



Jennifer Henderson

Personality Theory  
*Marilyn Monroe*

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Professor  
Edward T. Asbury, Ph.D.  
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She is known world wide even though she has been dead for the past 41 years. Her name is recognized everywhere, we all know Marilyn Monroe, her image conjures up thoughts of sex, sadness, beauty, movies, scandal, and loss. She captivated the world with her glamour and innocence; she had that special chemistry that a camera loves. Marilyn exuded "...idealized femininity and sexual thrill. The epitome of desirability. Monroe was the sex symbol who also suggested vulnerability and a childlike desire to please" (online site a). The life of Marilyn Monroe seems to be one of tragedy and success intertwined, her personality characteristics enabled her to become one of the most famous star in Hollywood but the same traits also brought about her demise.

Marilyn Monroe was born Norma Jean Mortenson on June 1, 1926. Her mother, Gladys, was unmarried, and Norma Jean's father deserted them even before she was born. Norma Jean grew up not knowing who her father was; her mother eventually gave her the last name of a previous boyfriend, Baker. Her mother suffered from mental illness and was poorly equipped to raise a child, thus Norma Jean became a ward of the state. Her childhood was filled with insecurity and instability. She never had her own home but was shuffled from one foster home or orphanage to the next. She was abandoned by her father without a backward glance which left her feeling unwanted and unworthy of love. Without any family to care for her and nurture her, one can surmise that she grew up with her emotional needs grossly unmet.

At sixteen, Norma Jean, in an attempt to create a home for herself, married James Daugherty an aircraft plant worker. The marriage ended four years later when Norma Jean found success in modeling; Marilyn Monroe was created, her aspirations were to become famous and loved. Marilyn herself said "I knew I belonged to the public and to

the world, not because I was talented or even beautiful, but because I had never belonged to anything or anyone else” (online site B). She spent her childhood being sent from one temporary home to another never finding acceptance or security; it is no wonder that her needs as an adult were geared towards being the center of attention.

Marilyn’s career was built on her beauty, charisma, and sex appeal. She began modeling for magazine covers, got small roles in movies, and was Playboy’s first centerfold. Eventually, Hollywood noticed her undeniable screen presence and she starred in many movies. She was typecast as the unaware and innocent sex kitten, which she eventually grew tired of “being a sex symbol is a heavy load to carry, especially when one is tired, hurt and bewildered” (online site B). She looked to men for the love she never received from her father and many were eager to oblige.

Marilyn was married and divorced three times. Her second marriage was to retired baseball great Joe DiMaggio, it lasted nine months; “Joe was an extremely jealous type of guy and resented her popularity among other men. He desired a housewife, not a star of such magnitude...the marriage was in trouble from the beginning” (online sit A). Joe was a conservative man and wanted a conservative marriage, with a wife at home; Marilyn was not the average homemaker and refused to change. Two years after their divorce, Marilyn married playwright Arthur Miller, they divorced five years later. Marilyn never had children although she tried during her marriage to Arthur, and had several miscarriages. It seems ironic that the one thing she most needed eluded her...true love and acceptance.

Theorist Karen Horney sees resiliency in children as long as they feel loved; “A child can stand a great deal of what is often regarded as traumatic—such as sudden weaning, occasional beating, sex experiences—as long as inwardly he feels wanted and loved” (Hergenhahn 138). Marilyn lacked this basic security as a child, her own parents abandoned her...if they didn’t want her, who would? Horney describes the behavior of such parents as the “basic evil”. Rejection of the child, indifference, erratic behavior, and unkept promises are all examples of the basic evil. Children that are exposed to this grow up with a basic hostility towards their parents which eventually manifests itself as a basic anxiety “...all pervading feeling of being lonely and helpless in a hostile world...” (Hergenhahn 137).

Vulnerability was one of Marilyn’s traits that both helped and hurt her; it was the key to her success and downfall. This quality seemed to transpose to the screen and thus endeared her to the public. Yet it also drove her need for affection, approval, and the spotlight. If anyone truly loved Marilyn, it was Joe DiMaggio. It was reported that just before she died they were planning on remarrying. Joe never truly left her...even after divorce they remained friends. After her death, Joe had roses placed on her grave every week for the next twenty years. Marilyn though chose her career and spotlight over her marriage to Joe. It seems that the immediate and overwhelming illusion of acceptance by her fans over shadowed DiMaggio’s quiet and deep love.

Another trait of Marilyn’s personality was her need for approval. She wanted to be a star more than anything, she needed to be loved and admired by others to ease her own anxiety. Towards the end of her career she realized how superficial and hollow fame truly was, “In Hollywood a girl’s virtue is much less important than her hairdo.

You're judged by how you look, not by what you are. Hollywood's a place where they'll pay you a thousand dollars for a kiss and fifty cents for your soul. I know, because I turned down the first offer often enough and held out for the fifty" (online site B). Marilyn's ultimate needs, "I have feelings too. I am still human. All I want is to be loved, for myself and for my talent" (online site B), were never met. Horney recognizes three adjustment patterns that people utilize to reduce anxiety when dealing with others. Marilyn tended to utilize the Moving Toward People "...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" (Hergenhahn 140). Marilyn seemed to be seeking acceptance and love outside of herself, her own thoughts were not pleasant, and she required others to make her feel special, "I feel stronger if the people around me on the set love me, care for me, and hold good thoughts for me. It creates an aura of love, and I believe I can give a better performance" (online site A).

With all of her success and fame, Marilyn still suffered from feelings of inferiority. Not only did this stem from her childhood but later in life she also saw that she was trapped into her sex symbol role and was not seen as a serious actor "My illusions didn't have anything to do with being a fine actress, I knew how third rate I was. I could actually feel my lack of talent, as if it were cheap clothes I was wearing inside..." (online site A). She accepted the criticism as her lot but still she tried to affect a change to be taken more seriously. These feelings can lead to the creation of an idealized self "This distorted view of one's self as unworthy displaces the real self as a frame of reference for living. Such a person creates an idealized self which has little relationship

to the real self” (Hergenhahn 142). Once an idealized self is created, the person then lives in a world of unrealistic expectations, where their every thought and behavior is monitored as to what they should and shouldn’t have done. Horney describes this as the *tyranny of the should*: “Forget about the disgraceful creature you actually are; this is how you should be and to be this idealized self is all that matters. You should be able to endure everything, to understand everything, to like everyone, to be always productive—to mention only a few of these inner dictates” (Hergenhahn 142).

Marilyn was emotionally fragile, dependent upon others for approval, and the most desirable woman of her time. Together these factors led Marilyn to see her beauty and sex appeal as her main talent. Her appearance and charisma is what the public was fascinated with and so too became her link to approval and adoration. “While the camera loved her, it was not reciprocal. Those fears of not looking perfect haunted her as she stared into her mirror. To fail to see her self as perfection was to be devastated, especially that last week of her life when she studied all the little lines in her face, saying to everyone who would listen, including me, “See, I’m growing old.” Ironically, she never looked more beautiful, more alive, with poise and powers” (Brown) According to Horney basic anxiety causes one to feel helpless and lonely, therefore one tries all means to avoid the basic anxiety. Horney has described the ten strategies for minimizing basic anxiety; usually the neurotic person focuses on one. Marilyn may have focused on the *Need for Affection and Approval* more than the other strategies, “one who uses this strategy lives to be loved and admired by others” (Hergenhahn 138). In Marilyn’s eyes a proven way to gain attention and admiration is through her looks and charm. When honeymooning in Japan with DiMaggio, Marilyn took time to entertain the military men

in Korea “...standing in the snowfall facing these yelling soldiers, I felt for the first time in my life no fear of anything, I felt only happy” (online site A). Finding happiness outside of yourself is fleeting, soon the fans will go home and what’s left is you...your values, your feelings, your own company. Having a healthy *real self* is imperative to living a balanced life “...the human individual, given a chance, tends to develop his particular human potentialities. He will develop then the unique alive forces of his real self: the clarity and depth of his own feelings, thoughts, wishes, interests; the ability to tap his own resources, the strength of his will power...All this will in time enable him to find his set of values and his aims in life. In short, he will grow, substantially undiverted, toward self realization. And that is why I speak...of the real self as that central inner force, common to all human beings and yet unique in each, which is the deep source of growth (Hergenhahn 142). Finding substance in yourself...your own uniqueness in values and integrity requires a daunting self examination. Some wonder what Marilyn would be doing today if she were still alive, would she still be the same charming yet vulnerable person? Marilyn herself knew she was fragile, stating “To put it bluntly, I seem to have a whole superstructure with no foundation, but I’m working on the foundation” (online site A).

The story of Marilyn Monroe’s life is one we can all learn from. Today’s society is one of illusions and appearances. Our daily lives are saturated with messages on how we should look and behave...and none of them are realistic. Everyone on television is attractive and successful; they all wear the right clothes and drive the latest cars, have the newest gadgets, and know the right people. Magazines are filled with ads of what we need to buy to be “in”. We are placing more and more emphasis on looks and outward

beauty...what ever happened to the inner beauty? Some people will never be physically beautiful should they be considered somehow inferior? According to Horney people that live in “accordance with their real selves are on the road to self-realization, which means they will approximate their full potential and live in harmony with their fellow humans” (Hergenhahn 140). Your heart and soul are ever present and always ready to grow...they become more compassionate and beautiful with age, shouldn't this be our focus?

Marilyn Monroe started life without a loving home; she never had the unconditional love of a parent. Unconditional love from someone else helps us learn to love ourselves, helps us to recognize the good in ourselves. Unconditional love ensures us that we are worthy of being loved, no matter what mistakes we make. Unconditional love gives us a sense of peace and tranquility...everything will be alright. This is the foundation that Marilyn was looking for...a strong and positive self image that does not hinge on anything except being.

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