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Novel Ideas for Social Work Theory and Practice That Were Ahead of Their Time

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Article abstract

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Keywords: Theory, practice, Erich Fromm, social character

Abrégé : Le domaine du service social tente actuellement de composer avec un certain nombre de théories et de concepts contradictoires dans sa quête pour découvrir des moyens d'envisager les questions sociales, le monde des clients et les pratiques exemplaires. Or, bon nombre

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de ces théories réunies de divers endroits ne s'inscrivent pas dans la même veine logique ni philosophique. Cela a mené à un fondement théorique décousu, épars et désuni en service social, ce qui en a sans doute affaibli son efficacité d'ensemble, sa réputation et son incidence. Le psychanalyste et philosophe allemand Erich Fromm (1900-1980) a offert différentes conceptions, positions et orientations qui pourraient solidifier les fondements théoriques du service social et peut-être même offrir des éléments de base utiles à l'élaboration d'une théorie unifiée du fonctionnement humain dans le monde. Le présent article explore l'ensemble des travaux de Fromm dans l'optique de mettre en application une partie de ses idées à la théorie, aux politiques et à la pratique du service social. Il aborde des solutions pour résoudre la bifurcation des théories issues de la psychologie et des théories fondées sur la société. Enfin, l'article s'attarde au concept de « caractère social » de Fromm ainsi qu'à ses incidences pour la pratique du service social.

Mots clés : Théorie, pratique, Erich Fromm, caractère social

Introduction

THOSE WITHIN THE FIELD of social work generally rely on a plethora of formal and informal theories to define their profession, improve their clinical practice, and understand the client world (Sibeon, 1990). The majority of these theories are centered either on understanding and modifying the psychological processes of individuals or understanding and modifying the social and structural environments that individuals inhabit. In spite of such theoretical abundance, there is little evidence that theories representing an integrated view of both human psychological dynamics and social processes are currently in use by social work practitioners. Many social workers, policy makers, and researchers inevitably rely on an ad hoc collection of internally and externally focused models that are often incongruent with one another. Thus, social work professionals hold incomplete conceptions about the nature of client problems, needs, and strengths. This leads to similarly incomplete prescriptions for personal and social change.

Erich Fromm (1900-1980) rejected the idea of a dichotomy between theories that focus solely on either individual psychology or societal determinism, and disagreed with those who attended to one without regarding the other. Just as he criticized Freud for favouring the presence of, and conflict between, internal drives in explaining the human experience, he also criticized sociologists such as Durkheim for minimizing psychological processes in relation to sociological ones. Fromm preferred an integrated view that equally credits both psychological factors and one's socially shared mode of living in explaining why people occupy the places they do in life.

According to Rasmussen and Salhani (2008), Fromm's body of work represents a useful starting point for developing a new, desegregated social work theory. "Social work must attempt to find a seamless conceptual map that theorists and practitioners can confidently use to understand and confront the complex issues of everyday life, from social organization to action, to the unconscious, and back" (p. 202).

As such, this paper considers Fromm as a relevant theoretical contributor to the psyche-social debate, especially through his treatment of the work of Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx. In many respects the two theorists symbolize the bifurcation of psyche and social, and Fromm spent much of his career reconciling their divergent theoretical orientations.

Next, a summary of Fromm's theory of social character is presented in a way that demonstrates its effectiveness in consolidating psychological and social-structural components. Fromm's social character types are considered in light of modern human problems. Included with the synopsis of each specific social character type is a reflection on the type's pertinence to life and how that type can be theoretically applied to social work policy, practice, and research.

Fromm, obsolescence, and postmodernism

An important aside must be made before proceeding. Although Fromm's ideas could easily be considered even more relevant in today's society than in his own (Ingleby, 1991), his manner and style of writing can appear quite dated at times. For example, as a "man of his time," Fromm almost exclusively used the term "man" when referring to humanity or people of both sexes. According to Thomson (2009), he became aware of this issue in the 1970s but could not find a "linguistically elegant solution" (p. 26) that would hold the same meaning. Despite containing such apparently anachronistic terms and ideas, the essence of his theoretical work is nonetheless useful for social work.

While Fromm did not identify as "postmodern," Davis (2003) argues that much of his work was aligned with some of the aims of postmodernist thought. Fromm shared something akin to a postmodern critique of modernism; a concern that the industrialized West drove individualism and, thus, a profound sense of existential insecurity and alienation. Where Fromm departs from postmodern sentiments is in his rejection of a strong-constructivist view of existence in favour of one that affirms both the existence and human need for a system of beliefs and values (Frie, 2003). Social work is decidedly value driven as it seeks to improve the lives of people. It could be said that postmodern theory aids in the useful deconstruction of privileged understandings about the world, thereby leading to emancipatory ends. However, common understandings in general are foundational for a continuing and collective sense of thought and agency. In other words, while some postmodern theorists, particularly

of the nihilistic stream, argue that there is little evidence for a non mind-dependent reality (Boghossian, 2006), social work theory and practice are each premised on the acceptance of at least an elementary set of truths, or what Sayer (2000) terms "practical adequacies."

Fromm's relevance to the psyche-social debate

Fromm was deeply intrigued with the bidirectional relationship between social control imposed by authoritarian regimes and the conscious and unconscious attributes of individuals.

Fromm brings at least three attributes to this discussion that could be viewed as particularly appealing to social work theorists: an interdisciplinary method, a pragmatic focus on developing clinically useful knowledge, and a drive for social change.

Fromm is a man who refused to be categorized. Although a sociologist and trained as a psychoanalyst, he was interdisciplinary in his approach, drawing from the fields of psychoanalysis, sociology, anthropology, economics, history, philosophy, and religion to contribute to his collection of social theories. Much of his work stemmed from the writings of Freud, Marx, and Spinoza, yet he was not reluctant to part with any of their ideas when they appeared to be misguided or obsolete.

Indeed, it is this multifaceted method that may have led to the criticism of Fromm from many of those fields. According to psychoanalysts, he is too "sociological;" for sociologists he is too "essentialist;" for Marxists too "voluntaristic;" and for theologians, too "humanist." Precisely because he mixes so many discourses and cuts across so many disciplines, he has tended to be marginalized by all of them" (Ingleby, 1991, p. li). For example, it was said that Fromm was both criticized and overlooked not because of poor ideas, but because he did not pay homage to the Freudian establishment (Burston, 1991). Some have cited these broad attacks, as well as Fromm's refusal to nurture his own academic following, as contributors to his movement into historical obscurity. Other theorists such as Lacan arguably contributed in a greater way in advancing the psyche-social debate among academic circles, and yet Fromm appeared more concerned with making his work accessible to the general public. Indeed, among those at the Frankfurt School of which he was a part, Fromm was by far the most widely popular.

Further, although both Lacan and Fromm were clinical psychoanalysts, Fromm drew heavily from his work with clients, while Lacan kept his theoretical and clinical worlds separate and did not include mention of any influence of his clinical practice in his writings (Bocock, 2002). While Lacan used linguistics as a tool to map the unconscious and to theoretically close the divide between psyche and social, he is charged with "oversymbolizing" and constructing over-complicated arguments that make any real-world application difficult (Dowrick, 1983). Social work

must also answer the question, "So what?" in regard to new theories that come along. In other words, complex or intangible theories that cannot be meaningfully translated into practice settings remain only academic artifacts and do little for the human agenda of improving people's lives. A combined psyche-social theory must be clinically relevant.

Fromm was criticized as a "grand theorist" by some, yet was known for minimizing the impact of his own work and was deeply self-reflective (Thomson, 2009). Such personal academic tentativeness and rejection of others' false dichotomies and arbitrary delineations are carried into his treatment of the psyche-social debate. Developing a combined psyche-social theory requires a methodology that is not overly loyal to any particular field of study. This would be a fitting task for those within the field of social work because clinicians and social work researchers already tend to work from a broad selection of theories, and are often required to speak a number of professional dialects in their work environments.

Fromm considered himself a "humanist psychoanalyst," and was deeply concerned with both developing human potential and addressing social ills. This is in line with accepted social work values, which formally include a dedication to social justice and to being of service to humanity (Canadian Association of Social Work, 2005). Such elements lend themselves to a mandate for social change. Both Fromm and the social work profession consider social development to be a pivotal component for improving the lives of large segments of the population, especially those pushed to the margins of society. Fromm became more engaged in American politics in the latter years of his life for this reason, and sought democratic reform on humanistic grounds. In fact, Freire (1970) himself, whom many anti-oppressive social work theorists have cited in formulating their work, broadly referenced Fromm.

Merging psyche and social through Freud and Marx

Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx possessed somewhat divergent views about the nature of human motivation, as well as whether agentic or structural factors dominated human life. Yet the commonalities Fromm outlines between them are important because they provide guideposts for the creation or extension of a psyche-social theory. Fromm highlights characteristics shared by Freud and Marx; namely skepticism about people's conscious thoughts pertaining to themselves and others, and their "dynamic and dialectic approach to reality" (Fromm, 1962, p. 17). These characteristics hold a common theme that are prescriptive for social work: that of the need for human beings to rid themselves of shallow and deceptive understandings of human nature, and the need to develop the courage to attend to the deeper elements of human life.

Fromm suggests that both Marx and Freud doubted the accuracy of people's everyday beliefs about themselves and about society. Marx

"believed that our individual thoughts are patterned after the ideas any given society develops, and that these ideas are determined by the particular structure and mode of functioning of the society" (1962, p. 14). These thoughts help people to cope with their lower stature, but could also be manipulative tools in the hands of an oppressive elite. Marx was concerned with freeing the populace from the bonds of a prevailing and oppressive economy through removing the illusory ideologies that masked their shared reality.

Similarly, Freud believed that people veiled themselves under elaborate illusions for the purpose of masking or dulling the "misery of real life" (1962, p. 15). Yet while such fantasies may offer short-term relief, they were posited to promote psychological impotence. Freud believed that if a person could foster an awareness about "the fictitious character of his conscious ideas, if he can grasp the reality behind these ideas, if he can make the unconscious conscious, he will attain the strength to rid himself of his irrationalities and to transform himself" (1962, p. 16).

Although Marx's thoughts about human self-deception occupied a socio-economic realm and Freud's were relatively centered on human libidinal drives, both theorists share a mutual legacy that exists to some degree in contemporary thought. For example, in the field of sociology, structural elements are given considerable weight in explaining the direction of people's lives. The public is generally considered to be unaware of these underpinning social structures, even though individuals reproduce these structures on a continual basis (Archer, 1982). In psychology, Freud also affirmed the effects of these social structures insofar as they unconsciously inform the repressive functions of the superego (Morris, 2006). As well, current psychological therapies, such as cognitive behavioural therapy, address forms of cognitive "unawareness" that manifest, for instance, in deceptive "automatic thoughts" that provide fuel for sometimes burdensome emotions.

The second common characteristic is in how they approached reality in a dynamic and dialectic way. Rather than looking to predict future behaviour (of an individual in the case of Freud or a state in the case of Marx) based on direct observation and a review of past behaviour, they suggested that one ought to consider the dynamics underlying that behaviour. For Freud, these forces are considered largely unconscious, and hold greater predictive power than a facile examination of one's everyday language and actions. Likewise, Marx believed that studying the underlying forces of a society would lead to a greater understanding of the past, as well as the alternatives a nation must choose between to move forward in a healthy way.

Fromm wrote specifically about the relationship between the individual and society, suggesting that one must study the psychosocial attributes adopted by the majority of a population in order to fully understand its larger economic and social structures.

> I should like to state that the relationship between society and the individual is not to be understood simply in the sense that cultural patterns and social institutions "influence" the individual. The interaction goes much deeper; the whole personality of the average individual is molded by the way people relate to each other, and it is determined by the socioeconomic and political structure of society to such an extent that, in principle, one can infer from the analysis of one individual the totality of the social structure in which he lives" (Fromm, 1947, p. 86).

"Social character" as Fromm's exemplar of a combined theory

Fromm's theory of social character represents a design that integrates human agency and psychological factors on the one side with social and structural elements on the other. Fromm links these in the form of degrees of personality adjustment as related to a society's mode of production and socio-political climate. Yet more than seeking to simply describe such character, Fromm's purposes were more prescriptive. Fromm's research to this end "aims at discovering various kinds of social character within the context of the factors that determine it; he then wishes to confront this social character with the teleological ideas entailed in a humanistic concept of man and history" (Funk, 1982, p. 24).

Fromm's concept of social character holds direct clinical application: to offer a societal baseline from which to gauge an individual's mental health. Fromm defines social character as "the nucleus of the character structure which is shared by most members of the same culture in contradistinction to the individual character in which people belonging to the same culture differ from each other" (Fromm, 1955, p. 76).

Such character arises from the structural realities of a particular society as an adaptation to its demands. Its purpose is "to mold and channel human energy within a given society for the purpose of the continued functioning of this society" (p. 77). Through this mechanism, the behaviours required by people to maintain that form of society are pushed from the realm of conscious decision. Further, these behaviours actually become powerful inner drives that motivate people to act in ways that are necessary to survive under the unique societal system.

Fromm meant for this social dynamic to be understood alongside intrinsic human nature, emphasizing that although the concept of social character would help one to discern how large groups of people adapted socially to their mode of existence, individuals also possess infinitely intricate personality attributes that could not easily be categorized. "Environment is never the same for two people, for the difference in constitution makes them experience the same environment in a more or less different way" (Fromm, 1947, p. 69). This is a sentiment that perhaps foreshadowed the hermeneutical turn of psychoanalysis, and is exemplified by Gadamer's (1960) concept of "situated" existence.

According to Fromm, social character is instilled to children through a familial process. The family essentially works (knowingly or unknowingly) on society's behalf to transmit these collective attributes to the next generation through the modeling of their own social character and through the rearing practices common to that society. What causes distress is the lag between a society's mode of life and the required social character. This idea is congruent with the phenomenon of generational alienation that occurs when the previous generation attempts to instill character traits that no longer match the mode of life of the subsequent one. For example, the frugalness of a generation raised during the Great Depression has created friction in members of later generations who are accustomed to material abundance and a "disposable" society.

Personal character orientations

As with social character, Fromm's conception of personal character orientations combines psychological and social factors. Much is shared between Fromm's theories of social and personal character. His model follows a Freudian foundation in the sense that a person's character traits are not directly observable, but underlie and are inferred by his or her behaviour. Further, individual traits are considered relatively stable over time and stem from an overall orientation that generally escapes the conscious awareness of the individual.

Some who sought to continue Freud's work, such as Reich, have arguably reduced Freud's theories to the instinctive and libidinal drives of a single, unattached actor. However Fromm reminds us that Freud's theory was essentially a "social psychology" (Elliot, 2009). Thus, Fromm portrays people as the product of their unique connections to the world. "In the process of living, man relates himself to the world (1) by acquiring and assimilating things, and (2) by relating himself to people (and himself)" (1947, p. 66).

By "acquiring and assimilating things" Fromm is referring to the things required to meet human needs. People relate to the world by collecting things from the world, transforming them in some productive way, and consuming them. Relationships with people and having a sense of oneness with them are also crucial to surviving and thriving in the world. Fromm suggested that human character was the uniquely developed mechanism through which people channel their mental energy in order to meet these relational needs. This mechanism is essentially automatic and outside a person's conscious awareness.

This idea lends credence to more recent social theories currently popular in social work. The concept of internalized oppression and inferiorization provides a relevant example. It is said that such self-oppression occurs in marginalized groups when members of a population adopt the stereotyped or racist views of the dominant group (Mullaly,

2007). "This internalized oppression, in turn, will cause some oppressed people to act in ways that affirm the dominant group's view of them as inferior and, consequently, will lead to a process of inferiorized persons reproducing their own oppression" (2007, p. 276).

Fromm might suggest that on certain levels, such a phenomenon would become a facet of the individual and social character of the group out of relational necessity. In order for one to "acquire and assimilate" (in other words, to simply survive), such self-demeaning patterns become necessary, dysfunctional as they are. Conversely, ethnocentric patterns and behaviours, such as microaggression (Sue et al., 2007) enacted by members of the dominant group, are equally tied to underlying character traits that are on some level adaptive to the mode of life one is born into. More than merely adopting behaviours that would naturally follow from such a character dynamic, Fromm might suggest that individuals would be compelled toward such behaviours and even be gratified by them. Put more simply, people are naturally driven to want to be what society wants them to be.

In terms of clinical intervention, Fromm may suggest that a focus only on ostensible behaviour is not adequate. Rather a deep study of a person, that allows the client to bring about an awareness of his or her underlying motivations and drives, is prudent. "Awareness and understanding of unconscious conflicts and previously unrecognized associations between events (which are revealed, for example, in our dreams) allow us to change and move forward" (Thomson, 2009, p. 75).

It should be mentioned that there has been a fair amount of confusion between Fromm's individual and social character types. According to Maccoby, social character "can be conceived as internalized culture, interacting with individual character. The culture provides not only ideals but also meanings of behavior.... Crucial interactions have to do with the fit, or lack of it, between individual character (and) culture (Maccoby, 2002, p. 34). However, in studying the character of a social group, one must study individuals within that group. Yet such study is focused "not in the peculiarities by which these persons differ from each other, but in that part of their character structure that is common to most members of the group. We can call this character the social character" (Fromm, 1942, p. 238).

Specific personal character orientations

In *Man for Himself*, Fromm proposes a number of character types that people tend to present with, many of which are considered "unproductive" and one "productive" (Fromm, 1947, p. 69). He is careful to stress that they do not represent discrete categories, but rather people represent a mixture of these types, with one often dominating the others. Three of these types (receptive, exploitative, and hoarding) follow from Freud,

although Fromm stresses the negative aspects of these types in his new formulation.

Freud's erotic type, who seeks loving relationships and is vulnerable to dependency becomes Fromm's receptive type. Freud's obsessive type (formerly the anal character) who is conservative and cautious with a strong moral attitude becomes Fromm's hoarding type. And Freud's narcissist who is aggressive and innovative becomes Fromm's exploitative type. None of Fromm's types contradict Freud's descriptions. However, they do elaborate on them (Maccoby, 2002, p. 34).

Fromm adds marketing, authoritarian, necrophilous, and productive types to Freud's set. Each of these types will be described briefly here:

The *receptive orientation* is typified by a belief that the best things about life are provided from outside of the individual. Their focus is primarily one of receiving rather than producing. According to Fromm, such individuals have a difficult time saying "no" to others because such an answer would represent the rejection of such crucial external supplies. "They often have a genuine warmth and wish to help others, but doing things for others also assumes the function of securing their favor" (Fromm, 1947, p. 71).

The *exploitative orientation* is similar in its focus on receiving, but rather than through offering loyalty and agreement, a person with this orientation prefers to acquire such things either by force or through trickery. According to Fromm, their motto is "stolen fruits are sweetest" and he suggests "their attitude is colored by a mixture of hostility and exploitation" (p. 73).

The *hoarding orientation* can be contrasted from the previous two in that those of this type place little stock in what they can derive from the outside world. Instead, they are defined by possessive behaviour toward things, memories, and people. Often cloistered from the outside world, such people experience a sense of personal scarcity. They hold the idea that one's resources are limited and must be preserved. As such they are oriented more toward death than life, and rely on order and rules of fairness.

Unlike the preceding three types, representing the least amount of development by Fromm, the remaining types receive a more thorough treatment. This stands to reason as the latter represented Fromm's distinct contributions. In addition, it can be readily seen how Fromm combines social and economic conditions and personal psychologies together in the latter four.

Marketing character type

Fromm conceived of the marketing orientation as consequence of modern capitalism. He laments the way material goods have been devalued in terms of their usefulness in favour of their "exchange value."

In other words, the former commercial practices typified by the relational process of honouring each other's work and creations have devolved into a faceless system of supply and demand.

In the same way, human beings have undergone such commoditization that their personalities face judgment in a similar way that an obsolete piece of consumer electronics might. Both are treated in the same manner: exploited if found profitable and discarded if not. Fromm asserts that in such an environment people will become adept at marketing themselves in order to be in demand and subsequently supported by a corporation.

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

Today, this is arguably more true than ever, and with the development of new technologies such as social media, the average Western worker requires much greater social savvy to function in the marketplace.

For those who are already marginalized or who cannot afford the resources required to compete in the human capital market, this provides an added obstacle to advancement in the workplace. The appearance of skills and abilities supersede actual skills and abilities. As such, those with "other" appearances, such as those of a minority group or with a noticeable disability, ailment, or discernable difference are immediately and chronically at a disadvantage.

Necrophilous character type

The term "necrophilous" literally means "lover of death" and provides an immediate indication of the type's inherent characteristics. The type represents Fromm's attempt at reconciling Freud's theory that human beings possess powerful co-occurring instincts for both life and destruction (Fromm, 1973).

Someone with such an orientation will destroy as an answer to his or her problems or simply for the visceral pleasure of it. Further, the necrophile holds a "passionate attraction to all that is dead, decayed, putrid, sickly; it is the passion to transform that which is alive into something unalive" (1973, p. 332). This is in contrast to what he refers to as the biophilia, or a passionate love for life and all things living.

Signs of necrophilous character may be subtle. For example, Fromm speaks of a parent who is preoccupied with his or her child's illnesses and failures, paying little attention to growth and success. He references the environmental destruction of the earth, as humans transform living things into dead commodities, and prefer to be surrounded by glass and aluminum rather than hills and streams.

One does not need to look far to see how this character type has spread further and deeper into Western culture over the past 40 years. Crime and medical dramas regularly feature grotesque images of the dead and dying. Moviegoers are no longer content to watch someone merely die on screen. What is now demanded is an articulated, amplified, and protracted display of human death and suffering.

Fromm suggests that such a compulsion toward death arises when a person cannot reconcile the existential issues of his or her life.

> The psychical necessity for the development of necrophilia as a result of crippledness must be understood in reference to man's (sic) existential situation. If man cannot create anything or move anybody, if he cannot break out of the prison of his total narcissism, he can escape the unbearable sense of vital impotence and nothingness only by affirming himself in the act of destruction of the life that he is unable to create (1973, p. 391).

A similar force may be witnessed in families who receive social services. For example, parents with a necrophilous character, acting as societal agents, may inadvertently instill similar characteristics in their children. When their children respond in kind, this often results in a loop of destruction manifested in the form of abuse, substance addictions, criminal activity, psychological troubles, and eventually incarceration, mandatory child-protective services, and other dire outcomes.

Authoritarian character type

This orientation is generally divided into two major subtypes: sadism, or the satisfaction that is derived from dominating and inflicting pain on others, and masochism, the gratification that comes from being dominated and also being the object of such painful infliction. For Fromm, both subtypes were essentially two sides of the same coin. He referred to this dynamic as authoritarian because both subtypes are concerned with an admiration of authority, whether through submission to it or through the wielding of it. Those who express this character type are attracted to superior-inferior relationships and have difficulty with egalitarian relations.

This character orientation may serve to at least partially explain the chronic dependence of many clients on the welfare state and legal system.

Fromm suggests that because the sorts of freedoms acquired under capitalism are isolating and anxiety producing, people will often seek to shackle themselves in a maladaptive way to someone or something outside themselves. "Both masochistic and sadistic strivings tend to help the individual to escape his unbearable feeling of aloneness and powerlessness" (Fromm, 1942, p. 130). Such masochism involves a denial of self and a submission of will to an authoritarian person or system.

Further, a multitude of unwitting attendant social workers, police officers, nurses, or other helping professionals might in some ways enable and reenact some of the unhealthy conditions that produced the authoritarian orientation in the first place. A sadomasochistic mindset, instilled during a person's youth via parental or state influence, could be reinforced later by the system. The existence of sadistic or authoritarian elements within the welfare state and penal system could represent a grand phenomenon of transference and countertransference, with each "side" (worker and client) being naturally attracted to this orientation through formative life experiences.

For social work practitioners, the concept that some could be unconsciously drawn to the profession through a sadist mechanism is a chilling one. As with parenting, the line between acting as a positive socializing agent and authoritarian figure can be thin. Fromm points out that sadism need not be overt,

> The driving forces are not necessarily conscious as such to a person who is dominated by them. A person can be entirely dominated by his sadistic strivings and consciously believe that he is motivated only by his sense of duty. He may not even commit any overt sadistic acts but suppress his sadistic drives sufficiently to make him appear on the surface as someone who is not sadistic (1942, p. 140).

Among professions imbued with state authority such as child protection or the judicial system, is it possible that a portion of those attracted to the vocation are drawn by an unconscious drive to dominate and cause suffering in others? Certainly, the vast majority of those entering the profession are motivated by their inherent goodness and humanistic ideals. Yet Fromm, having experienced fascism first hand, was cognizant of the attraction of humans toward authoritarian dynamics.

The productive character type (with implications for social work policy and practice)

Most of the preceding orientations are decidedly dark. Perhaps this is due to the events that coloured Fromm's life: anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, totalitarian regimes, two world wars, and the like. Conversely, Fromm's productive type represented the supreme mindset and manner of living

that a human being could possess. By "productive," Fromm does not mean working toward a materially successful life, but rather having an attitude focused on the process of truly living.

Fromm was dissatisfied with Freud's idea of the "genital type," a concept that focused mostly on healthy and adaptive sexual and social functioning. Rather, he conceived of a mindset by which one is dominated by a love for life, true psychological freedom, and creative spontaneity.

> Spontaneity is the acceptance of the total personality and the elimination of the split between "reason" and "nature"; for only if man does not repress essential parts of his self, only if he has become transparent to himself, and only if the different spheres of life have reached a fundamental integration, is spontaneous activity possible (1942, p. 223).

Such spontaneity is manifested in the form of relational productiveness. In other words, such a person "experiences himself as the embodiment of his powers and as the 'actor'" (Fromm, 1947, p. 91). At the same time, such agentic power is couched within the context of a healthy relationship to the world and its structures. Once again, Fromm merges the individual with the social world; the two cannot be separate.

For a person's relationship to the world to be productive, Fromm suggests that a person must find a balance between reproducing the world and generating the world. This entails "conceiving it as it is and by conceiving it enlivened and enriched by his own powers" (p. 97). In other words there is a focus on being in touch with reality, but also recognizing that rather than simply reproducing that reality as an automaton, a person can make a positive contribution to that reality as an actor.

Although this enrichment will often come in the form of creative material endeavors, the highest focus of agentic power is on humankind itself. Human beings attain a pinnacle of enrichment when they are in the process of continual rebirth and growth as well as in the process of loving relationships with others. Fromm considered a productive love for humanity to be humankind's greatest aim.

How does one translate this idea into one that is congruent with social work values? The concept of "love" in a social work context is certainly a problematic one. The idea of a practitioner "loving" a client somehow resonates as "unclinical", as though professional lines have been crossed. Yet Fromm emphasizes that productive love is quite dissimilar to the broad societal definition of the term:

> Love is the productive form of relatedness to others and to one's self. It implies responsibility, care, respect and knowledge, and the wish for the other person to grow and develop. It is the expression of intimacy between two human beings under the condition of the preservation of each other's integrity (1947, p. 116).

When one speaks about providing care or having responsibility, even in a clinical setting, that person is showing "productive love" according to Fromm. When a social worker shows respect for a client through solidarity with them, or relates to their human core by seeking to know them at a deeper level, they are likewise acting with productive love. Fromm answers the criticism that such "love" is incompatible with secular society by asserting that love is the "ultimate and real need of every human being" (Fromm, 1956, p. 123). As such, rather than attempting to rid clinical contexts of a "productively loving" orientation, Fromm might suggest that social workers should encourage it.

Further, such "productive love" could extend to macro level practice as a structural remedy to persistent social ills. "Society must be organized in such a way that man's social, loving nature is not separated from his social existence, but becomes one with it" (1956, p. 122). Fromm's redefinition abandons the term's facile and saccharin-like connotations and recasts love as a rational response to the maladies of society.

Broadening this idea, social workers who want to apply Fromm's ideas on a macro level may do well to attempt to articulate the social character orientations of their locale. As with the psychodynamic view of bringing about change in one's mind, this step would involve seeking awareness around elements of the collective social unconscious and lifting them to the surface for consideration. Questioning one's deeper values may result in the abandonment of some of them. In other words, macro practice suggests that perhaps a culture as a whole would be well served to discard unproductive ways of thinking. Under such a paradigm, individual clients are no longer solely responsible for their lot, but are viewed within a societal context. When this integrated view of self and society occurs, society itself may become the client.

Conclusion

Social work theory currently lacks a theoretical model that effectively combines internal psychological factors and external social structural factors in its struggle to explain the reality of people's position and action in the world. Erich Fromm and his body of work, although long forgotten by the academy, have never been more relevant to such an aim. "Fromm's unique attempts to synthesize depth psychology and a critical perspective on modern social forces make his work central to social work's mission of alleviating oppression, fostering social justice, and facilitating healing and growth" (Rasmussen & Salhani, 2008, p. 203).

Fromm's theory of social character is readily applicable to modern problems perhaps in a greater way than when it was conceived. Social work theorists have an opportunity to build on this body of work in ways that are useful to healing both individuals and the societies they inhabit.

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