaret Mead, David Riesman, and Bruno Bettelheim. My citation data suggests the inadequacy of the climate of the times, geographical/national traditions, institutional prestige, and personal characteristics models for understanding the role of the intellectual movements of psychoanalysis and Marxism for explaining this case study.



models illuminates both the case of Derrida and Fromm yet ultimately undertheorize the reputational and sociological consequences of the orthodoxies forged and maintained in such intellectuals movements as Marxism, psychoanalysis, the New Left, and postmodernism. Developing a sociological account of the dynamics of orthodoxies and revisionism within intellectual movements is, in my view, an important but neglected aspect of a comparative and historical sociology of intellectuals.

### CLIMATE OF THE TIMES

Climate of the times models suggest that changing historical, political, and cultural factors largely determine the fate of intellectual contributions. Some intellectuals remain obscure, for example, because the society is not ready for their ideas, while others attain widespread fame because their work fits the mood of the moment or can be seen as part of an emerging social, political or cultural consensus during a particular historical period (Coser, 1984; Davies, 1995; Dingwall and King, 1995; Epstein, 1987; Griswold, 1986; Hale, 1995; Herman, 1995; Herrnstein, 1988; Jamison and Eyerman, 1994; Kapsis, 1992; Kurzweil, 1995; Lamont, 1987; Laub and Sampson, 1991; Lengermann and Niebrugge, 1995; Roazen, 1992; Rodden, 1989; Steinberg, 1996; Turkle, 1992). When one looks at these two cases from a climate of the times perspective, Fromm's pre-1965 prestige can be explained in similar ways as Derrida's post-1965 reputation. After 1965, however, the trajectory of Fromm's reputation in America is the exact opposite from the case of Derrida, partly because Fromm's work did not fit with the intellectual climate of the times while Derrida's did.

### GEOGRAPHY AND NATIONAL TRADITIONS

Social distance and national traditions models stress how geographic distance or proximity from powerful intellectual elites, prestigious cultural symbols and hegemonic national traditions limit or facilitate the ability of thinkers to legitimate their thought (Burnham, 1988; Clegg, 1992; Coser, 1984; Crane, 1987; Goldman, 1994; Kauppi, 1996; Kettler and Meja, 1994; Kurzweil, 1989; Lang and Lang, 1988; Lang and Lang, 1990; Turkle, 1992). Lamont makes a compelling case that the reception of Derrida in France was intimately tied up with the ways in which his ideas fit the habitus of the French intellectual class and the importation of deconstruction to America has to be understood as a case study in transference of ideas across space and national intellectual traditions (for a detailed discussion of the



French intellectual habitus, see Kauppi, 1996). Fromm's initial positive reception in America also has to be understood partly as an example of the importation of European ideas into a cultural context relatively unfamiliar with sophisticated social theory. And Fromm's decline after the 1960s has something to do with the fact that he lived in Mexico during the 1950s and 1960s and lived in Europe during the 1970s, a geographic reality that isolated him from the intellectual institutions and networks that helped create his reputation in the 1930s and 1940s when he was based in New York City.

### INSTITUTIONAL PRESTIGE

Institutional prestige models came in a variety of forms, but they all tend to highlight the halo effect provided by elite universities (Bourdieu, 1984; Camic, 1992; Cole and Cole, 1973; Crane, 1972; Kauppi, 1996; Laub and Sampson, 1991; Merton, 1968/1973); the institutional needs and resources of established academic disciplines or intellectual currents (Buxton and Turner, 1987; Camic, 1992; Clegg, 1992; Goldman, 1994; Horowitz, 1994; Whitley, 1984); the power of gatekeepers at top rank book publishing presses or intellectual journals and reviews (Coser *et al.*, 1982; Kadushin, 1974; Kauppi, 1996); and the role of mentors, allies, and schools of thought (Benton, 1984; Crane, 1987; Kadushin, 1974; Kapsis, 1992; Lang and Lang, 1988; Mullins, 1973; Tuchman, 1986). Both Fromm's fall and Derrida's rise can usefully be explained in institutional terms, since Fromm's lack of a full-time appointment to a prestigious professorship in America and Derrida's ties to numerous elite universities through the efforts of supporters of his ideas clearly helps explain the trajectory of their reputations. Fromm's work was professionally useful for numerous social scientists in 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s, but not throughout the 1970s until today, while Derrida's writings was pivotal to the legitimization of contemporary literary theory.

### PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Personal characteristic models stress how some thinkers become influential through their charismatic presence and others decline in prestige because of their interpersonal incompetence, lack of tact or personal scandals (Benton, 1984; Lamont, 1987; Noll, 1994; Roazen, 1992; Turkle, 1992). In addition, countless intellectuals are ignored because of their gender, race, class, or ethnicity, while other intellectuals are able to translate class or cultural advantages into intellectual recognition (Adair-Toteff, 1995;



Bourdieu, 1984; Durig, 1994; Kauppi, 1996; Lang and Lang, 1988; Lang and Lang, 1990; Laub and Sampson, 1991; Lemert, 1994; Steinberg, 1996; Tuchman, 1986). Personal characteristics models also emphasize how different styles and images of individual thinkers play a major factor in explaining their reputational histories (Benton, 1984; Clegg, 1992; Coser, 1884; Horowitz, 1994; Kapsis, 1992; Lamont, 1987; Rodden, 1990).

Lamont suggests Derrida's ability to market himself and network with important intellectual connections in America played a central role in his reputational success, while Fromm's personality and interpersonal relations had an influence on both his rise and decline as a major thinker (Bronner, 1994; Burston, 1991; Cortina and Maccoby, 1996; Coser, 1984; Funk, 1882; Hausdorf, 1972; Howe, 1982; Jay, 1973; Maccoby, 1995; McLaughlin, 1996b; Quinn, 1987). Derrida's complex language and renegade image increased his stature in French intellectual life and American English departments, while Fromm's popular writing style and relative cultural conservatism played a major role in both his early fame as well as his later decline. Finally, and most importantly, Derrida's relationship to the canon of Western philosophy and contemporary postmodernism and Fromm's complex and troubled engagement with Marxism and psychoanalysis are central components of both stories, suggesting the need for a theoretical account of the sociological dynamics of intellectual movements.

## HOW DERRIDA BECAME A DOMINANT PHILOSOPHER

Lamont's explanation of the successful legitimation of Derrida's work draws implicitly on what I am calling climate of the times, institutional prestige, geographical/national tradition, and personal characteristics models. At the most macrolevel of analysis, Derrida's ideas found an audience in France during the 1970s and 1980s because his complex ideas fit well into the cultural style of elite French intellectuals and the upper-middle class market for cultural capital. Moreover, what some have described as his nihilist politics and concern with the complexities of power fit the cultural sensibility and climate of the times for intellectuals in post-1968 France. From a national tradition perspective, Derrida's ideas crossed the Atlantic along with various French poststructuralist and postmodernist thinkers, and thus found an audience as part of a broader intellectual current involving the importation of French ideas into American intellectual culture.

At the institutional prestige level, Derrida's ties to the French intellectual establishment and a network of influential American academics at Yale, Cornell, and John Hopkins facilitated the diffusion of his work. Moreover, fiscally driven attacks on the prestige of academic philosophy in





France and the United States, combined with the vacuum created by the collapse of traditionalist paradigms in American literary criticism, created a context in which Derrida's work fit the needs of academic literature departments. In France, Derrida's sophisticated engagement with the most prestigious European philosophers contributed to a defense of the philosophical enterprise undertaken in the cultural magazines and media in a time of institutional crisis for the discipline. In America, Derrida's work helped the Yale Critics cohere into an influential school of thought within American English departments, and this perspective was diffused more broadly in several prestigious literary journals. That Derrida's ideas were "ambitious, adaptable, and packaged as a distinct product" made them professionally useful for a variety of literary critics, scholars in the humanities, feminist theorists, art historians, and anthropologists (Lamont, 1987). Derrida's cultural capital and network ties to prestigious intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic facilitated the creation of his reputation as an important thinker.

It is important, however, to avoid an oversocialized account of intellectual reputations. Even with the timing, market for French ideas, and the institutional connections all in place, Derrida's success must also be understood in personal/individual terms. Not all well-connected French intellectuals attained the recognition and renown of Derrida, and this can be explained partly by the ways in which he was able to create his "theoretical trademark" and a charismatic avant-garde image, linking both to the wave of interest in "deconstruction" in America (Lamont, 1987).

### FROMM'S RISE TO FAME

Erich Fromm was born in 1900 and came to the United States from Nazi Germany in 1933 (Funk, 1982). With the publication of *Escape From Freedom* in 1941, Fromm became a world famous psychoanalyst, sociological theorist, and social critic (Hausdorf, 1972; McLaughlin, 1996a). Throughout the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s, Fromm's many books and articles established his reputation as a major intellectual figure.

Climate of the times, geographic/national traditions, institutional prestige and personalistic models all help illuminate Fromm's dramatic rise to fame. From the perspective of a climate of the times analysis, Fromm's Cold War era writings had an affinity with the dominant cultural, political, and intellectual concerns in American society. *Escape from Freedom* (1941) was a wartime tract on the rise of Nazism that was a major precursor to both modern theories of totalitarianism and the authoritarian personality research tradition (McLaughlin, 1996a). Fromm's concern with the psycho-



logical factors that influenced the rise of fascism resonated with scholars and readers interested in exploring the “national character” of the Germans and the Japanese. Fromm’s stress on what he argued were the lower-middle class origins of Nazism fit into the dominant theories of the period, a perspective later institutionalized into the conventional wisdom by Seymour Martin Lipset’s *Political Man* (1960).<sup>6</sup>

*Man for Himself: Towards a Psychology of Ethics* (1947) and *The Sane Society* (1955b) contributed to the emergence of widespread social criticism of the cultural conformism and alienation brought about by the growing dominance of market culture and the subsequent commercialization of feelings and the suburbanisation of American life. *The Art of Loving* (1956a) was published while America was discovering both social science research on sexuality and paperback self-help books (Hausdorf, 1972). *May Man Prevail: An Inquiry into the Facts and Fictions of Foreign Policy* (1961b) and *Marx’s Concept of Man* (1961a) both became influential as the emerging New Left generation discovered alienated work, bureaucratic multiuniversities, the dangers of the nuclear arms race, and the interventionism of American foreign policy. Fromm’s Old Testament inspired communitarian radicalism fit well into the religious revival of the 1950s and the *Zeitgeist* of what Taylor Branch has called the King era (Fromm, 1950, 1955b). Moreover, Fromm’s reputation benefited from his association with a generation of prestigious emigre psychoanalysts and scholars who were helping de-provincialize American intellectual life (Coser, 1984).

At the institutional prestige level of analysis, Fromm’s fame in the 1940s through the early 1960s can be explained functionally by the “needs” of academic anthropology and sociology, psychoanalysis, and Marxism. Within sociology, Fromm’s work served several important functions in the 1940s and 1950s. *Escape from Freedom* exposed talented American intellectuals to the power of the sociological imagination and European social theory. Even though most sociologists would soon move beyond Fromm’s work for a variety of reasons, he had a significant influence on midcentury American sociology. Parsons read Fromm as part of his interest in integrating Freud into sociology (Gerhardt, 1993). Merton discussed *Escape from Freedom* extensively in his late 1940s lecture course at Columbia, “Social Theory and Social Structure.”<sup>7</sup> Fromm had an early influence on many other sociologists including David Riesman, Alex Inkeles, Dennis Wrong, and Rose Coser. Somewhat later, Fromm’s *The Sane Society* was influential on Robert Blauner’s *Alienation and Freedom* (1964) and the later sociologi-

<sup>6</sup>For a critique of this lower-middle thesis, see Hamilton, 1996.

<sup>7</sup>According to Richard F. Hamilton, Merton used Fromm’s work as an example of an work that was able to emphasize the linkage between social structure and social psychology (personal communication with Hamilton, Columbus, Ohio, Fall 1995).





cal literature on workplace alienation. Fromm's work and mentorship influenced David Riesman and his classic sociological analysis of American character in *The Lonely Crowd* (1950). Moreover, during the "normal science" of 1950s functionalism, Fromm played a pivotal role in developing a challenge to what Nicholas Mullins calls "Standard American Sociology," (Mullins, 1973). Fromm, following in the tradition of Robert Lynd, along with C. Wright Mills and Alvin Gouldner, helped lay the foundation for a "critical sociology." In addition, Fromm's insistence on combining social and psychological factors was an early challenge to the Durkheimian influenced hostility to psychology, which had held back the full development of social psychology as a subfield within sociology (Inkeles, 1963).

Fromm's 1930s research on social character was part of the development of the culture and personality tradition in anthropology and his effective writing in the 1940s and 1950s helped diffuse this work in America (Lenkerd, 1994). Although this culture and personality tradition would later go out of fashion, in the 1940s and 1950s it helped consolidate cultural anthropology as a distinct and relevant field (Spindler, 1978).

Fromm's work in this period was also important for psychoanalysis and Marxism. Psychoanalysis began as a marginal European-based sectlike movement, but it had gained legitimacy in America in the 1920s and 1930s among literary and artistic circles and in medical schools after the Second World War (Burnham, 1988; Coser, 1984; Hale, 1994; Roazen, 1974; Roazen, 1990). Despite the ideological opposition of orthodox psychoanalysts, Fromm's work in the 1940s and 1950s was instrumental in further diffusing Freudian perspectives throughout the social sciences and in America intellectual life more generally. Marxist scholars also benefited from Fromm's efforts at popularizing Marx in America and laying the groundwork for the revitalization of the tradition in the 1960s after the debacle of Stalinism.

Fromm's success in the 1940s and 1950s was aided by the fact that he was institutionally well positioned and networked with some of the major native and refugee intellectuals of the period. While Fromm never held a full-time academic position at a major university in America,<sup>8</sup> he had been associated with Columbia University in the 1930s as a tenured member of the Institute for Social Research (what we now call the Frankfurt School). Max Horkheimer, the director of the Frankfurt School, had managed to secure a home for the exiled critical theorists at Columbia (Wiggershaus, 1995). Fromm also maintained a successful psychoanalytic practice in New York city throughout the late 1930s and the 1940s, ensuring his financial

<sup>8</sup>In the United States, Fromm taught at the New School for Social Research, Bennington College, Michigan State University, and New York University.



security and his intellectual independence. Partly through his connections with several elite intellectuals Fromm was able to secure a book contract for *Escape from Freedom* with Farrar and Rhinehart, a major New York commercial press.

Personal characteristics models also help illuminate Fromm's success throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Fromm moved in the right circles and was adept at "impression management," building a reputation as an exciting and important renegade Marxist and Freudian. When *Escape from Freedom* (1941) was published it was reviewed glowingly by some of the major intellectuals of the day including Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, Dwight McDonald, and Ashley Montagu (McLaughlin, 1996a). Fromm's success was aided by the fact that he had known Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict from his participation in the Zodiac Club, an informal network of influential and soon to be influential intellectuals organized by the American psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan (Burston, 1991; Hausdorf, 1972).

### FROMM'S FALL FROM GRACE

Fromm was unable to sustain his reputation in the social sciences, psychoanalysis, and public intellectual life from the middle of the 1960s until the early 1990s. From a climate of the times perspective, Fromm's defense of traditional Marxist-influenced humanism was running against the grain of the antihumanist postmodernist current in American culture that helped create Derrida's reputation after the late 1960s (Bronner, 1994). Fromm's outspoken defense of libertarian democratic socialist politics left him isolated from both the more militant elements of the New Left of the late 1960s and 1970s and the neoliberalism and conservatism that came to dominate the political climate among intellectuals in the 1980s. While Derrida was able to develop an audience for his ideas among the upper-middle class cultural market in France, Fromm's work was too popular for the smaller and shrinking high-brow American intellectual audience. Yet Fromm's writings were too theoretical and political for the middle-brow market of self-help books, new age philosophy, and uplifting futurism.

At the personal characteristics level of analysis, Fromm had a difficult personality that damaged his ability to diplomatically negotiate the complexities of academic politics in modern universities, psychoanalytic faction fights, and political differences among networks of public intellectuals. In addition, despite Fromm's socialist politics, he was a relatively old-fashioned individual whose cultural style did not fit the post-1968 New Left or the



image of such radical or postmodern intellectuals as Sartre, Marcuse, or Foucault. Sartre, for example, challenged many of the cultural ideals of modern bourgeois society while Fromm, in contrast, was a politically radical but culturally traditional European scholar who sang Hasidic songs until the end of his life. While during the late 1960s Marcuse defended the radical New Left and the counterculture in widely circulated essays and associated with Angela Davis, Fromm argued that much of New Left cultural radicalism was childish and even destructive. One of Fromm's most widely read books was *The Art of Loving* (1956a), an argument for committed and egalitarian heterosexual relationships. Numerous cultural radicals in the 1980s were instead understandably drawn to Michael Foucault, who shared much of Fromm's critique of modernity but had charisma, a radical image, and frequented west coast gay bars.

### THE POLITICAL CLIMATE OF THE TIMES

While Derrida's politics fit well with the postmodern cultural radicalism in both the United States and France, Fromm was politically as well as intellectually isolated by the 1970s. Nowhere is the political dynamics of attacks on Fromm more apparent than in the example of Daniel Bell. While many psychoanalysts attacked Fromm for leaving Freud, Bell dismissed him for staying with Marx. Fromm's *Marx's Concept of Man* (1961a) contained the first major English translation by British sociologist Tom Bottomore of the Marx's 1844 philosophical manuscripts published in the United States. The book included an extended introductory essay where Fromm argued for the continuity of Marx's early and late writings. Arguing that communist scholars and anti-Marxists like Bell shared a common interest in ignoring the humanist roots of Marxism, Fromm suggested both had created the straw man of an "old" Marx who repudiates the "young." Fromm's defense of the humanistic perspective of the early Marx put him at odds with many anti-Marxist ex-socialists.

The consensus among contemporary scholars of Marx's writings such as Anthony Giddens, David McLellan, Shlomo Avineri, and Leszek Kolakowski is that there is a basic continuity in Marx's thought despite a major shift in emphasis in the later economic works. When Althusserianism gained prominence in the 1970s, Marxist scholars became preoccupied with finding a middle ground between Althusser's antihumanist interpretation and Fromm's stress on the centrality of the manuscripts. Again Fromm was caught in political cross fire. Bell attacked what he viewed as the fiction of a humanist Marx, ignoring Fromm's balanced criticisms and discussion



of Marx's personal behavior, political practice, and later works in *The Sane Society* (1955b) (Bell 1977).<sup>9</sup> Althusserians and Moscow agreed.

Fromm could not count on his fellow noncommunist radicals to rise to his defense. Reputations are often created in the social circles around such opinion journals as *Commentary*, *Partisan Review*, and *The New Republic* (Coser, 1964; Kadushin, 1974; Rodden, 1989). The independent socialist magazine *Dissent* played an important role in the delegitimization of Fromm's ideas. Between the summer of 1955 and the winter of 1956, *Dissent* published a bitter debate between Fromm and his former Frankfurt School colleague Herbert Marcuse (Marcuse, 1955a, 1955b, 1956; Fromm, 1955a, 1956b). Marcuse attacked Fromm's criticisms of Freudian theory, arguing that neo-Freudian revisionism led to simplistic and conformist politics. Although Marcuse's argument was weak in retrospect, the charge stuck and Fromm became known in *Dissent* circles as the "Norman Vincent Peale of the left" (Richert, 1986; McLaughlin, 1996b). And on the eve of the 1960s, *Dissent* editor and literary critic Irving Howe had a bitter falling out with Fromm over matters concerning the internal politics of the American Socialist Party. Fromm was now isolated even from the *Dissent* network, the natural home for his moderate democratic socialist politics.<sup>10</sup>

Fromm's writings helped create the political radicalism of the 1960s (Jamison and Eyerman, 1994), but the New Left ironically played a central role in Fromm's reputational demise. The freelance writer and anarchist

<sup>9</sup>Bell attacked Fromm as a matter of "a personal point" in the course of this review essay on Michael Harrington's *The Twilight of Capitalism* (1976). Bell was angry that Harrington had repeated Fromm's claim that Bell's "The Meaning of Alienation" had misquoted Marx. Bell was first puzzled why Fromm had quoted from the version from the Indian journal *Thought* instead of from the original version published in the *Journal of Philosophy*. Then Bell suggests that Fromm's claim is based on an error made by the Indian typesetters who "often think they know the English language better than those whose native language is English." And Bell is again puzzled why this "did not seem to occur to Fromm" (Bell, 1977:195). From Bell's account, the conflict seemed to be personal in nature. Their different interpretations of Marx's theory of alienation involved more than this typing error, a misunderstanding that was hardly Fromm's responsibility and could easily have been cleared up with a letter. The obvious answer for why Fromm cited the version published in India is that this journal is where he saw the essay. It is a shame that the political conflicts of the 1930s and 1960s would so distort discussion between two very similar types of thinkers while general public intellectuals disappeared into the academic professions and both of them suffered from unfair polemics from the New Left.

<sup>10</sup>Howe initially had been impressed with *Escape from Freedom* but later came to see it as unoriginal, preferring Hannah Arendt's militantly antipsychological account of totalitarianism. There were personal and intellectual differences between Howe and Fromm but the major cause of the rift was Fromm's arrogance. Howe had taken an immediate dislike to Fromm when they first met and viewed *The Art of Loving* (1956a) as sentimental. Fromm provoked the final rift with Howe by attempting to have a "manifesto" of his adopted as a party program for the American Socialist Party in the late 1950s. The essay would have made a good essay for *Dissent* but it was inappropriate as a party program and thus provoked ridicule.



Paul Goodman, for example, had long been dismissive of Fromm's version of Freudian theory, having published a scathing attack on *Escape from Freedom*. Goodman was an ardent Reichian and thus took issue with Fromm's sharp criticism of Freudian libido theory, suggesting that "every part of this general indictment is either wrong or absurd" (Goodman, 1945:198). When Goodman then became famous in the 1960s as a proponent of sexual liberation and student rebellion, Fromm's isolation among the left grew. Sociologist Edgar Friedenberg was a more moderate proponent of adolescent rebellion but he also was sceptical of Fromm's version of Freud, arguing against revisionism in a full-length article in *Commentary* (Friedenberg, 1962). And Franz Fanon's angry psychological radicalism was part of what Todd Gitlin has called the "days of rage," an intellectual climate that made Fromm pale in comparison.

The emerging counterculture in the middle of the 1960s further damaged Fromm's reputation. The rise of the counterculture and the sponsorship of Lionel Trilling and Norman Podhoretz catapulted the classicist Norman O. Brown to fame, and his once neglected *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History* (1959) contributed to the growing consensus that Freudian revisionism was an intellectual disaster. Brown offered the counterculture a politics of Dionysian frenzy and mystical union with the universe, a major precursor to the contemporary postmodern obsession with the body and universal abandon. Fromm's socialist humanism could hardly compete in that market place of ideas.

As the decade went on, Fromm was caught in no-man's land in the cultural wars of the 1960s, being neither a liberal centrist nor a New Left radical. When Marcuse and Brown became famous as a "guru" and a "prophet," respectively, for the sixties movements, a New Left orthodoxy was created and institutionalized. By the late 1960s, Fromm was seen by young radicals as a compromised liberal, while such liberals as John Schaar and conservatives as Allan Bloom viewed him as the dangerous enemy of all authority (Bloom, 1987; Schaar, 1961).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Fromm's reputational trajectory is, in this sense, the exact opposite from that of Orwell, an intellectual who was also famous and relatively marginal to the academy but who, unlike Fromm, gained and maintained immense prestige among public intellectuals. John Rodden shows that Orwell's reputation was made partly by the fact that the socialist Irving Howe, the liberal Lionel Trilling, and the neoconservative Norman Podhoretz fought over Orwell's legacy, and claimed Orwell as a hero who represented their respective politics with integrity (Rodden, 1989). Fromm, in contrast, was rejected and attacked by numerous socialists and liberals as well as all major conservative intellectuals familiar with his work. While Orwell gained support from intellectuals who had little in common with his democratic socialism (Trilling and Podhoretz), Fromm's strongest enemies were often intellectuals who essentially shared his basic socialist political perspective.



The emergence of intellectual feminism in the 1970s further isolated Fromm. While feminists in the 1920s had been attracted to psychoanalysis, the feminism that emerged in the early 1960s was hostile to Freud because of his sexism and biological determinism (Kurzweil, 1995). From Betty Freiden to Gloria Steinem, Fromm's Freudianism would leave him out in the cold. By the 1970s, however, many feminist intellectuals would use depth psychology to gain insight into the psychological roots of woman's oppression (Chodorow, 1978, 1989; Kurzweil, 1989; Mitchell, 1974; Turkle, 1992). Psychoanalytic feminist scholars after the 1960s picked up hostility to Fromm from orthodox Freudian and Kleinian institutes as well from the cultural analysis of the Frankfurt School or Norman O. Brown. Fromm's work was dismissed by feminist psychoanalysts largely without being read carefully.<sup>12</sup> And as feminist scholars took a French-influenced linguistic turn in the 1980s they tended to ignore older versions of cultural psychoanalysis—Lacanians were particularly disdainful of Freudian revisionism (Mitchell, 1974; Turkle, 1992). For these reasons even Karen Horney is only now being rediscovered as a "mother of psychoanalysis" (Sayers, 1991; Westkott, 1986). Fromm had fallen through the generational cracks.

While the dynamics of political currents and generations were clearly important, Fromm's reputational problems were most pronounced, however, at the institutional prestige level of analysis. While Derrida's work was professionally useful for philosophers and literary critics on both sides of the Atlantic in the late 1960s, by this time Fromm was in an academic no-man's land. Fromm argued for an interdisciplinary "science of man" that combined the empirical methods of the natural sciences with the interpretive insights of the humanities. This perspective went directly against the

<sup>12</sup>Dorothy Dinnerstein's *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (1976), for example, claimed that Fromm was an optimist who offered a "cleaned up psychoanalytic framework" that ignored "gender arrangements" and the "untidy details of infancy" (Dinnerstein, 1976). Fromm, in fact, had made his reputation by writing about the popular appeal of fascism and later wrote extensively about human destructiveness. Far from ignoring "gender arrangements," Fromm's life-long interest in the flawed but provocative work of J. J. Bachofen meant that he always put issues of gender and the family at the center of his analysis.

Jessica Benjamin's otherwise excellent *The Bonds of Love* (1988) dismisses Fromm in one inaccurate paragraph. Benjamin cites only *Escape from Freedom*, claiming that Fromm's "emphasis on the avoidance of anxiety rather than on instinct" is problematic (Benjamin, 1988). When one reads *Escape from Freedom* one finds Fromm explicitly criticizing Karen Horney's stress on anxiety avoidance. Fromm's alternative to instinct theory stressed existential dread, fear of death and aloneness, and a human need to relate to others in a meaningful way. Benjamin and Fromm share a common concern with the problem of recognition.

Dinnerstein and Benjamin disagree with Fromm about the psychological importance of early childhood relative to later life events, and their feminism was far more developed. But their discussion of Fromm is marred by the uncritical acceptance of the criticisms of neo-Freudianism articulated by Marcuse, Brown, and orthodox Freudians.





legitimation strategies of both the humanities and the social sciences. Since the 1920s and 1930s, social sciences in America had been attempting to increase their stature within universities by adopting the rigorous methods of the natural sciences. While Fromm argued for the necessity for empirical evidence and did one rigorous case study (*Social Character in a Mexican Village* with Michael Maccoby published in 1970/1996), he was a practicing psychoanalyst and popular writer more than a researcher. Most of his work was far too impressionistic, polemical, and multidisciplinary for modern mainstream sociology and political science, disciplines just then professionalizing and moving from "Education to Expertise" (Buxton and Turner, 1987).

Derrida's work was difficult to master but it provided a prestigious theoretical model that young literary critics could use to produce scholarly articles and books. The very ambiguity of Derrida's theories made them applicable to a range of literary topics. In contrast, Fromm's major theoretical argument was that social and individual character are independent causal factors in social life while also being shaped by the socioeconomic structures of society. The empirical research required to test and develop this theory is expensive, time-consuming, and requires a team of interdisciplinary scholars trained in sociology, anthropology, psychoanalysis, and social psychology (Maccoby, 1996). Fromm's very distance from disciplinary orthodoxies in the 1950s meant by the 1970s that he was marginal to any of the major schools of thought in modern social science that could have provided the resources and critical mass to test, develop, and diffuse his ideas.

In sociology, for a variety of intellectual, political, and personal reasons, Fromm had little influence or affinity with structural-functionalism, symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, rational-choice theory, or sociological structuralism.<sup>13</sup> Fromm was criticizing American sociology from the outside. Unlike Mills and Gouldner who positioned themselves as the loyal

<sup>13</sup>Fromm was closer to C. Wright Mills in politics and style than he was to Parsons' functionalism. Mills, however, preferred Weber and George Herbert Mead to Marx and Freud. Fromm's interest in the "self" was similar to the work of George Herbert Mead but Fromm, like Dennis Wrong many years later, would reject the overly cognitive orientation of mainstream symbolic interactionism (Wrong, 1961, 1994). Fromm would surely have unfairly seen Goffman's analysis of "impression management" simply as a complacent description of behavior in an alienated society. While Fromm would share some of ethnomethodology's critique of positivism, his work was more psychological than linguistic and dealt with history and politics, not everyday life. Fromm would agree with George Homans' critique of structural sociology's neglect of psychological theory yet Fromm's assumptions about human motivation conflicted with Homans' behaviorism as well as with contemporary rational choice theory. Homans viewed Freud as an overrated thinker while Daniel Burston has documented that Fromm saw himself as someone who was revising Freud's insights (Burston, 1991).



left-wing opposition within mainstream American sociology, Fromm was never able to develop a coherent following of graduate students and junior faculty committed to building a base for his ideas within the profession.<sup>14</sup> Although Fromm was a central figure in the early Frankfurt School of Social Research, by the 1970s he was no longer taken seriously by Marxist sociologists and was written out of the history of the Frankfurt School just as it was carving a small place for itself on the margins of sociology (Bronner, 1994; Funk, 1982; Kellner, 1989; McLaughlin, forthcoming; Richert, 1986).

Within anthropology, Fromm had been associated with the "culture and personality" school throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Fromm taught a seminar at Yale in 1949 with the anthropologist Ralph Linton, and psychoanalyst Abram Kardiner's early work cited Fromm extensively (Lenkerd, 1994). By the 1950s, however, Fromm was largely rejected by this network of thinkers, just as they themselves lost prestige and influence in the discipline. Kardiner, in particular, disliked Fromm intensely, had a personal loyalty to Freud, and dismissed Fromm's revisionism in his later writings (Kardiner, 1961). A negative view of Fromm's work was diffused among young social scientists through the extremely influential Linton/Kardiner culture and personality seminar at Columbia University.

Within psychology, Fromm had been a major intellectual figure in the 1950s but his reputation declined dramatically as the discipline professionalized and specialized. Fromm's strength as a psychological theorist was his historical and sociological perspective and philosophical sophistication. Throughout this century, academic psychology has increasingly striven for status as a rigorous experimentally based science, aligning with behaviourist and then with biological and cognitive models of human behavior. Fromm, in contrast, was a militant opponent of behaviorism, especially in the Skinnerian version that was influential in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>15</sup> Fromm was

<sup>14</sup>It is my view that Fromm's lack of a prestigious full-time appointment in an American university and his departure for Mexico in the 1950s are not the major factors that explain his decline. This would require a longer discussion than is possible in this paper, but let me just say here that several thinkers in a sample of comparable intellectuals who declined most dramatically from the 1950s until 1990 as measured by citations had full-time appointments at prestigious American universities, particularly David Riesman, John Dollard, and Clyde Kluckhohn.

<sup>15</sup>Fromm attacked early versions of behaviorism in *Escape from Freedom* (1941) and developed an extensive critique of Skinner in *Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973). The feeling was mutual. In Skinner's autobiography he tells an amusing story of the time that Fromm was a "guest for a day" at Harvard in the late 1950s. Skinner had been annoyed by what he regarded as Fromm's overgeneralizations, asserting that Fromm "proved to have something to say about almost everything, but with little enlightenment." But Skinner got angry when Fromm, looking at him from across the seminar table, said that people were not pigeons. Skinner decided that "something had to be done" and claims that he operationally conditioned a frantic hand chopping motion that made Fromm's watch almost slip off his wrist.



critical of attempts to explain human behavior solely with models based on animal studies or laboratory experiments. A young psychological theorist or researcher attempting to build a reputation on Fromm's work in the 1960s through the 1980s would have been swimming upstream with little institutional support in a discipline increasingly dominated by cognitive theory, experimental social psychology, and biologically oriented research.

Fromm's work was even less relevant to the legitimacy crisis of the contemporary humanities. While the social sciences appealed for societal resources based on the prestige of science and the utility of their research, the humanities could only argue for the value of the "cultural capital" they provide. Derrida was educated at a prestigious French university and presented himself as someone with unique and sophisticated things to say about the major issues of philosophy and literature. In contrast, Fromm was a philosophically sophisticated social science critic of positivism who drew extensively on literary sources. Fromm was simply too close to the social sciences for philosophers or literary critics to find useful. The psychoanalytic theorists that literary critics draw on tend to be speculative writers who theorize far beyond clinical data, as with Lacan (Turkle, 1992). In addition, Fromm's writing was clear and cogent but lacked literary flare. Fromm's popularizing style undercut the very cultural distinctions on which the academic humanities depend. The psychoanalytic writers influential in the humanities write in highly complex language while Fromm's writing was clear and straightforward. Many scholars in the humanities built on Fromm's work for dissertations, articles, and books from the 1940s through the 1980s (Funk, 1982; Hausdorf, 1972). From the 1960s on, however, Fromm was a career liability in the humanities while Derrida was a valued and prestigious intellectual reference.

While Lamont argues that Derrida's strategy of combining an academic base and intellectual audience outside universities was central to his success, Fromm's reputational decline can partly be traced to his popular nonacademic appeal. Derrida aimed his complex and difficult work to a large market of upper-middle class French readers interested as much in status symbols as intellectual insight. Derrida's base in the United States was in the academy—not the opinion journals—since he understood that the market for intellectuals was much smaller in the United States and was shrinking with the death of public intellectuals (Jacoby 1987; Brint, 1994). Derrida concentrated his efforts on building a base in English departments in America throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Fromm, on the other hand, wrote most of his works to educate general readers and mobilize political activists not to insert his work into academic debates or elite intellectual discourse. Fromm could be read by a combination of academic specialists, elite intellectuals, therapists, religious leaders, college freshman, social



workers, high school teachers, and middle-class general readers. As a consequence, Derrida's reputation benefited by his exclusivity while Fromm lost stature among academics who increasingly came to see him as a popularizer. Yet Fromm was not simply a popular but derivative thinker like Vance Packard (for a different view of Packard, see Horowitz, 1994). Fromm made original contributions within the several fields of thought, particularly psychoanalysis and Marxism.

## BEYOND PSYCHOANALYSIS AND MARXISM

The various theoretical perspectives we have discussed explain a significant part of Fromm's reputational history. The climate of times, geographical/national traditions, institutional prestige, and personal characteristics models, however, cannot fully account for the sociological dynamics at play within the intellectual movements of psychoanalysis and Marxism, a central element in this case study. While Derrida's work helped solve a legitimacy crisis for French philosophers and American literary critics, Fromm was rejected in the only two settings in American intellectual life where his work could have been institutionally useful after the late 1960s. Fromm had developed internal revisions of Freudianism and Marxism that could have helped preserve the insights of these traditions while moving beyond outdated and damaging orthodoxies. Fromm helped diffuse the Freudian ideas of unconscious motivation and character analysis throughout American culture while challenging Freud's patriarchal assumptions and ahistorical focus on libidinal instincts. Fromm distinguished himself from Freudians of his time by his open criticisms of the dogmatic and closed nature of the psychoanalytic training institutes. Fromm was an early proponent of innovative ideas that would later emerge within the mainstream of psychoanalysis in the form of object relations theory and interpersonal psychology (Burston, 1991; Cortina and Maccoby, 1996; Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983).

A similar intellectual and sociological dynamic was at play with Fromm's relationship to Marxism. Fromm retained and developed the Marxist insistence on a concrete analysis of historical social relations as well as the theory of alienation. Yet Fromm avoided dogmatic economic determinism and the classical Marxist blindness to moral, cultural, and psychological dynamics (for discussion of some of the theoretical blindnesses in Marxism, see Aronson, 1995; Lukes, 1985; West, 1991). Fromm was an influential proponent of an early version of humanistic Marxism. Paradoxically, it is precisely the institutions that in the long run had the most to



gain from Fromm that delegitimized his theories within the broader intellectual community.

Fromm's innovative ideas are related to his sociologically marginal position, and this explains both his rise and decline. Again, the comparison to Derrida is illuminating and raises larger questions about the social and institutional formation of intellectual canons. Lamont argues that Derrida was successful in managing his intellectual reputation because he was able to situate his work in prestigious philosophical traditions. Derrida convinced other intellectuals that his work was an original contribution to debates that can be traced from Descartes, Hegel, Nietzsche through to Husserl and Heidegger. Even the opposition of Lévi-Strauss and Foucault increased Derrida's stature since this established that he was a player.

Fromm's experience was very different. Fromm drew major insights from both the Freudian and Marxist traditions, yet his work challenged central tenets of these respective orthodoxies. Sociologist Lewis Coser argues that "the two most powerful intellectual currents of the modern world" were "nursed within the confines of intellectual sects that . . . were . . . intense in their intellectual commitments and even more productive of seminal ideas" (Coser, 1965:8). The social organization of knowledge within Freudianism and Marxism is thus unusual and not exclusively professionally or market driven. Even today, Freudian institutes continue to be organized in the theoretically intense and semisecret almost sect-like form of their origins. And while most major communist parties around the world have collapsed in disgrace and the democratic socialist current is marginal in America, Marxist scholarship is loosely tied to a movement culture and retains elements of the sectarianism of its past (Aronson, 1995).

It was Fromm's very marginality to these Freudian and Marxist movement cultures that allowed him to question some of the outdated and questionable ideas of both the academy and these alternative traditions. Fromm developed powerful revisions of psychoanalysis and Marxism largely by synthesizing insights from other intellectual approaches, particularly Durkheimian, Weberian, and Simmelian sociology as well as European existentialism. Many other Freudians or Marxists had their creativity swallowed up or blunted by their institutional need to gloss over the contradictions of their theories. While Fromm was ahead of his time in challenging the blindness of the traditions he worked within, this strategy inevitably alienated him from the institutional gatekeepers for Freudian and Marxist orthodoxies.

Fromm's conflicts with the Freudian establishment in America partly must be understood in the context of the sociological literature on the professions. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Fromm continually was attacked by orthodox psychoanalysts partly because he was not a medical doctor.



Fromm and other “lay analysts” threatened the professionalizing strategy of Freudians who were attempting to carve out a position for psychoanalysis as an elite specialization within medical psychiatry (Hale, 1995; Roazen, 1974).

Fromm’s reputation among orthodox Freudians declined even more dramatically in the 1950s when he published numerous popular articles and best-selling books attacking central elements of orthodox Freudian theory. Fromm criticized the patriarchal bias of Freud’s view of gender, questioned the universality of the Oedipal complex, and argued that psychoanalysis must engage historical sociology and cultural anthropology in order to transcend biological determinism. In addition, Fromm was one of few psychoanalysts willing to challenge Ernest Jones’ hagiographic three-volume *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud* published between 1953 and 1957. Worse of all, Fromm made these criticisms of Freudian orthodoxy in mass market books and a *Saturday Review* article and not obscure clinical journals. He was thus a threat to the client base as well as the ideology of Freudians (Fromm, 1959). For close to 50 years now Fromm has been one of the most hated Freudian revisionists (Rogow, 1970).

Fromm’s relationship to Marxism was politically more complex but hardly less troubled. Fromm initially had been attracted to Marxism as a young antiwar German drawn to the libertarian radicalism of Rosa Luxemburg. While much of Fromm’s intellectual energy had been directed at battling Freudian orthodoxy while defending psychoanalytic insights, Fromm became known in America primarily as a defender of Marxism and not as an internal critic. From Fromm’s perspective, American intellectual life was dominated by such uninformed anti-Marxist ideology that it was imperative to attack negative myths about Marx and Marxism. From *Escape from Freedom* (1941), through *The Sane Society* (1955b), *May Man Prevail: The Facts and Fictions of Foreign Policy* (1961b), *Marx’s Concept of Man* (1961a), *Socialist Humanism* (1965), and *To Have or to Be?* (1976), Fromm played a major role in developing and popularizing a humanistic Marxism based on the philosophical anthropology of the early writings.

Fromm was an unorthodox Marxist, drawing extensively from utopian socialist and anarchist traditions as well as from the sociology of his Ph.D. dissertation advisor Alfred Weber. Fromm defended many of Marx’s insights, but was a sharp critique of 20th-century Marxist-Leninism as well as the social democratic tradition. Fromm argued that Marx’s work was flawed by outmoded psychological and political assumptions rooted in 19th-century European conceptions of progress. Fromm’s democratic socialism made him numerous enemies among doctrinaire Marxists who viewed him as a “liberal radical researcher caught within the framework of bourgeois thought” (Dobrenkov, 1976:9).





Fromm's principled insistence on both the greatness and profound limitations of Freud and Marx prevented him from becoming part of these respective canons. For Freudians, the Oedipal complex, libido theory, and the charismatic leadership of an infallible Freud were unnegotiable requirements for genuine psychoanalysis. For Marxists, the demands of "scientific socialism" required more respect than Fromm was willing to give for the ideas of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. Marxists rejected the moral appeals of utopian and religious socialism, the decentralism of anarchism, and the analytic tools of bourgeois philosophy and social science. What Znaniecki called "fighters for the truth" among dogmatic Freudians and Marxists thus rightly saw Fromm as a threat to the integrity of their ideas (Znaniecki, 1965). Fromm had the intellectual credentials to bring "foreign" ideas inside both Freudian and Marxist institutions and networks. Moreover, his public intellectual role gave him a wide audience for his challenges to Freudian and Marxist orthodoxies.

Fromm's commitment to breaking from all orthodoxies precluded the development of an alternative institutional base for the refinement and diffusion of his own distinctive ideas. Fromm was not willing to frame his revisionism in the language of orthodox psychoanalysis as Eric Erikson did, nor would he recant his Marxist heresy as did Lukács. Fromm also refused to build his system of thought around a return to the "original" Freud or Marx, a legitimization strategy undertaken by both Lacan and Althusser (Benton, 1984; Kauppi, 1996; Turkle, 1992).

Fromm did not establish his own school of psychoanalytic thought as did Adler, Rank, and Klein, nor did he form a "cult" like the Jungians (Noll, 1994). In the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, Fromm had been associated with a loose psychoanalytic "school of thought" often labeled neo-Freudianism or the "cultural school" of psychoanalysis. Among the major neo-Freudians were Karen Horney, an innovative German protofeminist psychoanalyst, and Harry Stack Sullivan, a pioneering American psychiatrist. Fromm worked closely with Horney and Sullivan in America in the 1930s and 1940s as they battled Freudian orthodoxy together and worked to develop a revised version of psychoanalysis that was more sociological and less reductionistically biological. Yet ultimately, Fromm was too Freudian, Marxist, and sociological for Horney and Sullivan. In any case, both Horney and Sullivan were dead by the middle of the 1950s, and younger neo-Freudians split into different psychoanalytic factions. Throughout the 1960s, their intellectual stature fell together in the wake of both orthodox Freudian attacks and the general decline of psychoanalysis (Hale, 1995; Paris, 1995; Quinn, 1987; Westkott, 1986). Interpersonal psychoanalysis represents the institutionalized legacy of neo-Freudianism but Harry Stack Sul-



livan, not Fromm, is credited with being the originator of this school of thought (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983; McLaughlin, 1998).<sup>16</sup>

Nor did Fromm establish an alternative type of academic Marxism that was professionally useful as did followers of Gramsci, Althusser, E. P. Thompson, rational choice Marxists, or Immanuel Wallerstein. Fromm had, of course, been a major contributor to the early development of critical theory and a central member of the inner circle of the Frankfurt School. By 1939, however, a series of personal, intellectual, and political differences as well as conflicts over resources had resulted in Fromm leaving formal association with the Institute (Funk, 1982; Jay, 1973; McLaughlin, forthcoming; Wiggershaus, 1995). Horkheimer and especially Adorno became bitter enemies of Fromm and attempted to exclude him as best they could from the history of the Institute. Most of the scholarship about the Frankfurt School has, until very recently, underestimated Fromm's importance to the early development of critical theory (Bronner, 1994; Burston, 1991; Kellner, 1989; Richert, 1986;). Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, and Benjamin became the central figures within a revised history, and Adorno's student Jürgen Habermas became the heir to the tradition (McLaughlin, forthcoming).

Without an institutional base in either neo-Freudianism or the Frankfurt School, Fromm's work was vulnerable to attack by hostile and organized Freudian and Marxist schools of thought. The sociological roots of Fromm's reputational problems again can be illuminated by comparison to Derrida. Attacks on deconstruction by its intellectual opponents increased Derrida's stature among his followers as they rallied around the flag. By the middle of the 1980s, an attack on Derrida was a challenge to the careers of many well-connected academics. Even Derrida's critics within the broad intellectual movement of "postmodernism" accepted his claim to being an important and original thinker. Fromm, in contrast, lost stature from attacks on Freudianism and Marxism from outside these traditions as well as being undercut internally by claims that he was neither a "true" Freudian or a "real" Marxist.

The differences between the reception in America of the work of Fromm and Derrida has more to do with coalitions between intellectual movements than the content of ideas. Derrida, according to Lamont, was successful in managing his image and putting together a network of promoters who were able to build "deconstruction" as an influential school of thought. In contrast, Fromm's insistence on simultaneously challenging Marxist, Freudian, sociological, and political orthodoxies damaged his ability to forge coalitions in support of his work. Many Freudians, therapists, and

<sup>16</sup>This discussion of neo-Freudianism draws on language from my article "Why do Schools of Thought Fail? Neo-Freudianism as a Case Study in the Sociology of Knowledge" (McLaughlin, 1998).



intellectuals who agreed with Fromm's revisions of psychoanalysis disliked his radicalism. Many revisionist Marxists either found Fromm's commitment to psychoanalysis un compelling or were influenced by Freudian orthodoxy.

Sociologists like Parsons, Smelser, Slater, Weinstein, Platt, or Chodorow who did integrate the Freudian perspective into their work tended to be drawn to psychoanalytic orthodoxy or more current revisionist perspectives like "object relations" despite Fromm's sociological sophistication. Parson's relationship with the orthodox Boston psychoanalytic institute is an important part of this story. Most sociologists disagreed with Fromm's critique of positivism (Fromm was a premature postpositivist) and rejected his relative lack of systematic empirical research evidence. The very marginality that allowed Fromm to "escape from orthodoxy" also made it difficult for him to refine his perspective in ways that met established intellectual norms and standards within academic disciplines. Fromm's clear writing and popular success also tended to lose him prestige among academic social scientists. And the readers of social criticism increasingly found Fromm too conservative or too radical, too Freudian or not Freudian enough.

Fromm's unorthodox Freudian and Marxist ideas continually made him enemies. Everyone seemed to agree that Fromm's revision of orthodox Freudian and Marxist theory was simpleminded and led to bad politics. They could not all be right because they said contradictory things. But nonetheless, throughout the 1970s and 1980s the view of Fromm as a simplistic popularizer was institutionalized as a cliché among American intellectuals (Jacoby, 1975; Lasch, 1979; Robinson, 1969).

Fromm was largely isolated by the late 1970s. There were numerous intellectuals who had been influenced by Fromm over the years, but for sociological reasons none of them had an institutional, ideological, or career interest in promoting Fromm or defending him from critics. While the writings of Derrida tended to create followers within institutional settings appropriate to his work, Fromm's greatest appeal was to intellectuals who were relatively marginal to the very institutions that maintain reputations. Fromm's work and example continued to have an influence on such intellectuals as the sociologist David Riesman,<sup>17</sup> psychologists Abraham Maslow

<sup>17</sup>Fromm's only major supporter among the American intellectual elite is the exception that proves the rule. In the early 1940s, Fromm had been the therapist for a young man named David Riesman, a lawyer who would go on to make major contributions as a sociologist and public intellectual. Riesman had gone to Fromm for psychoanalysis at the suggestion of his mother's therapist Karen Horney. While the formal analysis was very brief, unconventional, and not particularly successful (at least according to Riesman), it was the beginning of a long-standing intellectual relationship and friendship. Fromm helped introduce Riesman to the European intellectual tradition, particularly Marx and Freud. In the 1940s and 1950s, Fromm was widely known as one of Riesman's mentors. The publication of *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) played an important role in diffusing a creative modification



and Rollo May, the social anthropologists Ernest Becker and Edward Hall, the social critics Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich, and writer and consultant Michael Maccoby. These intellectuals all gained their influence by writing popular books while being relatively marginal to major academic institutions, disciplines, and psychoanalytic institutes as well as to the social circles of the American intellectual elite.<sup>18</sup>

Thus by the last decade of his life, Fromm had a wide popular audience and numerous “weak” ties to important intellectuals. But he had no institutional base outside of Mexico where he had founded the national psychoanalytic institute. A geographic/national tradition model explains some of Fromm’s isolation since he lived and worked in Mexico and commuted to American universities throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and thus he was no longer as intimately networked with important intellectuals as he had

and adaptation of Fromm’s ideas in America. The fame and influence that *The Lonely Crowd* had created allowed Riesman to build a successful career as a sociologist, expert on undergraduate education, and powerful intellectual in the corridors of the American establishment (Kadushin, 1974). Riesman was not, however, well positioned to promote Fromm’s ideas.

<sup>18</sup>Although Riesman wrote about Freud, he was not trained as a psychoanalyst and was himself relatively marginal to mainstream sociology as well as to the networks of the New York intellectuals. Riesman had little reason to associate himself with Fromm’s increasingly radical politics. Riesman and Fromm had worked together on the antinuclear movement of the 1950s, but once “ban the bomb” activities had been eclipsed by the Vietnam War their political differences became more salient. For example, Riesman had tried to talk Fromm out of speaking at the countercommencement at Columbia in 1969. While Riesman admired Fromm’s psychoanalytic insight, he (along with Herbert Gans) was sceptical of Fromm’s analysis of American society. Riesman was not a socialist or an institutional outsider and preferred ethnographic detail and local particularities to the Frankfurt School style of broad generalizations (interview with author, Boston summer 1992). Since Riesman had political and intellectual ambitions of his own, he had no reason to defend Fromm from the many intellectual enemies he created for himself.

Abraham Maslow and Rollo May learned from Fromm but went on to found their own brand of humanistic psychology and existential psychoanalysis respectively. Fromm had very different political and intellectual commitments, and both Maslow and May distanced themselves from him in later years (Hoffman, 1988; Burston, 1991). Ernest Becker had been influenced by Fromm but increasingly became a Rankian, distancing himself from Fromm as he made his own reputation as a public intellectual with his best-selling *The Denial of Death* (1973). Edward Hall taught with Fromm at Bennington College, and he himself was a popular writer on the margins of the academy (Hall, 1992). Radical educators Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich had both been friends with and learned much from Fromm before they had each become famous along with the New Left upsurge during the 1960s and 1970s. Both Freire’s critique of the “banking” model of education and Illich’s proposals to “deschool” society were influenced by Fromm’s critique of modern educational institutions. Fromm became friends with Freire and especially Illich throughout his years in Mexico (Burston, 1991). Maccoby had been mentored in social science by David Riesman and he learned psychoanalysis from Fromm in Mexico while working on what would be their co-authored book *Social Character in a Mexican Village* (Fromm and Maccoby, [1970] 1996). Maccoby later became a management consultant and writer and has written about his work with Fromm in several places including in a new introduction to the Transaction edition of *Social Character in a Mexican Village* (Maccoby, 1996).



been at the height of his career.<sup>19</sup> In addition, Fromm's style did not fit intimately into American political and intellectual culture as did the work of such homegrown public intellectuals as Harry Stack Sullivan, C. Wright Mills, or David Riesman.

Nonetheless, the importance of intense hostility to Fromm from within Freudian and Marxist orthodoxies is a far more compelling explanation of his decline than a geographic/national traditions model. Fromm's move to Mexico, for example, could just as easily be seen as being caused by his marginalization within American psychoanalysis instead of the reverse since he was essentially forced out of active involvement in mainstream Freudian institutes in America. And the foreignness of Fromm's thought to American intellectual traditions can hardly explain his marginalization within the Frankfurt School or the fact that Adorno and Marcuse's reputations held up better throughout the 1970s and 1980s than did Fromm's.

Fromm's relative isolation was not the ultimate cause of his decline, but contributed to a situation whereby dogmatic Freudians and Marxists were able to successfully delegitimize Fromm's work in the specific historical context of the late 1960s and 1970s. Many of the insights that Fromm pioneered entered Freudianism, Marxism, the social sciences, and social criticism indirectly through Fromm's influence, or they followed a parallel independent path from internal dissidents and innovators within these schools of thought, academic disciplines, and networks of intellectuals.<sup>20</sup> Fromm's reputation de-

<sup>19</sup>Fromm's departure to Mexico was clearly a factor in his decline, but several thinkers in my sample whose reputations did not decline were dead by the early 1960s, particularly C. Wright Mills, Harry Stack Sullivan, and Karen Horney. As John Rodden's book on Orwell suggests, it is not always necessary to be psychically active in networks to have ones reputations continue—dying just at the right time can sometimes increase one's stature (Rodden, 1989)! I also have citation data documenting that Fromm's reputation in sociology rose in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s and declined in the US even though he spend far more time in the U.S. than he did in Britain. Fromm's reputation seems to have done better in Canada than in the United States as measured by citation data, although I have found little evidence of him spending significant time north of the border.

<sup>20</sup>Within contemporary psychoanalysis, the cutting edge ideas stress interpersonal dynamics and object relations, not instincts, ideas Fromm played a major role in developing along with Horney and Sullivan. Numerous contemporary Marxists now emphasize culture, morality, a critique of consumerism, communitarianism, and the value of the utopian radical tradition alongside the traditional Marxist stress on workplace conflicts and the power of capital. Within academic social science, Fromm was an early pioneer of what sociologists now call the "sociology of emotions." Fromm discusses what he terms the "commercialization of friendliness," in *Escape from Freedom* (1941), arguing that family socialization, public education, and later peer social pressure brings about a situation in which

If you do not smile you are judged lacking in a "pleasing personality"—and you need to have a pleasing personality if you want to sell your services, whether as a waitress, a salesman, or a physician. Only those at the bottom of the social pyramid, who sell nothing but their physical labour, and those at the very top do not need





clined dramatically while many of his ideas as well as similar perspectives were developed, modified, and refined within the appropriate institutional settings. Using Robert Merton's phrase, Fromm was "obliterated by incorporation." By the 1970s, Fromm was a psychoanalyst without a school, a sociological theorist excluded from all canons, and a social critic marginal to the major intellectual movements of the day. Fromm's attempts to escape from orthodoxy is a recipe for becoming a forgotten intellectual but paradoxically, it is also one road toward creating interesting and useful ideas.

### CONCLUSION: ESCAPE FROM ORTHODOXIES

While climate of the time, geographic/national tradition, institutional prestige, and personal characteristic models are illuminating, Fromm's reputational trajectory ultimately can be explained by the ways in which his ideas drew from important Marxist and Freudian insights while challenging both theories at critical points. As a result of Fromm's challenge to orthodoxies, he gained remarkable fame and influence in the 1940s and 1950s but was attacked with extraordinary vigor by fighters for the truth in both intellectual systems throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Fromm's very public challenge to both Marxist and psychoanalytic orthodoxies created powerful enemies who were hostile to him because of the deep seated loyalties and identifications that are created within intellectual movements.

Much of literature on intellectual reputations ignores the centrality of emotional commitments to intellectual orthodoxies as well as the powerful influence of various intellectual movements on academic theory and research. The "rise and fall" of Erich Fromm is incomprehensible without a serious analysis of how orthodoxies are formed and revisionism rejected within the intellectual movements of Marxism and psychoanalysis just as Derrida's rise to prominence is linked to his relationship to the intellectual movement of postmodernism.

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to be particularly "pleasing" Friendliness, cheerfulness, and everything that a smile is supposed to express, become automatic responses which one turns on and off like an electric switch. (Fromm, 1941:268-269)

Fromm had spelled out an intellectual agenda that would be developed more empirically decades later by Hochschild and Ritzer and numerous empirical researchers in the area of the sociology of emotions (Hochschild, 1983) Yet Fromm's place in the theory for this literature has been inadequately recognized. The "culture and personality" tradition is returning to fashion in a more sophisticated form as the global economy gives rise to more cross-cultural comparative research. And social critics continue to write about the cultural and personality dynamics of modernity, echoing many of the themes that Fromm raised decades previous (Bellah *et al.*, 1985, Chancer, 1993, Lasch, 1979, West, 1994; Wolfe, 1989; Selznick, 1992; Wrong, 1994)





This raises larger questions in the sociology of knowledge. The rise of Derrida, for example, is linked to the movementlike culture created by postmodernism and cultural studies in the academy in North America, factors Lamont discusses but does not theorize. Debates about the reputations of theorists associated with feminism, antiracism, rational choice, positivism, postcolonialism, ethnomethodology, neoconservatism, critical pedagogy, and the New Left are invariably tied up with the issue of how social movements outside the university shape scholarly discourse as well as how academic schools of thought create movement like loyalties and commitments that operate in the context of the fierce competition for legitimation and resources in modern universities and intellectual life. A research agenda on orthodoxies and revisionisms within intellectual movements must be at the very center of a sociology of knowledge and intellectuals.

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