# AN EMPIRICAL VALIDITY TEST OF FROMM'S PERSONALITY ORIENTATIONS THEORY*[1]

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## SUMMARY

Erich Fromm has described each of four personality orientations by a list of adjectives. Do these adjectives have a reasonable degree of cohesiveness to constitute one orientation? In order to answer this question, 92 male and female university students were asked to check adjectives on Fromm's list that applied to them. Adjectives were alphabetically presented. Average intercorrelation among adjectives comprising each orientation was calculated and compared with average intercorrelations for 1000 randomly selected combinations of adjectives. Fromm's orientations obtained high percentile ranks compared to simulated combinations. Adjective combinations were then chosen on the basis of factor analysis of half the data. The factor analytic combinations were also compared with 1000 simulated combinations. Percentile ranks of Fromm's combinations were similar to those obtained by factor analytical combinations. Fromm's descriptions of personality orientations are seen to have a reasonable degree of cohesiveness, especially Exploitative and Marketing orientations.

## A.    INTRODUCTION

Erich Fromm's (4, 5) well-known personality theory asserts that a person's personality may be characterized as being either productive or nonproductive. A nonproductive personality, in turn, may be dominated by one of four orientations. These orientations are constructs proposed by Fromm as underlying and organizing behavior. People dominated by the *Receptive* orientation believe that all that is good lies outside of them and the only way to get the

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good things in life is to receive them from others. People dominated by the *Exploitative* orientation also believe that all that is good lies outside of them. But they do not expect to receive the good things of life freely; they tend to grab them from others. People dominated by the *Hoarding* orientation, on the other hand, do not believe that good things can be either received or exploited; they believe that security comes from owning things, protecting them, and becoming self-sufficient. Finally, persons with the *Marketing* orientation (a development of the modern, industrial society) tend to look at themselves and others as impersonal commodities, to be bought and sold to the highest bidder. A particularly poignant example of a person with the Marketing orientation is Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (9, p. 79) who says at one point to the apparition of his dead brother".... it's not what you do, Ben. It's who you know and the smile on your face! It's contacts, Ben, contacts!....aman can end with diamonds.... on the basis of being liked!"

While Fromm's theory is well known and discussed in many personality texts (e.g., 2, 8), relatively little empirical work has been done to test its validity. Keniston (7) studied 12 college males through repeated interviews; his study, however, is intuitive and impressionistic and lacks statistical and methodological rigor. Benson (3) and Reimanis (10), on the other hand, have rigorously studied the incidence of alienation and anomie in school children and college students, but the relevance of their work to adults is in question [see Maddi (8, p. 416) for further details]. Fromm and Maccoby (6) have done a longitudinal, anthropological study in a Mexican village, administering a lengthy questionnaire to over 400 villagers (95% of the total population). Using global as well as factor analytic techniques, the authors found some support for the existence of the Exploitative, Hoarding, and Receptive orientations, as well as for aproductive orientation. The Marketing orientation did not emerge, and the authors believe th.is to be a result of the fact that the village was a nonindustrial society. Perhaps the only major test of Fromm's theory in an industrial society was made by Alsofrom (1) as a Doctoral dissertation. She prepared a set of 15 statements for each of the four orientations (a total of 60 statements) by rewording Fromm's descriptions of the respective behavioral traits. By administering the statements to 311 students and factor analyzing the responses, she extracted seven factors and rotated five of them. She considered that there was modest evidence in favor of the Receptive and Hoarding orientations in two of her factors, and a third factor seemed to be a combination of the Marketing and Exploitative orientations. The other two factors were independent of Fromm's   theory.

In view of the sparseness of validity studies done on Fromm's theory in an industrial society, it seems desirable to do more such studies. The present work is one such study. It asks a rather fundamental question about Fromm's theory: namely, are his four orientations sufficiently cohesive among themselves and distinct from one another to be considered separate orientations? This question is answered with use of a simulation program especially designed to answer such ,questions.

## B. METHOD

### 1. Subjects

Ss were 92 male and female students from Saint Mary's University who answered a questionnaire about their personality anonymously at the request of the *E*. No monetary compensation or academic credit was provided. The *E* did explain to the *S*s, however, after they had filled out the questionnaire, how to score it, and what their scores might mean.

### 2. . Materials

Fromm (4, pp. 120-121) has provided a list of 46 adjectives which are said to characterize the four orientations. The adjectives occur in pairs *of* opposites, the positive ones being indicators of the productive aspects of an orientation, and the negative ones indicating the nonproductive aspects. There are 13 adjectives describing the Receptive orientation, seven describing the Exploitative orientation, 12 describing the Hoarding orientation, and 15 describing the Marketing orientation. (One adjective, "adaptable," is listed under both the Receptive and the Marketing orientations, presumably by oversight.)

This list was rearranged in an alphabetical order. The positive adjectives were on one page and the negative adjectives on another.

### 3. Procedure

Each *S* was given the two lists of adjectives with the following instruction:

> Please put a check mark (/) beside each of the following adjectives if you feel that adjective describes your personality to at least a reasonable extent. Leave the space blank if the adjective does not apply to you. Please be as honest and objective about yourself as you can. Please do *not* write your name anywhere on the paper.

In the analysis of the results, it was found that *S*s had checked very few, if any, adjectives on the negative list, and hence statistically useful analysis of the negative list could not be done. (The *Ss'* reluctance to admit to any negative qualities in themselves, even anonymously, is itself an interesting

finding to a personality theorist.) Hence results of only the positive list will be reported.

The 46 positive adjectives in an alphabetical order, along with their identification number and the orientation to which they belong, are given in Table 1. The latter two items, of course, were not seen by the Ss.

## C. RESULTS

When a researcher has gathered responses by S ·s to a large number of variables, he or she usually does a factor analysis to reduce the number of variables, and attempts to interpret the resulting factors. The situation regarding Fromm's theory, however, is quite different. Here we already have four "factors" given by the theory, and we need to know whether those factors are valid. A minimum requirement for their validity is that the correlations between adjectives constituting an orientation be higher than correlations between adjectives chosen at random.

In order, therefore, to test the minimum validity of each orientation, a 46 x 46 correlation matrix was computed for the list of 46 adjectives. The average intercorrelation was calculated for the adjectives constituting each orientation. The average intercorrelations were as follows: Receptive, .2339 (13 adjectives); Exploitative, .2849 (seven adjectives); Hoarding, .1705 (12 adjectives); and Marketing, .1687 (15 adjectives).

These values of average intercorrelations by themselves are meaningless, however, without a measure of their statistical significance. In order to obtain such a measure, a simulation program was written. This program chose $x$ different random numbers between 1 and 46 (where $x$ was 13 for the Receptive orientation, 7 for the Exploitative orientation, etc.), and using the 46 x 46 correlation matrix, based on the 92 Ss' data and stored in memory, calculated the average intercorrelation for this random combination of the $x$ adjectives. It repeated this process 1000 times and printed all the average intercorrelations arranged from the lowest value to the highest value.

For the Receptive orientation, for example, the lowest average intercorrelation for a random combination of 13 adjectives was .1223; the highest was .3535. Within these 1000 simulated values, the average intercorrelation value of .2339 for Fromm's particular combination of 13 adjectives ranked as Number 714. In other words, Fromm's particular combination ranked at 71.4 percentile. Percentiles for the other three orientations were as follows: Exploitative, 98.0; Hoarding., 69.2; Marketing, 88.1.

In order to determine further the significance of the percentile values obtained from Fromm's orientations, two other analyses were made. In the

TABLE 1
FROMM'S LIST OF P'OSITIVE ADJECTIVES ARRANGED ALPHABETICALLY

| Adjective | Orientation |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Able to change | Marketing |
| 2. Able to make claims | Exploitative |
| 3. Able to take initiative | Exploitative |
| 4. Accepting | Receptive |
| 5. Active | Exploitative |
| 6. Adaptable | Receptive |
| 7. Captivating | Exploitative |
| 8. Careful | Hoarding |
| 9. Cautious | Hoarding |
| 10. Charming | Receptive |
| 11. Composed under stress | Hoarding |
| 12. Curious | Marketing |
| 13. Devoted | Receptive |
| 14. Economical | Hoarding |
| 15. Efficient | Marketing |
| 16. Experimenting | Marketing |
| 17. Forward-looking | Marketing |
| 18. Generous | Marketing |
| 19. Idealistic | Receptive |
| 20. Imperturbable | Hoarding |
| 21. Implusive | Exploitative |
| 22. Intelligent | Marketing |
| 23. Loyal | Hoarding |
| 24. Methodical | Hoarding |
| 25. Modest | Receptive |
| 26. Open-minded | Marketing |
| 27. Optimistic | Receptive |
| 28. Orderly | Hoarding |
| 29. Patient | Hoarding |
| 30. Polite | Receptive |
| 31. Practical | Hoarding |
| 32. Proud | Exploitative |
| 33. Purposeful | Marketing |
| 34. Reserved | Hoarding |
| 35. Responsive | Receptive |
| 36. Self-confident | Exploitative |
| 37. Sensitive | Receptive |
| 38. Social | Marketing |
| 39. Socially adjusted | Receptive |
| 40. Steadfast, tenacious | Hoarding |
| 41. Tender | Receptive |
| 42. Trusting | Receptive |
| 43. Tolerant | Marketing |
| 44. Undogmatic | Marketing |
| 45. Witty | Marketing |
| 46. Youthful | Marketing |

first analysis, data for all 92 *5*s were factor analyzed. After comparisons were made in the factor loadings obtained from principal component and principal factor methods, and the loadings in each method before and after orthogonally rotating them, it was determined that the principal components after varimax rotation and Kaiser normalization gave the best results. (Best results here mean that the number of variables with loadings of .30 or more was maximized.) Four factors were extracted to make the number comparable to Fromm's four orientations.

The 46 adjectives were thus classified into four mutually exclusive factors by assigning every variable to the factor on which its loading was the highest. For example, Factor 1 comprised 10 adjectives: namely #2, 3, 5, 15, 16, 17, 22, 27, 32, and 36._ Each of the four factors was then subjected to the simulation test previously used for Fromm's four orientations. The significance of average intercorrelations for adjectives constituting a factor was as follows (in percentiles): Factor 1, 99.99; Factor 2, 99.99; Factor 3, 99.92; Factor 4, 99.98.

Obviously the factor analysis has given much better combinations than Fromm has. This is, however, not a fair comparison because the same data were used in extracting factors and then testing their significance.

The second test was therefore made in a different and fairer way. First, factors were extracted with use of half of the sample. Then by means of the simulation technique, the significance of these factors was calculated for the other half of the sample. This procedure gave the following result (in percentiles): Factor 1, 62.4; Factor 2, 93.1; Factor 3, 95.4; Factor 4, 89.9.

## D. CONCLUSION

The basic question to be answered by this study was this: How cohesive are the adjectives that make up each of Fromm's four orientations? If they seem to be reasonably cohesive, then a researcher could use those adjectives to determine an *S's* orientation. On the other hand, if the adjectives in an orientation do not belong together any more than a group of adjectives chosen at random, the basic framework of Fromm's theory is in question.

The average intercorrelations among the groups of adjectives chosen by Fromm were higher than could have been expected by chance alone. In comparison to 1000 random combinations, Fromm's four orientations ranked at 71.4, 98.0, 69.2, and 88.1 percentiles, respectively. The Exploitative orientation's 98 percentile ranking is particularly impressive. The 88.1 percentile ranking of the Marketing orientation is also quite respectable.

By comparison, factors obtained from factor analysis of half the data had

rankings of 62.4, 93.1, 95.4, and 89.9 percentiles, respectively. This performance is only slightly better than Fromm's. When one considers that Fromm's choice of adjectives was made some 30 years ago, on purely theoretical grounds, while the factor analytic choices were based on a sample comparable to that on which they were to be tested, Fromm's percentile ranks look all the more impressive.

We conclude, therefore, that Fromm's orientations are much more cohesive than could be expected by chance alone, especially the Marketing and Exploitative orientations. With our confidence thus increased in Fromm's concept of the personality orientations, the way is clear for further validity studies. These studies can now be aimed at investigating whether each orientation has any behavioral predictive power.