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## **An Analysis of Erich Fromm and Karen Horney through Cultural Psychology**

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## Abstract

In this opinion paper, I analyzed Erich Fromm and Karen Horney, two of the famous Neo-Freudians from the perspective of cultural psychology. First, I described the common characteristics of Neo-Freudians. Second, I stated Fromm's and Honey's criticisms of Freud. Third, I summarized the philosophies of Fromm and Horney. Fourth, I elucidated why they chose specific values as the important ones for humans from their life experiences, cultural backgrounds, and the zeitgeist of their time. In conclusion, both scholars underscored the importance of achieving two opposing motivations (i.e., individuation from others and connectedness to others) for humans, yet their answers were ambiguous because the self-construct they used allowed only one of these two opposing motivations.

## 要旨

本論文では新フロイト派に分類される二人の巨人、エーリッヒ・フロムとカレン・ホーナイの思想が文化心理学の視点から論じられる。新フロイト派の思想の概略が説明された後、上記二人の学者が述べたフロイト批判と彼ら自身の思想が紹介される。続いて彼ら自身の思想が、各々の人生経験に加えて彼らの生きた時代や文化的背景から非常に強く影響を受けながら形成された事実を指摘する。結論として、フロムとホーナイが現代人に提言した生き方の処方箋は「自己確立」と「他者との関係性の確立」という二つの目標の達成を暗示しているが、各々の文化により異なる概念（例：自己意識）の存在が彼らの提唱した生き方の処方箋を不明確にしていると推論された。

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In cultural psychology, psychological terms that are traditionally assumed as universal, such as self, mind, and emotion, are considered artifacts of culture (Kitayama, 1997; Miller, 1999). Therefore, individuals create their own subjective reality from their own unique experiences with other people, the societies they belong to, and the zeitgeist of their time. In this paper, Erich Fromm and Karen Horney, two of the famous Neo-Freudians, are analyzed from the viewpoint of cultural psychology. I discuss these two scholars in the following order. First, the characteristics of Neo-Freudians are explained. Second, Fromm's and Horney's criticisms of Freud are introduced. Third, Fromm's philosophy is outlined. Fourth, Horney's philosophy is summarized. Fifth, both Fromm and Horney's philosophies are culturally analyzed. At the end, conclusions are drawn.

### 1. Characteristics of Neo-Freudians

Historians of psychology assumed that Fromm and Horney belonged to the Neo-Freudian psychoanalytic school of thought (Schultz & Schultz, 1992). There were four major common assertions among Neo-Freudians. First, unlike Freud, sexuality was not a crucial factor for human behavior. Second, they thought environment, especially society and its own culture, played a much greater role in psychological development than Freud's developmental theory had suggested. Third, human relationships with other people were considered significant factors in psychological development. Fourth, the present was deemed more important than the past (Suzuki, 1992).

## 2. Criticism of Freud from Fromm and Horney

Fromm (1956/1989) explained his criticism of Freud as follows:

My criticism of Freud's theory is not that he overemphasized sex, but his failure to understand sex deeply enough. He took the first step in discovering the significance of interpersonal passions; in accordance with his philosophic premises he explained them physiologically. In the further development of psychoanalysis it is necessary to correct and deepen Freud's concept by translating Freud's insights from the physiological into the biological and existential dimension (pp. 34-35).

Fromm focused on the relationship between an individual and society and emphasized the influence of modern capitalism upon the cognition and behavior of contemporary human beings. Horney also criticized Freud's theory as too physiological, deterministic, and mechanical and emphasized the influence of human relationships upon behavior and the importance of cultural factors (Suzuki, 1992). Nevertheless, Freud was also influenced by the zeitgeist of his time: faith in science (Schultz & Schultz, 1992). Freud tried to explain human beings from a mainly biological perspective (Sulloway, 1979) because most of the people in his time believed that science could solve all the problems they faced.

## 3. Fromm's Philosophy

For Freud (1930/1961), sexuality was the center of human life because he tried to understand human beings solely from their physiological functions.

We said there that man's discovery that sexual (genital) love afforded him the strongest experiences of satisfaction, and in fact provided him with the prototype of all happiness, must have suggested to him that he should continue to seek the satisfaction of happiness in his life along the path of sexual relations and that he should make genital eroticism the central point of his life (p. 48)

Nevertheless, in Fromm's philosophy, the essential key for understanding human beings was not sexuality. Fromm (1941/1969) claimed that the most critical issue in

psychology was how an individual should relate to others, not simply through instinctual and physical gratification. According to Fromm (1941/1969, 1973), not only psychopathology but also violence and cruelty were the results of isolation, insecurity, and anxiety, which are by-products of the Renaissance and modern capitalism. Fromm (1941/1969) stated that in the Middle Ages, people believed that the universe was a single, giant organism in which each person had his or her own role under God's rule. Although human beings in this era had extremely limited individual freedom, people were very confident about their past, present, and future lives because everything was believed to be in God's almighty hands. However, since the Renaissance, modern science has developed so rapidly that it has taken over the absolute authority of God. Although modern human beings gained individual freedom and were liberated from the authority of the church, they lost social stability and a sense of belonging to community, nature, and God. In other words, people attained freedom but lost something on which they could depend. However, many of Fromm's critics complained that Fromm idealized human life in the Middle Ages (Knapp, 1989).

Additionally, modern capitalism makes a human being "a commodity, experiences his life force as an investment which must bring him the maximum profit obtainable under existing market conditions" (Fromm, 1956/1989, pp. 77-78). Therefore, many contemporary human beings are faced with feelings of isolation, insecurity and anxiety in their daily life. Thus, those who can not stand the feelings of isolation, insecurity, and anxiety are trying to escape from the freedom which promotes these feelings. The Germans, who were devoted to Nazism during World War II, might indicate that Fromm was correct because they followed Hitler without questioning his orders and threw away their cherished freedoms. Additionally, Fromm (1973) stated that the more people lose social belongingness and feel more alone, the more cruel, violent, and destructive they become.

Fromm's prescription for the disease of contemporary humans was an altruistic style of love and productive work for the sake of general welfare. Nevertheless, many of Fromm's critics complained that his explanations were unclear (Knapp, 1989).

In his later years, Fromm proposed that the ultimate aim of humans is self-realization: to attain the capacity of real love and productive work. His concept of "self-realization" was heavily influenced by Zen-Buddhism because of his longtime friend, Daisetz T. Suzuki: "the mediator of Zen in the West" (Funk, 1978/1982, p. 122).

#### 4. Horney's Philosophy

Many psychological theories have been produced from the psychologist's own life experience. For example, Erikson felt excluded from any group of people throughout his life (i.e., he felt no sense of identity); as a result, he invented a new field of psychology: identity psychology (Tatara, 1990). Karen Horney's mother favored Horney's older brother more than Horney herself, and her father underestimated her figure and her mental ability (Schultz & Schultz, 1992). As a result, Horney herself developed a "basic anxiety," which she defined as a child's "feeling of being isolated and helpless in a world conceived as potentially hostile" (1950/1991, p. 18). This means that the "basic anxiety" was not innate but the result of an unsatisfactory relationship between the child and the parents. As for Freud, the major human drive was the satisfaction of libido. Nevertheless, Horney proposed that the major human drive was aiming "not at satisfaction but at safety" (1945, p. 13). For her, the utmost motivation of human behavior was to relieve "basic anxiety." Although Horney also admitted the magnitude of childhood experiences in Freud's theory, she did not accept a deterministic view of personality development. She wrote, "I believe that man can change and go on changing as long as he lives" (1945, p. 19). Rejecting a universal pattern of personality

development, Horney (1939) proposed that personality development was totally dependent upon cultural and social factors. Horney (1945) stated,

And my impressions were confirmed when I came to the United States in 1932. I saw then that the attitudes and the neuroses of persons in this country differed in many ways from those I had observed in European countries, and that only the difference in civilizations could account for this (p. 12).

According to Horney, in attempting to relieve this “basic anxiety,” people fall into three categories of maladjustment. First, “the compliant type, manifests all the traits that go with ‘moving toward’ people” (1945, p. 49). “In sum, this type needs to be liked, wanted, desired, loved; to feel accepted, welcomed, approved of, appreciated; to be needed, to be of importance to others, especially to one particular person; to be helped, protected, taken care of, guided” (1945, p. 51). The second category was the aggressive type of people who are always “moving against people” (1945, p. 63). They want to conquer everybody. The third category consisted of those who are “moving away from people” (1945, p. 72). Such people don’t seek others’ affection or fight against it, but they try to keep away from other people. They want to avoid any dependency. Nevertheless, none of these behavior types was the ideal way to resolve basic anxiety. Horney (1945) wrote,

The neurotic must be helped to retrieve himself, to become aware of his real feelings and wants, to evolve his own set of values, and to relate himself to others on the basis of his feelings and convictions (p. 220).

Horney (1945) believed that these three neurotic types are by-products of a negative and unsatisfactory childhood environment. According to Horney (1945), these three neurotic types can be prevented by warmth, understanding, and loving care in the secure family environment.



## 5. Cultural Analysis of Fromm's and Horney's Philosophies

Both Fromm and Horney offered two layers of answers to contemporary human beings' conditions. The first layer of Fromm's answer was to accomplish non-possessive love and productive work. Fromm's second layer was self-realization. The first layer of Horney's answer was having love, warmth, understanding, and security. Horney's second layer was to find the real self, which is hidden under the idealized self-image, and to live honestly according to one's real self.

In their first layers, both Fromm and Horney picked up several values, but neither of them could explain why these values were more essential than other values. I assume that they chose these values for three reasons. First, their Western culture traditionally and historically had regarded these values as more significant than other values. Second, the zeitgeist of their time and their own life experiences and environments led them to choose these values unconsciously. Third, they were longtime friends who shared ideas until their friendship ended when Fromm diagnosed Horney's daughter with a psychological problem caused by her mother (Knapp, 1989).

In Western culture, the fundamental way of thinking originates from Judaism and Christianity. In Christianity, the highest value is God and God is love. Although the definition of love in English varies from person to person (Sternberg & Barns, 1988), love in Christianity only means non-possessive, altruistic love: loving other humans without expectation of any reward. Additionally, the Protestant ethic emphasizes productive work. Germany, where Fromm and Horney came from, used to be a Protestant country before the rise of Nazism.

A brief review of Fromm's life shows he was born in Germany in 1900. Fromm was raised in an Orthodox Jewish family (Fromm, 1994; Schaar, 1964). As an extraordinarily intelligent student at the Universities of Heidelberg and Munich, Fromm witnessed the

breakdown of the German Protestant cultural environment (Schaar, 1964). In addition, many of Fromm's ancestors were Rabbi and scholars of the Talmud. He came to the United States in the early 1930's in order to escape the Nazi persecution of the Jews. From that time on he lived in the U. S. and Mexico and died in 1980 (Fromm, 1994; Schaar, 1964).

Schaar (1964) described Fromm's life as follows:

War, cultural chaos, psychoanalytic explorations, homelessness, and totalitarianism - these are the epochal features of the world of Erich Fromm. He lives in a day when the sun has gone out of the human condition, and all his writing starts with the conviction that the life of Western man has gone desperately wrong. This sense of urgency which pervades Fromm's work has made of it an ambitious system of social criticism (p. 4).

Because of these life experiences, Fromm denied the fundamental core of Western civilization: God. Therefore, when he had to choose the most important value for human beings, he did not choose God. Yet, he chose the one and only synonym of God: non-possessive love. Unconsciously, Fromm might have chosen the one and only synonym of God because he claimed to be a humanist in his conscious sphere. Nevertheless, both his family background as an Orthodox Jew and the cultural environment of the German Protestant atmosphere made him choose non-possessive love and productive work as the core values of human beings.

The development of Horney's theory is also similar to Fromm's situation. As mentioned before, Horney did not obtain love, warmth, understanding, and security from her parents in her childhood. When she turned fourteen, she began experiencing adolescent crushes in order to gain these values. Schultz and Schultz (1992, pp. 479-480) described her as follows.

At seventeen she started a newspaper called 'a virginal organ for supervirgins' and took to walking the streets frequented by prostitutes. "In my own imagination," she

confided to [sic.] her diary, “there is no spot on me that has not been kissed by a burning mouth. In my own imagination there is no depravity I have not tasted, to the dregs” (Horney, 1980, p. 64, cited in Schultz & Schultz).

Although she married, her married life was a disaster. She was unable to enjoy her sexual life with her husband and was depressed and had frequent stomach aches. Both before and after her divorce, she engaged in several affairs (Schultz & Schultz, 1992).

Feeling starved for these values during childhood and continually pursuing them throughout her life, Horney chose love, warmth, understanding, and security as the fundamental values of the human being.

Although Fromm’s answer in his second layer was self-realization, he “failed to find that indestructible core called the self. His failure is due partly to bad metaphysics and partly to bad logic” (Schaar, 1964, p. 67). But I can suppose his concept of self-realization is very similar to that of Zen-Buddhism because of the influence of his longtime friendship with Daisetz T. Suzuki. “For Suzuki, Zen is ‘the quintessence and the spirit of Buddhism’ and ‘the teaching of the heart of Buddha’”(Funk, 1978/1982, p. 122). Horney also stated in her second layer that self-realization is the answer. She defined the real self as a “central inner force, common to all human beings and yet unique in each, which is the deep source of growth” (1950/1991, p. 17). Her description of the real self mirrors one of the main concepts of Buddhism: The one is whole and the whole is one. In Buddhism, self-realization means to understand this concept not only rationally but also through one’s total existence (i.e., body, soul, and mind). This kind of understanding is termed as *satori* in Zen-Buddhism. It is a kind of “experience of enlightenment” (Funk, 1978/1982, p. 122).

Therefore, both Fromm’s and Horney’s self-realization accomplishments seemed similar to Buddhism. In attainment of *satori*, individuality and relatedness with others become one integrated accomplishment. In Zen-Buddhism, happiness can not be thought of from the individual perspective because we can not become happy in isolation from others.

Zen-Buddhism says that we can not become happy in confronting other people's agony because all living beings are connected and interdependent. This assertion is supported by some social scientists in the West. For example, Durkheim (1897/1966) studied suicide, an individual behavior, and found that religion, gender, and marital status influenced the probability of suicide in individuals. He concluded that as individuals lose meaningful connections to society, they begin to feel that life is meaningless, and society itself also begins to suffer from anomie, the feeling of despair and meaninglessness (Durkheim, 1897/1966).

Many terms in Zen-Buddhism are context dependent, losing all meaning when removed from their context. Likewise every human being needs their social environments to give meaning to their lives. Each person gains his or her uniqueness from one's relationships with others. Therefore, we need others in our life for our mental and physical well-being. Actually, Berscheid and Reis (1998) found that people consider high quality, close human relationships as more important than anything else for psychological and physical health.

Several scholars have pointed out that individualism is one of the fundamental ideologies in the United States (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Berscheid, 1999; Sampson, 1988; Triandis, 1995). In order to sustain individualism, two core values are implied in every aspect of American life: autonomy and freedom from any external force. For example, many schools of psychotherapy (Sue & Sue, 1990), the educational system (Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989), and the institution of marriage (Dion & Dion, 1993) in the U.S. have attempted to adjust to the standard of autonomy and freedom. However, this ideology also risks isolation and the devaluation of human relationships, because conformity, obedience, and interdependence have been viewed as signs of weakness and helplessness in Western psychology (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1994). Furthermore, some have argued that psychopathology (Allen, Coyne, & Huntoon, 1998), obesity (Schumaker, Krejci, Small, &

Sargent, 1985), narcissism (Lasch, 1978; Mijuskovic, 1979), risky sexual behaviors (Miller & Paone, 1998), and violence (May, 1969/1989) in the U.S. are partially caused by the effects of isolation and the devaluation of human relationships.

Contemporary scholars have also proposed that every human being has two opposing motivations: individuation from others and connectedness to others, and that both motivations are essential to healthy human life (Guisinger & Blatt, 1994; Triandis, 1995).

Finally, both Fromm and Horney noticed a critical problem of contemporary individuals in modern societies. The individualism in Western society caused them to question the meaning of happiness of individuals out of social context. In addition, both of these scholars used the psychological term “self,” which was referred to as “independent-self” by Markus and Kitayama (1991). This kind of self fundamentally assumes that one’s self has clear boundaries and emphasizes the significance of independence and autonomy. Although both scholars' philosophies were similar to Zen-Buddhism, they were somehow critically different from Zen-Buddhism, because their psychological term for self is independent self, and psychological self in Zen-Buddhism may be interdependent-self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The interdependent-self assumes that uniqueness of an individual is created from one’s relationships with others. Moreover, Suzuki (1967) underscored that in traditional Western thought, the existence of A is different from the existence of B or C. There is a clear boundary of individual unique existence. Yet in Zen-Buddhism, existence of A can become the existence of B or C within a particular context. Therefore, many Westerners have problems in utilizing Zen-Buddhism.

## 6. Conclusion

Both Fromm and Horney indicated that we need to obtain a balanced integration of individuality and relatedness for happiness long before excess individuality becomes a real

headache of contemporary American life. From a cultural psychologist's perspective, both Fromm and Horney thought and lived in their environments, the zeitgeist of their time, and their cultures. They chose their own unique values from their unique life experiences and searched for happiness from an individualistic perspective because the United States of America, the country to which they had recently immigrated, was the most individualistic country on Earth (Triandis, 1995). Their unique framework of zeitgeist and culture molded them to have their values and their philosophies of life. Both scholars searched for the answer of self-realization that mirrors Zen-Buddhism. However, their answers for attaining the two goals (i.e., individuation from others and connectedness to others) became vague because a crucial psychological construct, "self," they used allowed only one of these two motivations. The more independence and autonomy an individual with independent-self achieves, the more connections and the meaning of life he or she loses. Yet their unsatisfactory answers can be prevented. We can integrate some artifacts (e.g., psychological constructs, religion, formatted behavior patterns) of different cultures into our own psychological system. The crucial point is to acknowledge the critical differences among cultures (e.g., the construct of "self" in case of Fromm and Horney). We are likely to assume that the word means the same thing across cultures. However, the reality and the thoughts that are created by our languages might be significantly different to each person. The most fundamental point is to recognize the critical differences among cultures when we try to integrate artifacts of cultures interculturally.

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