

Chapter 1 : Toward a Science of Social Character

Social Character in a Mexican Village throws new light on one of the world's most pressing problems, the impact of the industrialized world on the traditional character of the peasant. This ground-breaking work will be invaluable to the work of sociologists, anthropologists, and psychoanalysts.

Fromm considered this study a way of increasing understanding of social character and contributing to Mexico where in a group of psychiatrists had invited him to found the institute. In particular, the study sought to understand the roots of alcoholism and violence among villagers who had received ejido land after the Mexican revolution of 1910. Fromm hoped to discover ways to treat these pathologies, social as well as individual. We also learned that a combination of opportunity and psychoanalytic understanding of unconscious fears of becoming independent of irrational authority could strengthen the productiveness and self esteem of young men from these families. *Social Character in a Mexican Village* 1 also describes the method of an interpretive questionnaire and how to analyze social character from the responses. In this brief paper, I want to focus on three aspects of social character that need to be clarified, if we are to fully develop a science of social character. However, Fromm left some confusion about the difference between individual and social character. He calls these, in a paper, 5 "libidinal types," but in fact, he describes them more in terms of object relations. However, they do elaborate on them. The degree of productiveness which means active interest in work, knowledge and other people modifies and transforms a character type. There is a major difference between the obstinate and stingy unproductive obsessive personality and the orderly, hardworking productive obsessive personality. For further discussion see Maccoby, The third contribution is a new personality type posited by Fromm, the marketing character. The confusion comes when social character is described solely in terms of individual character. A peasant farmer and the bureaucrat may both be moderately productive obsessive - hoarding characters, but because their social contexts are different, their social characters are also significantly different. The dynamic values or emotional attitudes shared by a group, the social character, can be understood as internalized culture, interacting with individual character. The culture provides not only ideals but also meanings of behavior. It allows different variations of a social character, for example the obsessive bureaucrat and the helpful, receptive bureaucrat. A crucial interaction has to do with the fit, or lack of it, between individual character and culture. Some character types fit better than others. Culture changes more slowly than the social environment, and character changes even more slowly. A strong individual character which meshes with the social character and is firmly adapted to a culture will resist cultural change. This is particularly true for people with moderate to low productiveness; change upsets effective adaptation and causes them extreme anxiety and resentment. People in this situation become vulnerable to leadership which promises to reinstate the lost culture or provide a new one which reconnects their character giving their lives a satisfying sense of meaning. Fromm first described this interaction in relation to the Germans who supported Hitler. Fromm described a hardworking, frugal patriotic social character rooted in an obsessive-hoarding personality whose savings had gone up in smoke with the inflation of the 20s and who had been humiliated by defeat in World War I. He offered to reconnect a social character that had lost its moorings to a new society. In our study of campesinos, Fromm and I described the interaction between the male decedents of hacienda peons and the post revolutionary ejido. These submissive, fatalistic, unproductive receptive men lacked the independence required by peasant farming. They rented out their lands to the entrepreneurs productive narcissists and became heavy drinkers. For some villagers, whose families had remained free of the haciendas, the social character needed for independent farming meshed with a productive obsessive individual character. But many of the villagers we studied, and others that my colleagues and I have interviewed during the past 30 years, were a mix of types. This was also the case for 75 percent of the German workers and white collar employees studied by Fromm in 1930. Given the revolutionary social conditions that existed in Germany, a relatively small group was able to change the culture, restructuring institutions that would shape the social character of the future. For most people, the social character is not deeply rooted in their individual character. Rather, it is an internalization of cultural norms that determine social attitudes and give meaning to social behavior. Most

people go along with the prevailing consensus, and the more productive people of any type are best able to adapt to a changing social environment. Ultimately these people gain control of a society and are able to change social institutions so that they shape the social character that supports the new institutions. Thus, productive narcissistic villagers who were entrepreneurs exploited new capitalistic opportunities to increase their wealth and transform village culture. They strengthened schools and diverted funds from traditional fiestas to building new roads and instituting basketball and soccer, games that stimulated teamwork and a competitive spirit. The more productive traditional peasants, especially the younger generations, who were descendants of free campesinos went along with the new leaders. The unproductive, especially the descendants of peons, were unable to adapt and became unhappy cultural misfits. The chart Social Character in a Mexican Village presents these three social character types, with different socio-economic roots and different ideologies. Modern history suggests that a similar process of social selection has periodically caused changes in the social character. A century ago, in the U. S. Rockefeller crushed competitors and built great companies. Their companies became relatively stable bureaucracies which became models for government organization and schools. Families raised children to adapt to these institutions. The industrialists endowed foundations and universities to enshrine their names and also to develop the skills and attitudes required by the bureaucracies. At the middle of the 20th century, the productive obsessive bureaucratic character dominated American institutions. However, the rise of a service society began to select and shape the marketing character. In the 70s and 80s, the culture continued to move in the direction of service, which now comprises 75 percent of work. As women increasingly entered the workplace and became wage earners, the hierarchical paternalistic family was transformed. These changes were intensified and given a new direction in the 90s as another revolution in technology transformed work and organizations. As in the past, productive narcissistic entrepreneurs, like Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Steve Case and Jack Welch, to name the best known, created new industries, using the discoveries of information and communications technology. Those leaders and others like them are now shaping how people work, learn and how they define themselves. Impatient with bureaucracies, the new productive narcissists downsized and automated work to cut costs, maximize flexibility and institutionalize continuous change. Loyalty and years of service no longer guaranteed life-time employment. It was also more cost-effective to contract out services, sometimes to small entrepreneurial firms or reduce labor costs by exporting work to Asia and Latin America. The model for information age work became Silicon Valley where managers and professionals reinvented themselves as "free agents" ready to change jobs if they could get a better deal. They identified themselves in terms of their skills and projects rather than as belonging to a company. To become more productive, organizations began to redesign work. New modes of work required not only new skills but also new values. A new organizational ideology emphasized innovation, interactive networks, customer responsiveness, teamwork, and flexibility. The economic organizations creating the greatest wealth had to become interactive instead of bureaucratic. They had to manage intelligence rather than energy. Instead of the paternalistic bureaucratic manager, the interactive managers were expected to be coaches of empowered individuals and teams, of young employees who knew more about technology than their elders. To describe this shift, consider the chart: It summarizes changes in socio-economic base, the social character, and the ideals, ideology, or social self rooted in the bureaucratic and interactive social characters. Social Character and the Life Cycle-Bureaucratic vs. The social character does not appear full blown in childhood but is formed throughout the life cycle. In Social Character in a Mexican Village 1 , we described how schooling and forms of play contributed to forming the social character of the campesino. To go further, I have used Erik H. Erikson based his stages on the idea that people had to respond to the challenges of both their bodies and cultural expectations at different ages. How they met these challenges or accomplished these life tasks formed their competencies, values, emotional attitudes and sense of identity or self. What Erikson first wrote in and revised in now seems dated and sexist. This is because the different cultural roles Erikson describes for men and women fit the bureaucratic, not the interactive era. Furthermore, the idea of psychosocial developmental stages can be misleading. First of all, Erikson, like most social scientists, uses the concept of development without defining it. What do we mean by development? Is it just maturation? Maturation is a biological process that occurs in all living organisms. Growth can be either

positive or chaotic as in cancerous growth. I would prefer to define human development as growth of competence, a process in which individuals increase their ability to both determine and satisfy their needs. In terms of this definition, human development implies increased awareness and ability to frustrate compulsive needs that weaken a person, while reinforcing those needs that are consciously embraced and are strengthening. Optimal individual development for any social character requires a supportive community, freedom from oppression and opportunity to satisfy creative needs. For the bureaucratic and interactive social characters, both the positive developmental outcomes and the typical psychological problems are different. I see development more in terms of complexity theory, as determining operating principles that direct a complex self organizing system to adapt continually to both its environment and its biological maturation. Although success in mastering a life cycle task increases the chances of success at the next level, failure at a particular stage does not mean that an individual has forever lost the chance to develop. Some people master psychosocial tasks or challenges despite early failure, with help from others. Correspondingly, the stresses of life may undermine development. The individual may be driven by unconscious needs and forced to wrestle with old issues. The bureaucratic social character struggled with issues of independence, starting with separation from mothers who were stuck in the home and might try to live through their children. For males, the resolution of Oedipal struggles with the father began in childhood but continued with father-figure teachers and bosses in the hierarchies of school and work. The challenge of intimacy could lead to a solution that submerged the individual, especially females, within a semi tribalistic family that stifled independence. In the bureaucratic workplace, individuals fit their selves in narrow roles. Rather than suffering from obsessive conformity, the interactive child lacks controls. Rather than over identifying with a parent, he or she feels part of a different world in which issues of group acceptance dominate. Rejection by the group can even cause the kind of destructive anger that erupted in a high school when boys who had been made outcasts shot and killed fellow students and teachers in Columbine, Colorado.

Chapter 2 : Social character - Wikipedia

The result, Social Character in a Mexican Village, provides a new approach to the analysis of soc The vast changes that occurred in the first fifty years after the revolution inspired Erich Fromm and Michael Maccoby to find out how the Mexican people were adapting.

Overview[edit] The concept describes the formation of the shared character structure of the people of a society or a social class according to their way of life and the socially typical expectations and functional requirements regarding socially adaptive behavior. Social character is essentially adaptive to the dominant mode of production in a society. While individual character describes the richness of the character structure of an individual, the social character describes the emotional attitudes common to people in a social class or society. The social character is acquired substantially in the family as an agent of the society but also developed in other institutions of society such as schools and workplaces. The function of the social character is to motivate people to accomplish the expected social tasks concerning work and interaction, education and consuming. Arising in the interaction of the socio-economic social structure and the social libidinous structure the social character makes it possible to use human energies as a socially productive resource. Erich Fromm emphasizes the social necessities, which must be obeyed by the members of a society. So that a society functions adequately, their members must acquire a character structure which enables them to do what they need to do in order to prosper. It is for example expected in an authoritarian society that people are motivated to subordinate themselves to a hierarchy and fulfill selflessly the instructions brought to them. In peasant society, people are socialized to save and to work independently. However, in the permissive consumer culture people are socialized to consume gladly and extensively. Thus the character structure in every society is formed in such a way that people can fulfill expectations quasi voluntarily. Although everyone develops character traits and character orientations that distinguish them from people who live in other cultures, people in every culture with the same mode of production share basic elements of the social character. As a theorist of the society Fromm is not interested in the peculiarities by which the individual persons distinguish themselves from each other but he asks what is common to most people in their psychological reactions. So he examines the part of the character structure which is shared by most members of a society. Fromm describes this general core in the character as social character. The figuration of the social character takes place in most societies at cost of the spontaneity and freedom of the individuals. Literature[edit] Fromm, Erich Character and Social Process. An Appendix to Fear of Freedom, Routledge. Character and the social process". In Escape from freedom. Henry Holt and Company, pp. Fromm, Erich and Michael Maccoby Social Character in a Mexican Village.

Chapter 3 : Social Character In A Mexican Village

Social Character in a Mexican Village throws light on one of the world's most pressing problems, the impact of the industrialized world on the traditional character of the peasant. This ground-breaking work will be invaluable to sociologists, anthropologists, and psychoanalysts.

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Chapter 6 : Social Character in a Mexican Village by Erich Fromm

What was the most common character type found in Fromm's research on social character in a Mexican village? nonproductive-receptive Fromm held that our culture's current feelings of anxiety, isolation, and powerlessness stem from.

Chapter 7 : Social Character in a Mexican Village - Erich Fromm - Google Books

Social Character in a Mexican Village does much more than introduce a new approach to the analysis of social phenomena. It throws new light on one of the world's most pressing problems, the impact of the industrialized world on the traditional character of peasants.

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