

## Frieda Fromm-Reichmann and Erich Fromm

*Written in response to "Frieda Fromm-Reichmann. On Her Contribution to Psychoanalytic and Psychiatric Theory, with a Note on Erich Fromm's Estimate of Her Work in the U.S.A" by K Hoffmann and N Elrod*

It is good to see Frieda Fromm-Reichmann featured in three articles in this journal's seven years of existence (1, 2). Fromm-Reichmann's teachings deserve careful study by the current generation of mental health professionals, most of whom trained in an era overly optimistic about the recent pharmacological advances and too hopeful that brief therapies could carry the day. Fromm-Reichmann set the standard for the application of psychodynamics to the treatment of severe mental illnesses. She inspired her audiences and readers to make a career commitment to treating severely ill people, a population still in dire need of clinicians' dedication.

This paper accurately quotes of Fromm-Reichmann and in its representation of certain points of debate. However, I feel that the authors' choice of quotations of Fromm-Reichmann might discourage the reader who is new to her from ordering her book, *The Principles of Intensive Psychotherapy* (3). This text was required reading for essentially everyone training to become psychiatrists, clinical psychologists or social workers until around 1980. It is still available in paperback for just \$13, in continuous publication since it appeared in 1950. Other suggested readings include her selected papers in Bullard (4), Greenberg (5) and Silver (6), a festschrift honoring Fromm-Reichmann.

I wish I could agree with Hoffmann & Elrod when they say, "Apparently all psychotherapists now agree that transference and countertransference matters are of the utmost importance and that interpretation of the one or the other is necessary if the therapy is blocked or threatened in its existence." It seems to me that very little psychodynamic treatment of individuals struggling with psychosis is taking place in the United States currently. Medication management and brief and focussed therapies form the weakened backbone of training programs in which young clinicians are

burdened with "large case-loads" and little time or energy to reflect on interpersonal issues. This has resulted from advances in pharmacological treatments and from the emergence of managed care firms, whose mission is to restrict hospital admission and severely curtail hospital lengths-of-stay and frequency of psychotherapeutic sessions.

Surveys indicate that the pendulum may be swinging (7). Psychiatric residents are increasingly dissatisfied with their training programs, are anxiously finding themselves relegated to the role of medication manager, while others are treating the patients. Even in their final year of training, they may have only a passing acquaintance with the psychodynamic literature. Often when I ask if they have heard of Fromm-Reichmann, Ferenczi, Sullivan or Searles, they say "No," or "I think I've heard their names." "Have you heard of *I Never Promised you a Rose Garden*?" They often answer, "I remember that song," unaware of the existence of Joanne Greenberg's autobiographical novel depicting her recovery from schizophrenia under the care of "Dr. Fried."

Fromm-Reichmann inspired clinicians in the United States until recent years. Now when she is recalled, it is too often in the context of the term "the schizophrenogenic mother," a term which was peripheral to her treatment philosophy (8). Inaccurately, the organization of parents of patients with schizophrenia (NAMI) has made this term their target in their assault on psychodynamic approaches. In its informational brochure, "NAMI Consumer and Family Guide to Schizophrenia Treatment," The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill highlights five statements, the first two relating to pharmacotherapy, the third to psychotherapy, the fourth to vocational rehabilitation and the fifth to community treatment. I will quote Point 3:

The right kind of psychotherapy, together with medication, can help you better understand and manage schizophrenia and can help reduce symptoms. Psychotherapy aimed at providing information about the illness, managing symptoms and treatment, providing support, and helping with problem-solving skills should be provided to all individuals with schizophrenia. Psychotherapy aimed at

understanding unconscious drives or getting at the psychological roots of schizophrenia is *never* appropriate. Family members in regular contact with a patient as well as others who help the patient day-to-day should receive at least nine months of education about schizophrenia, support, crisis intervention, and problem-solving skills. Family therapy based on the premise that family dysfunction caused schizophrenia should *never* occur.

A recent book, *Madness on the Couch: Blaming the Victim in the Heyday of Psychoanalysis*, by Edward Dolnick (9) similarly tars the image of Fromm-Reichmann. Our culture seems to depend upon a conviction that we are progressing. As our theories accommodate to the shrinking dollar, we need to believe we are discarding erroneous theories, rather than becoming too overwhelmed to master them. It is as if there is no need to read that which is no longer relevant and thus by extension no longer true or good. But the master clinicians who described their work in the pre-pharmacologic era can give current practitioners a fuller sense of their present patients' dilemmas, and can alert them to aspects of their counter-transference which they might otherwise ignore.

While I and the other members of the International Society for the Psychologic treatment of Schizophrenia (ISPS), are working to bring public attention to this debate, we often feel like a beleaguered assortment of isolated dinosaurs. We work with our patients, modifying our approaches as necessary, as did Fromm-Reichmann. Our aim is to reduce our patients disorganizing anxiety by helping them delineate their grandiose hostility. Some of us still utilize a therapist-administrator split, although this certainly is far from typical.

While we have much to contend with, from those who would see schizophrenia as simply a biologic disorder to be managed, it is discouraging to find a belittling attitude among those studying Fromm-Reichmann's contributions. I will now respond to the authors' comments on Erich Fromm and his wife of four years, Frieda Reichmann. I will draw heavily on the autobiographic tape she made a year before she died at the age of 67 of a heart attack, which I edited and published in *Psychoanalysis and Psychosis*. Frieda describes Erich Fromm as coming into her life during her time at I. H. Schulz's Dresden hospital, Weisser Hirsch (2). The two decided she should leave Weisser Hirsch and open her own sanatorium, which she did with the help of a loan from an

uncle. They catered to the Zionists, kept a kosher kitchen, and integrated Judaism into the treatment approach. The place was nicknamed a "Torah-peuticum," a pun on "Therapeuticum".

We thought we would first analyze the people, and second, make them aware of their tradition and live in this tradition, not because the Lord has said so, but because that meant becoming aware of our past in big style. Then we would do something not only for the individuals but also for the Jewish people (6: 480).

Fromm-Reichmann went on (not included in the published transcript),

Then I had to help Erich of course to learn what he still had to learn [to meet clinical requirements for licensure.]

I had to open a small department for psychotics because he had to see them. Then I had to write somebody who was the head of the psychiatric department in Munich [saying] that Erich for his religious studies had to hear psychiatric classes. So, he got his psychiatric classes and so he got his training.

At the torah-peuticum,

The religious teacher was in love with me and talked with me about 'little Erich'. Erich is 10 ½ years younger than I am and the religious teacher was maybe 10 years my senior. Perhaps it would have been much better. You see, I began to analyze Erich and then we fell in love and so we stopped. That much sense we had! Erich and I married when I was thirty-six and we married in the middle of the sanatorium experience (6:480).

She continued describing Erich (not published),

He was a German-Jewish boy so he helped, you know, with words he helped fine. He could sit down and read a paper [while I and the others cleaned and arranged the furniture]. Later on he learned that. When I visited with him in Davos [where he sought treatment of his tuberculosis] he had learned it. Already, there he did the cooking. But in those times he was the only spoiled Jewish son of a German-Jewish family and he helped marvelous with ideas. I learned lots from him along those lines and with words but not with action. But since I was a very active and very energetic female myself, that was all right. I got what I wanted: a very intelligent, very warm, very well educated man who knew lots of things in another field from mine. (Aspects of these remarks appear in Silver, 6: 481).

Frieda continued,

His father said at our wedding he was so glad that he married me because I could take care so well of his only son and by golly wasn't he right! He didn't know what he said. I gave Erich 600 every month. That is, our hospital gave him. Three hundred for his analysis and three hundred for living. There were years when I was very bitter with it but God it's all so long back. And also I got at those times tremendous satisfaction from it. Too, people became reasonably great guys and girls and Erich, he never would have gotten into it if we wouldn't have met. If you come to think of it, you know [Erich's writings are] all sociological stuff. The first things were religious.

Did I tell you how we got away from (running a sanatorium) in big style like two real Jewish intellectuals? There was a German analytic journal not for medical psychoanalysis, but applied, called *Imago*. Now, there was a memorial number I don't know for what – maybe some Freud's birthday or something, and there I published a paper about the analysis of the Jewish food rituals (recently published, Fromm-Reichmann, 10) and Erich an analysis of the Sabbath or Yom Kippur, or both. And that's how we announced we were through. If you don't think that's in big style! And it was a good paper at that. Every once in a while when Erich and I meet now and I say, I have a wonderful 'bocad,' which means that you don't eat this and that, and Erich says, 'I heard about a certain Fromm-Reichmann who wrote a real illuminating paper about the Jewish food ritual.' And then, 'I must look up what it was all about.' (sigh) If you want to know something for my epitaph: then I think we could say 'I wasn't lazy, and I had lots of fun but of another type as compared with many other people. It was a very special type of fun.' (Parts of this are quoted in Silver, 6:481.)

The authors of the article under discussion mention Fromm's pattern of citations. I made my own quick survey, drawing from the ten titles in my personal library, some books purchased in paperback during my high school and college years. I found surprisingly few citations of his contemporaries. There are a few passing references to Jung. Fromm mentions the ideas of Sullivan, Horney and others in a general way. His writings are not clinical, but are more like highly effective college lectures. His style is as entertaining as a popular television talk-show guest's. That he does not credit his former wife in this context is hardly evidence of either her lack of influence or even of his lack of gratitude. Fromm had many thoughts about the clinical situation, but I am left wondering how much time he spent actually working with clients, and whether he ever worked with psychotic patients after his Torah-peuticum experience. Reviewing the list of his publications in Burston's biography (11), I find

only one paper appearing in a psychoanalytic journal, and this again is a general essay.

Fromm-Reichmann and Fromm went their separate ways in their lives and their specializations. Frieda had found her way to Chestnut Lodge following a phone call from Erich to Ernest Hadley, then the training analyst of the Lodge's owner and medical director, Dexter Bullard, Sr. Erich thus opened a crucial professional door for his former wife, as she had done for him early in their marriage.

Erich had made his way to Chicago in 1933, and then to New York City (11:17–8). Burston beautifully summarizes the plight of the non-M.D. analyst emigrating from war-torn Europe only to find enormous professional obstacles to successful re-establishment of a professional life here (11:18–20). Fromm's lack of citation of his wife's work might have derived from resentment of her success in finding a strong place, intellectually and fiscally, in the clinical and teaching system of the American Psychoanalytic Association. There, she served as a training and supervising analyst and president of its Washington-Baltimore Psychoanalytic Society from 1939 to 1941. She presented at the meetings of the American Psychoanalytic Association, and was honored by the American Psychiatric Association's 1954 meeting where she delivered the Academic Lecture. She was a fighter, confronting the conservative element in that and other settings. Harold Searles told me that when Fromm-Reichmann went to California for her year at Stanford University's Center for the Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, she had already received a staggering thirty-six speaking invitations.

However, I am merely speculating about Fromm's possible envy. If one looks at Harry Stack Sullivan's writings, one finds similarities to Fromm's work in their limited documentation of sources and references to others, who have influenced their thinking. One finds no reference to the works of Fromm-Reichmann or other women with whom he worked closely. Both men wrote in an era when men taught and women generally listened respectfully or collaborated in a "supportive" role. At the Lodge, senior staff often described Sullivan as extremely temperamental and abrasive. Fromm-Reichmann responded with diplomacy, often prefacing her remarks by saying, "As Sullivan has taught us," even when it was clear to listeners that she then stated her own indepen-

dently formed views. She had demonstrated this tact in her professional friendship with Georg Groddeck and Kurt Goldstein (12).

The authors' remark, "In other words, it seems to us that Fromm did not on the whole take Fromm-Reichmann's ideas and therapeutic methods very seriously in his written works" seems uninformed. It lacks consideration of the personal issues in Fromm's marriage to Frieda Reichmann. The central issue in the failure of their marriage was reproduction versus literary generativity (insemination versus seminal writing): I hope the reader will study the recently published paper by Fromm-Reichmann, "Female psychosexuality" which she delivered at a scientific meeting of the Washington-Baltimore Psychoanalytic Society in 1935, the year she arrived in the United States (13).

Fromm-Reichmann, recalling her medical school days, said,

I adored obstetrics. I might have done it if it hadn't been that, that's really one thing, I was too short. When my turn came, I had the time of my life. I delivered forty-four babies. You had to stay one month in the clinic, and whenever you could go, I went. I made the nurses mad in the delivery room because I wanted to take care of the babies afterward, and that was another's affair. The medical students did the delivery and off they went. And I never did. That was my great conflict with them. Anyway, that I would have liked to do. I still have pictures of that time with a baby on each arm where you can see how I enjoyed it (14:473).

Additionally, she had taken on the care of a morphine addict friend's daughter for about four years when this girl was between about 10 and 14 years old. She always wanted to have time with the children of her colleagues, as Otto Will described,

Frieda served as godmother to our son. At often unexpected hours my wife would receive a telephone call: 'Gwen, I have a vacancy in my schedule and I'd like to see Patrick.' Gwen would immediately bring the baby to the cottage and sit aside while Frieda and Patrick enjoyed each other. The request was not exactly a command, but I don't think it was ever refused! Inconvenient as they sometimes were, those were good visits, giving pleasure to infant, mother, doctor and to me. (15:133)

Frieda was in her mid-thirties when she married, in an era when the biologic clock ticked even louder than now. She wanted children. Lodge lore has it that Erich (not yet thirty years old) refused,

seeing children as an impediment to his writing and teaching career. This seems a central issue in their rather short marriage. The often-quoted quip, "Fromm didn't mean 'Escape from Freedom'. He meant escape from Frieda" is not quite right. He escaped from Frieda into freedom from parenthood. Although he married twice more, he never fathered children. Quoting Frieda,

So, Passover, Erich and I went into the park in Heidelberg and ate bread, not matzo. We couldn't do it at home because there were these people who, after all, relied on us, and the punishment for that is *korvat!* That means no children usually. If you can't have any, that is, if you both can't have any, then that family disappears from the universe. So that's the punishment you would get. But not that I believed that (14: 480).

Fromm-Reichmann's maternal energies were directed toward her patients and students, and these energies are still accessible to those who study her writings. I find the authors' remark "once in the United States, it would seem Erich Fromm was freed from any obligation to think along the lines of Frieda Fromm-Reichmann" to reflect an attitude of a rebellious adolescent toward his mother. This does a deep disservice to both Erich and Frieda, who managed the enormous challenges of immigration, each making monumental contributions in their two separate and distinct areas of creativity. As a transferential granddaughter of Fromm-Reichmann, I have written this response as a continuing assertion of my debt of gratitude to her, knowing that there are very many in my generation who have been equally enriched by her works. Perhaps this discussion of her value to Erich Fromm will stimulate the reader to explore her writings and the work she inspired at Chestnut Lodge and elsewhere.

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*Reply to the Discussion by Ann-Louise Silver*

Ann Silver has done all of us a service by bringing new information on Frieda Fromm-Reichmann to our attention. It is too bad that others before her have kept information of this important woman away from us.

Although Ann-Louise Silver and I work in close contact with each other, we now and then interpret Fromm-Reichmann's theories and therapies differently. Silver's background is American culture and psychiatry, mine is European. Silver lives and works close to where Fromm-Reichmann lived and worked at Chestnut Lodge. I live and work in Germany, at the Lake of Constance, next to the place where Ludwig Binswanger worked and lived.

About ten years separate us in age – and all these factors together may perhaps show in our different concerns for psychoanalysis and social psychiatry, psychoanalysis and psychopharmacology, psychoanalysis and psychosocial nursing and psychoanalysis and philosophy and literature. Thus, in a

sense, I am in the spirit just as near to Fromm-Reichmann's husband Erich as to her.

To give just one example: Our institute studies and discusses *Principles of Intensive Psychotherapy* thoroughly, as many of our members and candidates work in institutions with severely disturbed patients, and Hedi Haffner and I presented this book and its implications at the Conference of the Erich-Fromm-Society in Ascona in May 1997. The present paper does not present this book to the reader (perhaps the editors and we ourselves are motivated by Ann-Louise Silver's remarks to publish this paper in the International Forum as well).

I am grateful for our exchange, since both Fromm-Reichmann and Fromm were very serious workers in the field of mental health. They both deserve thorough study and research.

*Klaus Hoffmann*