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TOWARD A MORE SPECIFIC AND FLEXIBLE UNDERSTANDING OF THE GETTER: A FROMMIAN APPROACH

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Adler has been quoted as saying that Freud seems to have known much more than he understood (Adler, 1938). This statement appears to bear particular relevance when one discusses Freud's character types. Freud, indeed, appears to have been a very keen, astute, and critical observer of human behavior. However, in terms of the psychodynamics of his theories of personality and psychopathology, i.e., his attempts to explain the underlying factors and processes of behavior and the etiology of psychopathology, many psychologists, particularly Adlerians, feel that he "missed the boat." As a result, his character types, particularly the oral and anal character, appear to have significant empirical validity, while the more core aspects of his theory, e.g., libido, Oedipus complex, are at best unassailable. In light of these factors, Mosak (1959) has reinterpreted Freud's oral character in a more parsimonious, socially appropriate fashion. He calls it the "getting type," a term taken from a typology of four life styles briefly mentioned by Adler in his later writings (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Both terms describe the same behavior pattern, but the psycho-philosophical explanations differ.

It is the intention of this paper to go a step further and attempt to demonstrate how the "getting type" can really be subdivided into two life styles, each of which is virtually identical to Erich Fromm's receptive and exploitive character orientations. By partitioning the "getter" into two similar but separate life styles, one will be able to utilize the more specific traits Fromm attributes to these character orientations and thus to gain a broader, more detailed descriptive understanding of these behaviors which constitute the "getter" style of life. In doing so, we will also expand the flexibility of Mosak's typology in order to include a look at some of the characteristics observed in the "healthy getter," i.e., those individuals whose life style is essentially centered around getting, but who also show a more developed sense of social interest.



In most respects, the Adlerian "getter" and the Frommian receptive and exploitive character orientations can be seen as one and the same. Both types are generally unhealthy, since neither has adequately learned to cooperate; thus, both types are more ego centered and less task oriented. Both types of individuals believe that the "source of all good" is outside of them; therefore, they believe that the "goodies of life," love, affection, knowledge, or something material such as money, must be derived from others. They have difficulty loving others since the problem for them is to be loved and not to love; they seek to be served and not to serve and bear responsibility. They can never get enough since they lack a developed sense of social interest and a sense of confidence in themselves to cooperate, produce, and give. Consequently, both types of individuals feel very insecure if their "source of supply" seems threatened.

Before describing more specific commonalities between the "getter" and Fromm's receptive and exploitive orientations, it is necessary to differentiate between the latter types. The critical difference between the two types is that the receptive type expects to *passively receive* things (gifts) from others, while the exploitive type tends to *actively take* things from others. Thus, the "passive getter" (receptive orientation) includes that type of individual who exploits and manipulates others through *passive* modes. These individuals seek others who will take care of them. They are, as Fromm (1947) states, "always in search of the magic helper" (p. 70). Both Adlerians and Frommians consider this type to be very fond of food and drink. Indeed, many often turn to drugs, become alcoholics, or stuff themselves with food. On the whole, this type seems to be more optimistic than its counterpart, at least as long as their "source of supply" is not threatened. The passive-dependent personality is an example of a "passive getter."

The "active getter" (exploitive orientation) includes those types of individuals who "get by" *actively* manipulating and exploiting others. This type is often more pessimistic, suspicious, and envious of others than is the receptive type. Often the sarcastic "biting mouth" is the chief characteristic of this group. Here the "goodness" of others is dependent upon their usefulness, i.e., they are "good" if they can be manipulated and used for personal gain. The kleptomaniac is an example of this type of person; likewise, the antisocial personality, while not a pure example of an "active get-

ter," does, nevertheless, contain essential behavioral components of the active getter.

From the above analysis we can see that the "getter" who is passive in his approach to life is essentially a receptive type, whereas the "getter" who is active is essentially an exploitive type. Thus, both terms describe common behavioral patterns and, therefore, can be used interchangeably.

One of the major strengths of Fromm's theorizing is that he is one of the few personality theorists to attribute a specific set of traits to his character types (Maddi, 1976). By equating the "getter" with receptive and exploitive orientations, we are able to gain a broader, more specific understanding of some of the traits which characterize the "getter" behavior.

Each of Fromm's character traits lies on a specific continuum. A negative pole, indicating a discouraged life style (nonproductive)

TABLE I
RECEPTIVE AND EXPLOITIVE CHARACTER ORIENTATIONS
(TYPES) TOGETHER WITH THEIR PARTICULAR TRAITS

Positive Aspect	Negative Aspect
<i>Receptive Orientation</i>	
accepting	passive, without initiative
responsive	opinionless, characterless
devoted	submissive
modest	without pride
charming	parasitical
adaptable	unprincipled
socially adjusted	servile, without self-confidence
idealistic	unrealistic
sensitive	cowardly
polite	spineless
optimistic	wishful thinking
tender	sentimental
<i>Exploitive Orientation</i>	
active	exploitive
able to take initiative	aggressive
able to make claims	egocentric
proud	conceited
impulsive	rash
self-confident	arrogant
captivating	seducing

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anchors one end, and a positive pole, indicating a life style with social interest (productive) anchors the other end of the continuum. At this point, only the negative aspects from each orientation are congruent with Mosak's description of the "getter," e.g., submissive and aggressive. Both character orientations along with their traits are shown in Table 1 (Fromm, 1947, p. 120).

Because no one ever obtains a truly fully developed sense of social interest, and because no one ever completely lacks social interest, it makes little sense to talk in terms of strict dichotomies, e.g., healthy, unhealthy. Mosak's life styles, while very helpful, tend to deal generally with more negatively toned styles. Indeed, certain combinations of his life styles appear to be highly correlated with certain types of psychiatric disorders, e.g., phobic reaction, which is composed of the central themes or life styles of the controller, the martyr or victim, and the "aginner" (Mosak, 1968). The private logic of many "healthy" individuals, however, also contains these same themes. In spite of this fact, we have no real set of positive traits by which to describe them.

By equating the Adlerian and Frommian typologies we are able to build upon Mosak's typology, perhaps making it more flexible and dynamic and, thus, allowing us to speak of the more admirable qualities a "getter" might possess if s/he develops and expresses more social interest. After all, as mentioned before, there are few, if any, "pure getters." Thus, an individual who tends to get can be seen as lying on any point of the spectrum depending upon his level of social interest. For example, a "passive getter" who gains greater social interest could become less passive and more accepting of others, and/or less submissive and more devoted, and/or less cowardly and more sensitive, etc.; likewise, perhaps an "active getter" might become less conceited and more proud, and/or less arrogant and more self-confident, and/or less aggressive and more able to take initiative. By placing each trait on a continuum, we obtain greater flexibility and, thus, a more practical and realistic model.

In conclusion, if it is possible to identify specific traits for the "getter," then it is also quite likely that the same can be done for Mosak's other life styles, such as the controller, the driver, etc. By attributing specific character traits to each of his styles, one will strengthen and extend the usefulness of his typology.

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