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## The coming triumph of the psychosocial perspective: lessons from the rise, fall and revival of Erich Fromm

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This article presents the story of the rise, fall and revival of Erich Fromm, arguably the most important psychosocial thinker of the 20th century. Fromm was a major intellectual figure in the 1940s, 1940s and 1950s in a period of time when psychosocial work was growing in influence. Work that continues in that tradition is outlined and the implications this story holds for the psychosocial school of thought is spelled out through given events in the world today (Trumpism and right wing nationalism in particular) that once again create space for psychosocial ideas. The opportunities and the challenges faced today by the psychosocial perspective are discussed in light of the lessons that can be learned by looking at the earlier case of the rise and fall of Erich Fromm and the current global revival of interest in his theories. I conclude by offering some thoughts on how elements of sectarianism have sometimes plagued the psychosocial perspective and how this can be avoided in the coming years as we look forward to the coming triumph of depth psychological perspectives in the social sciences.

**key words** critical theory • emotions • psychoanalysis • social character • right-wing populism

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### Introduction

Psychosocial theories, methods, research and ideas represent a paradigm whose time has come, offering as it does, indispensable insights into the global cultural, political and existential crisis that we are living through. That is a lot of pressure for an academic tradition, especially one without much of a home in the contemporary research university and in the halls of political power or journalistic conventional wisdom. But, given world events and the challenge they pose to existing paradigms of knowledge, there is now what social movement scholars would call an opening in ‘political opportunity structures’ for the intellectual social movement of psychosocial scholarship (Frickel and Gross, 2005).

The further development of this journal is an important political and intellectual task and in this article I will offer just one small example that the potential revival, refinement and consolidation of this intellectual tradition offers for the world today outside our narrow academic and clinical debates. We are presently seeing a

worldwide revival of interest in the psychosocial perspective of the critical theory of German psychoanalytic sociologist and public intellectual Erich Fromm, which is connected to the coming flowering of a larger intellectual movement of psychosocial perspectives that this journal is part of. In this article I will present the story of the rise, fall and revival of Erich Fromm, arguably the most important psychosocial thinker of the 20th century. I will then outline work that continues in that tradition and the implications this story holds for the psychosocial school of thought. I will conclude by offering some thoughts on how elements of sectarianism have sometimes plagued the psychosocial perspective and how this can be avoided in the coming years as we look forward to the coming triumph of depth psychological perspectives in the social sciences.

## **A political moment of opportunity for the psychosocial perspective**

But first, why is the psychosocial perspective on the rise and its triumph in academia almost inevitable? Who can read the news today and not see passions, emotions, fears and psychic displacements, and not reflect on the dangers to the world posed by leaders with deeply flawed characters, all things that the major dominant paradigms in the social sciences have traditionally ignored, underestimated and misread. The dominant paradigms in the social sciences are in crisis, as they did not predict and have trouble explaining the election of Donald Trump, Brexit and the global rise of extremist nationalism and conspiracy theories that we are seeing around the world. Social media is a key element of all this, obviously, but the issues go deeper. After Donald Trump, is it really possible to argue that we need to look at politics exclusively through rational choice theories and ignore the importance of character and individual personality?

There are political and economic issues at stake in Brexit and it would be wrong to misuse the psychosocial perspective to simplistically argue that either Remainers or Leavers are paranoid, xenophobic, delusional or displacing their own anxieties about their lives onto policy questions. The chaos of Brexit is a political issue, not a psychological one, and ways forward must be political. At the same time, who cannot look at recent political debate in the UK and not ask questions about mass collective social psychology?

The psychosocial perspective cannot and should not offer a unified political approach to understanding these diverse events. Nor should psychological analysis replace detailed and peer-reviewed scholarship in economics, political science, sociology and related disciplines as if one could understand these dynamics purely through even the most sophisticated psychology. But the cork is unscrewed now and psychosocial insights cannot be returned to the bottle. They will soon enter the mainstream of social thought and this journal has an important role in creating this major paradigm shift over the coming decades.

This great potential is linked as well, we should remember, to the rise and broader triumph of psychological thinking in politics, and this has its negative consequences, as can be seen with the extraordinary rise to fame of Jordan Peterson. Peterson, a Canadian psychologist at the University of Toronto in Canada, became a world-famous celebrity intellectual in 2016–17 by taking Jungian clinical thinking and theorising to millions of young people on YouTube, alongside paranoid political critiques of ‘political correctness’ and what he argues is post-modern Marxist thinking in our

universities. Now is not the place nor the time for a detailed analysis of the Peterson phenomenon, but we should all put aside our initial visceral reactions to his ideas and personality in the interests of political effectiveness and analytic rigour. We must ask ourselves, why are so many young people dissatisfied with mainstream academic research and teaching, and what explains the pull that many obviously feel towards psychological thinking about social issues even if the particular form it is being expressed through is deeply cultish?

It is true, of course, that Peterson's complicated connections with figures on the political right as well as his obnoxious political posturing and exaggerated critiques of feminism, trans activism and left and liberal thinking play a significant role in his success. We are living in a time of political reaction. But, clearly, the massive commercial success of his semi-scholarly self-help book *Twelve rules for life* (Peterson, 2018) suggests a hunger for thinking about life and society in ways that do not ignore depth psychological insights. The proponents of psychosocial scholarship will rightly say that the revival and institutionalisation of psychosocial perspectives in the modern university require far more scholarly care than we have seen in and around the Peterson cult. But, who can deny that there is a desire and need out there for new ideas drawing on depth psychology? There is a vacuum that the social sciences must fill or our disciplines will not be long for this world, as massive institutional changes spread through higher education in these neoliberal times.

To be clear, my argument is not that psychosocial scholars should jump into political battles on all matters Trump, Brexit and far-right extremism. Nor am I suggesting that, as a school of thought, we should spend too much time seriously thinking about Peterson's ideas. The major work ahead for psychosocial scholars around the world is far more mundane: we should mostly just keep doing what we are doing, perhaps working a little harder around the development of a unique psychosocial perspective represented in this journal, in special issues and conferences and in some job advertisements. The action for the psychosocial perspective is mostly in the academic trenches:

- convincing university deans of the value of the approach;
- raising grant money;
- working with government, business and civil society;
- training, mentoring and promoting young scholars, including in their research projects, where they can do their work collectively and make their academic reputations;
- doing our teaching in the classroom and publishing in peer-reviewed journals and presses.

Some of us will want to be public psychosocial writers, but most of us will and should stick to traditional academic scholarship.

The reality is, however, that academic paradigms never rise and succeed simply because of the quality of ideas and hard work of committed scholars, as academic politics is always shaped by broader societal trends and political currents. We are living in a moment of opportunity for the psychosocial perspective and we must seize the moment with confidence and determination, but also a historical perspective. We should remember that this is not the first time in social science history that the psychosocial perspective has been thrust onto the intellectual scene by major

political events in the world, nor is it the only time that our ideas have been gaining momentum in academic institutions.

## **Total wars before the hyper-professionalisation of the social sciences**

In the wake of the senseless brutality of the First World War, and in the years just before and in the aftermath of the rise of Adolf Hitler, the social sciences were also becoming psychosocialised. The very disciplines of sociology, psychology, anthropology and political science that would come to dominate the 20th century were not fully institutionalised and professionalised at the time, of course, and they all became relatively open to psychoanalytic and social psychological ideas as traumatised soldiers came home from the front, the power of nationalism became obvious to all observers of world politics in the 1930s, and Freud's ideas gained status and attention in the humanities, among elite journalists and social scientists interested in culture and personality and related approaches. Even economics, the field most hostile to the psychosocial perspective, was not the ahistorical and mathematical dismal science it would become by the beginning of the 21st century, especially in the United States, and had room for psychological insight and research. The 1930s, 1940s and 1950s were a good time to be working on bringing depth psychological insights into the social sciences and while it was not called the psychosocial perspective back then, the opportunities for and openness to similar and related ideas were very real.

This openness to the psychosocial would not last into the decade of the 1960s, something I will illustrate from research on sociology. Sociologists in the later years of the Cold War era were moving in a different direction, away from the depth psychology that had such influence on their work in the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s and early 1950s. Sociologists had drawn heavily on psychoanalytic insights in the early and middle decades of the 20th century, but as George Cavalletto and Catherine Silver (2014) have painstakingly documented, there was a dramatic decline in references to Freud and psychoanalytic ideas in sociology journals beginning in the late 1950s. They persuasively argue that Freudian ideas had a significant influence on sociological thinking in the early 20th century, especially after the First World War. This peaked in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, so that Freud and depth psychology had become accepted elements of intellectual life in general and in sociological research and the theoretical tradition (Cavalletto and Silver, 2014).

This changed dramatically at the end of the 1950s. Using a systematic method to calculate references to Freud and psychoanalytic ideas in core journals such as the *American Sociological Review* and the *American Journal of Sociology* from 1900 to 2005, Cavalletto and Silver document a dramatic 'closing' of a previous 'opening' of the sociological mind to psychoanalysis, created by what they describe as a ferocious backlash (Cavalletto and Silver, 2014). Sociologists came to see the insights of the psychoanalytic tradition as too speculative, overly focused on psychological rather than sociological factors, and harmful to the development of a rigorous scientific sociology to compete with economics, psychology, political science and the natural sciences in research-oriented universities (Cavalletto and Silver, 2014). This move away from psychoanalysis was, as Silver (2014) shows, associated with what she calls 'paranoid and institutional' dynamics. Based on a careful sociological analysis

informed by psychoanalytic theory, Silver discusses what she calls ‘paranoid anxieties and paranoid theory’ and describes how the ‘struggle to position sociology as a science inflicted narcissistic injuries on both organizational and individual levels’ (Silver, 2014: 54).

## Erich Fromm's rise, fall and contemporary revival

Psychosocial studies can never be reduced to the ideas or influence of one individual thinker, but, at least in sociology, Erich Fromm was a major figure and the rise and fall of his psychosocial work parallel the broader trends outlined above. Fromm was a psychosocial thinker because he insisted on the importance of both depth psychological insights and historical-structural factors and his key insights came from exploring the interactions between these levels while giving each dynamic and mechanism serious analytic and empirical attention. Fromm fell in influence because of four major factors:

- sectarianism within psychoanalysis;
- political sectarianism within Marxism;
- the closed and insular nature of academic fields in relationship to mass publics;
- disciplinary orthodoxies that exclude the psychosocial.

Here I will tell the story of Fromm’s 20th-century reception, laying a framework for discussing how the current political opportunities for the psychosocial are creating a revival of Fromm’s work and new openings for this paradigm, but also setting new potential traps for our perspective.

The publication of *Escape from freedom* (Fromm, [1941] 1969) made Fromm famous as both a psychoanalyst and a sociologist. *Escape from freedom* argued that the rise of Nazism could not be understood without insights from both Freudian and sociological thought. According to Fromm, scholars rooted in Durkheimian and behaviourist assumptions about the need to look for the external sociological and political roots of the rise of Hitler were missing the deeply emotional and unconscious roots of human irrationality highlighted by the Freudian tradition. Freudians who tried to explain Hitler purely based on a ‘mad man’ theory of history were equally blind to Marx’s attention to the historical class-based origins of political movements and perspectives. In Fromm’s view, a purely psychological perspective on Nazism gave too little attention to the pathologies of modern individualism highlighted by Durkheim and the role of Protestant culture emphasised by the Weberian tradition. The crisis of the Second World War and the battle against fascism gave *Escape from freedom* its popular resonance, but Fromm’s theoretical synthesis of Freud and sociology made him influential within psychoanalytic institutions and among social scientists throughout the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s.

Fromm was never as influential in sociology as he was in psychoanalysis. Although he earned a PhD in sociology, supervised by Alfred Weber at Heidelberg University in Germany, and did serious empirical research in the 1930s (Bonss, 1984; Brunner, 1994; Friedman, 2013) and again in the late 1950s and 1960s (Fromm and Maccoby, 1970), he was never a professor of sociology nor did he engage as deeply with the profession as he had with psychoanalysis (McLaughlin, 2017a). Fromm saw himself as on the margins of the discipline and somewhat arrogantly saw himself above the

narrow concerns he saw as central to professionalised sociology. Fromm's *Man for himself* (Fromm, 1947) was instrumental in shaping the work of David Riesman, a sociologist whose *The lonely crowd* (Riesman, 1950) became the best-selling book of all time in the discipline (McLaughlin, 2001a). Moreover, Fromm's writing on the Marxist theory of alienation in *The sane society* (Fromm, 1955) and *Marx's concept of man* (Fromm, 1961) stimulated decades of empirical and theoretical work on the topic (Durkin, 2014). Fromm was a well-regarded sociologist in the 1940s and 1950s, was cited and discussed in major journals, and influenced young scholars particularly in the Marxist and conflict sociology that emerged in the 1950s and early 1960s.

There is a similar story to be told regarding Fromm's influence in psychoanalysis during the period of the psychosocial perspective's rise and decline. Fromm's initial influence as a psychoanalyst came from his association with what was once called the 'neo-Freudian' school of psychoanalysis in the 1940s and 1950s, which included Karen Horney and Harry Stack Sullivan (Funk, 1982; Burston, 1991; McLaughlin, 1998a), as well as his best-selling books on psychological themes in the 1950s, and his important although contested role in clinical practice, particularly at the William Alanson White Institute in New York (McLaughlin, 2001b; Cortina, 2015). I would argue that a key element of his fame and influence within the psychoanalytic field was his insistence that Freudians must confront society and history in a more sophisticated way. Fromm made psychoanalysis more sociological and helped to bring Freudian ideas into the intellectual mainstream in the United States.

One can understand Fromm's influence by emphasising how he helped pioneer a set of ideas related to new ways of thinking about early childhood, the self, the unconscious and approaches to clinical practice – all of which are reflected in what we now call the object relations, interpersonal and self-psychology schools of thought. The case for recognising Fromm's importance in psychoanalysis was made best by Jay Greenberg and Stephen Mitchell (1983): 'Fromm addressed many contemporary psychoanalytic issues decades before they were popularised by other theorists. He pointed to the importance of "narcissism," which currently dominates the literature' (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983: 106). In addition, Fromm 'introduced the concept of "symbiosis" (1941) years before Mahler ... [and] considered the role of agency and responsibility (1941) recently brought into the analytic mainstream by Schafer and Shapiro' (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983: 106). Fromm 'described the use of sexuality and perversions in the service of maintaining a fragile sense of self, an interpretive approach currently being developed by adherents of Kohut's "self-psychology"' (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983: 106).

As the psychosocial perspective declined in the broader society, Fromm's reputation went in a major tailspin. Fromm's reputation in sociology never really survived the late 1950s, despite the influence of his vision on young, radical intellectuals of the New Left. Sociology in the 1950s was becoming more professionally oriented, focusing its energy on what Columbia sociologist Robert Merton called 'middle range' theory, and thus increasingly rejecting the 'big picture' social science criticism practised by Fromm. Sociologists were concerned in the 1950s with establishing academic credibility in the research universities that came to dominate intellectual life in North America, and with doing mainstream and rigorous social science research. Citations to Fromm declined dramatically in the major disciplines, alongside a broader closing of space for the psychosocial perspective.

The two core reasons why Fromm's reputation rose so dramatically in the 1940s and early 1950s and declined so dramatically in the 1960s and 1970s were linked to his complex relationship to two major sect-like intellectual movements that were both profoundly creative and powerful, and deeply dogmatic: psychoanalysis and Marxism. Fromm was never as original or powerful a thinker as Freud himself, of course, but he was far more sociological, historically sophisticated and adept at writing for Americans. During the period from after *Escape from freedom* (Fromm, [1941] 1969) to the early 1960s, he was the single most important populariser of Freud in English, with the possible exception of the German psychoanalyst Erik Erikson. Fromm directly challenged core ideas about libido theory, the Oedipal Complex and the institutional practice of the psychoanalytic movement, and as a consequence his reputation was damaged by opponents of the psychoanalytic movement among psychologists and broader intellectual elites in North America who saw him as a misguided Freudian, as well as by defenders of the faith who saw him as a traitorous revisionist.

A similar dynamic played out with regard to the Marxist intellectual movement in Cold War and New Left era North America. Fromm was a student of the Marxist tradition and played an important role in developing a left Freudian lens that could help produce a radical theoretical perspective more attentive and sensitive to emotions and irrationality. Moreover, Fromm played a pivotal role in popularising the historical materialist perspective in American social science, particularly in *Escape from freedom* ([1941] 1969). Fromm played a key role in making people aware of the democratic and humanist nature of Marx's thought (Fromm, 1955), particularly in his 1844 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts' (Fromm, 1961; Durkin, 2014). Yet he was deeply anti-Stalinism, well before the dictator's death in 1953 and the exposure of his crimes against humanity by Nikita Khrushchev in 1956 (Fromm, 1950). Fromm also opposed Chinese Communism (Fromm, 1962) and was never drawn into Maoist fellow travelling that influenced many major left intellectuals of the 1960s era, such as Sartre and Foucault. As a consequence of these ideas and commitments, Fromm's reputation was damaged by his critics from the Cold War liberal and neo-conservative camps among elite intellectuals who saw him as a dangerous radical, while also suffering from perhaps even more hysterical attacks on his politics and scholarship by orthodox Marxists and proponents of the Frankfurt School's critical theory tradition that he had once been part of (Rickert, 1986; McLaughlin, 1998a; Durkin, 2014; Anderson, 2015).

Both psychoanalysis and Marxism are not traditional academic schools of thought but are intellectual social movements, which, shaped by a sect-like culture, tend to lead to denunciations, purges and excessive concern with intellectual purity (Coser, 1965; Frickel and Gross, 2005; McLaughlin, 2017b). While it would have been best for the psychosocial perspective back in the 1950s and 1960s for Fromm's insights to have been integrated and absorbed by broader theoretical traditions that included Jungian, Kleinian, Laing, Reichian, object relation and relational theorists, Lacanian and the Frankfurt School, and various versions of academic Marxism, sectarian divisions weakened the approach just at the time when mainstream social sciences were rejecting depth psychology as a whole.

These divisions were further enflamed by another major issue in the 20th-century academic world: the hostility many scholars experience with regard to public intellectuals and mass audiences. There are, of course, many good reasons why psychosocial scholars will be most concerned with establishing the perspective's

credibility within the research university, something that requires a technical and precise language, sophisticated empirical methods and specialised research programmes focused on peer-reviewed scholarship. Fromm's *The art of loving* (Fromm, 1956) sold more than 26 million copies and helped create a massively popular critique of the psychosocial consequences of market-dominated capitalist culture that shaped popular political activism during the civil rights and New Left era as well as being reflected in influential psychosocial-inflected scholarship (McLaughlin, 1998b).

The massive popularity of Fromm's writing damaged his reputational standing among scholars, and he came to be defined by the post-1960s generation of intellectuals as a simplistic populariser, not a serious thinker, partly because of the best-selling status of *The art of loving* (Fromm, 1956). Around the same time as Fromm published this book, he was also attacked by Herbert Marcuse, a German philosopher and 'critical theorist', in *Dissent* magazine, a low-circulation but high-status left-wing outlet, which helped ruin Fromm's intellectual and scholarly reputation (Funk, 1982; Richert, 1986; Burston, 1991; McLaughlin, 1999, 2008; Durkin, 2014). By the 1960s, Fromm had been defined as a simplistic and conservative popular writer, not a sophisticated psychosocial thinker and public intellectual. Fromm's insights and contributions were forgotten partly because of the hostility that academics hold towards popular writers, rooted in our own sometimes narrowly professional commitments to peer-reviewed work, an indispensable form of knowledge production but not something that should be worshipped as the only path to ideas.

Finally, the critiques made of Fromm were so influential in damaging his reputation because he was not rooted strongly in one specific discipline – sociology, psychology or social psychology. Sociologists rejected Fromm because they saw him increasingly as a psychologist or Freudian, not a social scientist concerned with the social. And as the discipline professionalised, quantified and became more methodologically rigorous from the 1950s through to the 1990s, he was increasingly seen as irrelevant. Psychologists viewed him as an historical sociological thinker, not part of scientific psychology. And, as first the behaviourist and then the cognitive revolutions swept a discipline that increasingly identified almost exclusively with the natural sciences, even Fromm's contributions as a personality theorist were forgotten. Fromm was essentially a social psychologist and the institutional basis for that field got caught in the no-man's land between sociology and psychology in the modern university. Fromm did himself no favours in all this, of course, as he was openly critical of modern sociology and vocally hostile to the discipline of scientific psychology, seeing it as a science of manipulation, an adaptation to an unjust and pathological society. There was truth to Fromm's critique, but there were times when he expressed his analysis in excessively prophetic, not analytic, terms (Maccoby, 1995). Social psychologists came to occupy a position of institutional and reputational vulnerability in late 20th-century research universities, so it makes sense that few young scholars in the field wanted to be associated with Fromm's controversial ideas. Fromm became a forgotten scholar even though he occupied precisely the intellectual space where psychosocial perspectives must go to create powerful ideas.

## The revival of Fromm's psychosocial ideas

The decline of interest in Fromm's ideas was not forever, it turned out, for the recent political opportunities that are creating new interest in the psychosocial perspective are



making space for a revival of interest in him. There is a resurgence of interest in the psychoanalytic orientation within sociology more generally, especially as represented in an important edited collection entitled *The unhappy divorce of sociology and psychoanalysis* (Chancer and Andrews, 2014). A good example of a sociological analysis that draws on Frommian-type ideas, although not as explicitly and comprehensively as she could have done, is Chancer (1992) *Sadomasochism in everyday life*. Chancer's research agenda holds the potential to open space for a feminist-influenced psychosocial sociology that draws heavily on Fromm's insights while avoiding some of his limitations (Chancer, 2017). There is a basis for Frommian-influenced work in sociology, even though it is clearly undeveloped and on the margins. The same revival is happening in psychoanalysis (Funk, 1982; Cortina, 2015; Buechler, 2017).

Psychologists generally remain uninterested in Fromm's insights, but recent political science and political sociology research has been far more open to address the rise of Trump using tools from the sociology of emotions (Hochschild, 2016), new versions of critical theory (Kellner, 2016) and the social psychology of a prematurely discredited authoritarianism research (Hetherington and Weiler, 2009). Only Kellner (2016) draws on Fromm to address these issues, but the opening is real given Fromm's contribution to the psychosociology of emotions and authoritarianism. And surely Fromm's brilliant analysis of malignant narcissism among authoritarian political leaders and their followers will have new relevance to sociologists who tended to dismiss this kind of psychosocial analysis before Trump (Fromm, 1973). Michael Maccoby's sophisticated empirical work on narcissistic leaders, undertook in the socio-psychoanalytic tradition, suggests that we should be cautious in too quickly pathologising Trump, thus missing the importance of his tactical political skills and the issues he has put on the political map (Maccoby, 2003, 2015).

## Lessons for the psychosocial perspective

The issue is not that we need a Frommian school of the psychosocial perspective to take advantage of the new openings for the perspective in the current political and scholarly climate – very much the opposite is true. The lessons we should draw from the rise and fall of Erich Fromm suggest that the last thing we need is to build the psychosocial paradigm around any one thinker or approach. And Fromm's ideas must be critiqued and reformulated and refined. When you look at how Fromm's psychosocial insights were created but then buried in the collective memory of 20th-century social science, however, there are four lessons that we can draw from the example that should guide contemporary efforts to build the psychosocial tradition in a new period of openness and potential.

### *Sectarianism among Freudians*

There would be no psychosocial perspective without the insights of the Freudian tradition, but the story of the rise and fall of Erich Fromm is also a story of psychoanalytic sectarianism that we must avoid. Scholars will come to the psychosocial perspective bringing theoretical commitments rooted in Klein, object relations, interpersonal, relational and Lacanian perspectives and there should be space for this intellectual diversity. Both orthodox Freudians and revisionist Frommians will contribute to the coming success of the psychosocial paradigm and it will not be

productive to refight the “Freud wars” of the past. The *Journal of Psychosocial Studies* and the broader psychosocial perspective must be deeply committed to Freudian eclecticism, taking the theoretical differences in these traditions seriously but not allowing scholars to forget the big picture. The broader social science community is blind and often hostile to depth psychological insights, and they and the general public are not interested in battles between these various camps rooted in 100-year-old quarrels. The psychosocial perspective must be committed to drawing out the insights of the psychoanalytic perspective but moving beyond narrow debates within various versions of Freudian-influenced theories to shape the discussions going on in the social sciences and among the general public about emotions, irrationality and passions. We have much to offer, but only if we keep our focus on these larger debates. Editors and reviewers of and contributors to the journal should always be asking themselves whether a particular theoretical insight is contributing to the development of a broader psychosocial perspective and is likely to be comprehensible and seen to be important outside particular schools of psychoanalysis.

### *Sectarianism within Marxism*

The same dynamic of sectarianism has the potential to ruin the opportunities we have for the rise of the psychosocial perspective within the Marxist-influenced elements of the perspective, and this must be resisted. The rise of far-right-wing populism in the current period is bringing back new interest in the insights of Frankfurt School critical theory and the research on the authoritarian personality; and the writings of Marcuse and Adorno, as well as Fromm, are being resurrected (Kellner, 2016). Along with insights, the revival of this tradition could very well bring back a form of political sectarianism that was common in the 1960s. Critical theory orthodoxy sees authoritarianism only as something that exists on the right and not also on the left, vilifies quantitative research as positivist and conservative, and promotes a focus on theory to an absurd extent that buries the importance of applied research in social work, education, child welfare and clinical practices. Moreover, Marxist orthodoxies will be used to make it difficult for some psychosocial scholars to look at personality and other individual variables as explanatory factors in stratification and inequality, as they surely are. The psychosocial perspective cannot have such political orthodoxies and must be open to all scholarly questions, including biology. Editors and reviewers of and contributors to the journal should always be asking what is the implicit politics of this piece and what can it do to address objections from those with different political views.

The return of critical theory alongside the psychosocial perspective may also bring back a certain sectarianism in the Frankfurt School tradition that limited our understanding of the world and will also make it difficult to raise funds and pull together the research teams required to do the hard work of psychosocial study where we test our theories against the world. The revival of the psychosocial perspective requires pragmatism, careful compromises and respect for political differences because the school of thought should be open enough intellectually to include scholars with different politics that range from the Marxist critical theorists, participatory action research, to political liberals and conservatives concerned with working without mainstream institutions. Scholars who do ethical research with corporations and governments cannot be drummed out of the psychosocial camp because of narrow

political litmus tests promoted by critical theorists trapped in a time warp of the late 1960s. Nor can we allow the current neo-McCarthyism being promoted by Jordan Peterson, which suggests that there is some kind of neo-Marxist post-modern conspiracy taking over our universities. Let us mine the Marxist and critical theory tradition for insights, but the psychosocial perspective must allow for a broad range of political perspectives, be concerned with practical results more than theoretical purity, and should find a place in all disciplines including in critical philosophy. Engaged applied research, however, should not be seen as lower down in the academic pecking order than philosophy or social theory, even though all our work should be theoretical.

### *Academic snobbery*

There is also a false hierarchy that exists in the symbolic boundaries and borders that exist between academic peer-reviewed scholarship and popular discourse, something particularly important to consider in this period of populist revolt. The current psychosocial revival has created new interest in depth psychology among the public and some of that can be seen with the rise of celebrity psychosocial perspectives, on the right with Jordan Peterson and on the left with Slavoj Žižek, a Slovenian philosopher and sociologist. One of the major challenges for the psychosocial perspective in the current period will be striking the right balance between academic scholarly work in peer-reviewed journals and the need for engaging the public outside the ivory tower, while avoiding celebrity-driven sensationalism.

We are living in a period where students are wired on social media, and we have seen many examples now of academics and intellectuals who have managed to create interest in new ideas on Twitter and YouTube, with blogs and TED talks, alongside writing popular books and essays in opinion journals and popular magazines. The success of the psychosocial perspective requires scholars among us who take the ideas out into the public sphere, and I hope the *Journal of Psychosocial Studies* will make space for discussion of this important challenge and task. Psychosocial work in peer-reviewed journals is the core, but this professional project will die on the vine if we do not also come up with strategies to get student interest in our ideas and create broad-based support for our perspective among mass publics. Some of us must be writing and speaking to the public with opinion pieces and essays, popular books, and on social media and should be supported and respected within our own scholarly ranks while doing this vital work. The journal should be on the alert for opportunities to publish work in the social understanding of the psychosocial perspective and should insist on the value, where possible, of clear prose and public relevance.

### *Disciplinary orthodoxy*

None of these ideas or practices will make any difference for the success of the psychosocial perspective if we do not find a way to create space for young scholars within research universities dominated by traditional disciplines such as economics, history, political science, psychology, sociology and, of course, the sciences; none of which have prioritised these insights. There are universities and departments that have done better on these issues than others, and we will hear from these places and scholars with their exciting research in these and forthcoming issues of the *Journal of Psychosocial Studies*. The truth is, however, that all disciplines and interdisciplinary

fields, including criminology, cultural studies, education, gerontology, philosophy and social work, create disciplinary orthodoxies and established ways of thinking. The challenge for us is to build networks, clusters, departments and a journal to help find strength in numbers. These institutional forms will create safe spaces in which we can explore the complexities of emotions and passions that are embedded in networks, organisations, cultures and institutions and cannot be understood in purely individualistic and biological terms.

Specific answers to the challenges posed to us by the limiting power of the disciplinary orthodoxies that we all need to negotiate must be created in practice by the new generation of psychosocial researchers who are emerging in a time of cultural, political and psychological crisis. A journal for this perspective is needed now, more than ever, and I am excited to be a part of it. The triumph of the psychosocial perspective is as close to inevitable as things can get in these academic matters. The 19th-century division between the disciplines that we have inherited is simply not adequate to address the ways that emotions, passions and feelings are both created by and in turn shape society and its social structures. The *Journal of Psychosocial Studies* exists in the intellectual space that the future requires. Despite enormous potential, however, the psychosocial perspective could once again lose out in the brutal academic competition that is the modern research university if we do not learn from the lessons of the past. Just as the qualitative tradition of symbolic interactionism triumphed in sociology not by defeating more mainstream traditions but by being absorbed into a broader set of disciplinary paradigms (Fine, 1993), the psychosocial perspective must be patient and smart. Attempts to create a Fromm school of psychosocial scholarship will certainly fail, as that would be sectarian and far too narrow. The same will be said of other competing practices within psychosocial traditions, if they attempt to dominate what must be a broad and loose coalition of scholars interested in emotions, passions and the social.

The need for this perspective in the world is more obvious than ever. Alongside existing powerful economic, political and historical forces, psychosocial dynamics will play their role in helping to reproduce social problems, inequality, hatreds, wars and climate disaster in the world outside our universities unless governments, policy makers, business leaders, social movements and citizens of the world directly address the psychosocial issues. Our scholarly work has the potential to contribute greatly to this larger set of social and political issues. I am proud to be part of this journal in the context of the broader intellectual project we call the psychosocial, as we struggle to create a new paradigm for thinking about psyche and society together – something desperately needed if the social sciences are to fulfil their potential.

### **Conflict of interest**

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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