Psychoanalytic Social Theory – Karen Horney

Psychoanalytic Social Theory is built on the assumption that social and cultural conditions, especially childhood experiences, are largely responsible for shaping personality.

People who do not have their needs for love and affection satisfied during childhood develop *basic hostility* toward their parents and, as a consequence, suffer from *basic anxiety*. Horney theorized that people combat basic anxiety by adopting one of three fundamental styles of relating to others.

- *moving toward people*
- *moving against people*
- *moving away from people*

- Most normal people use any of these modes of relating to people but *neurotics* are compelled to rigidly rely on only one.

- Neurotic's compulsive behavior generates a basic *intrapsychic conflict* that may take the form of either and *idealized self image* or *self hatred*.

- The idealized self image is expressed as:

  o Neurotic search for glory
  o Neurotic claims
  o Neurotic pride

- Self hatred is expressed as either
  o Self contempt
  o Alienation from self

Most of Horney's writings are concerned with the neurotic personality but can be applied to the normal personality.

Horney also had ideas about *feminine psychology* and the application of *psychotherapy.*

Background
- Very similar to Melanie Klein and other women psychoanalysts.
- Trained in Europe with classical Freudian psychoanalysts
- Objected to Freud's view on women, instead, believing that culture, not anatomy was responsible for the psychic differences between men and women
- Helped found the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute
- Close relationship with Eric Fromm which ended badly

Horney & Freud
- She believed that strict adherence to psychoanalysis would lead to stagnation in theory and practice
- Objected to Freud's beliefs about women's psyche
- Psychoanalysis should move beyond instinct theory and emphasize the importance of cultural influences in shaping personality
- Cannot overemphasize the importance of culture

Culture
- Emphasizes *competition* among individuals
- The basic *hostility* that emerges from competition results in feelings of *isolation*
- These feelings of being alone in a potentially hostile world lead to *intensified needs for affection*, which cause people to overvalue love
- As a result, many people see love and affection as the *solution for their problems*
- Genuine love can be a healthy, growth producing experience but the desperate need for love provides a fertile ground for the development of *neuroses*

Western culture contributes to this vicious cycle by:
- cultural teachings of kinship and humility that are contrary to the attitudes, namely aggression and the drive to win!
- Societies demand for success and achievement are nearly endless so that normal people have new, additional goals placed before them all the time
- Furthermore, western society tells people that they are free and can accomplish anything with hard work and effort without regard to genetics, social position, and the competitiveness of others

- These contradictions all stem from cultural not biological influences

- Childhood is where the vast majority of life and neurotic problems stem from

- Even more debilitating personal problems all have their roots traced to the *lack of genuine warmth and affection*

- From childhood experiences she determined that *people who rigidly repeat patterns of behavior do so because they interpret new experiences in a manner consistent with those previously established patterns*

In order for children to develop normally they need to experience both genuine love and discipline. Such experiences provide them with feelings of safety and satisfaction that lets them grow in accord with their real self.

- If these needs are not met the child develops **basic hostility** towards the parents.
- Repressed hostility leads to profound feelings of insecurity and a vague sense of apprehension called **basic anxiety**
- Both basic hostility and basic anxiety are intimately interwoven

Horney identified four ways of protecting themselves against feelings of being alone and in a potentially hostile world:
- 1 – *affection*
- 2 – *submissiveness*
- 3 – *power* (a defense against the real or imagined hostility of others
  - prestige (protection against humiliation expressed by the tendency to humiliate others)
  - possession (the buffering against destitution and poverty manifesting itself as a tendency to deprive others
- 4 – *withdrawal*

These protective devices are not normally a sign of neurosis but when they become unhealthy and people feel compelled to rely on them and employ a variety of interpersonal strategies they are called *compulsions*.

Horney identified ten *neurotic needs* that characterize neurotics in their attempts to combat anxiety.
1. neurotic need for affection and approval
2. neurotic need for a powerful partner
3. neurotic need to restrict one's life within narrow boundaries
4. neurotic need for power
5. neurotic need to exploit others
6. neurotic need for social recognition or prestige
7. neurotic need for personal admiration
8. neurotic need for ambition and personal achievement
9. neurotic need for self-sufficiency
10. neurotic need for perfection and unassailability

These needs are boiled down to three *neurotic trends*, including;
1. moving toward people (needs 1 & 2)
2. moving against people (needs 3, 4, 5, 6, & 7)
3. moving away from people (needs 8, 9, & 10)

The Interaction of Basic Hostility & Basic Anxiety
With the Defenses against Anxiety

Basic Hostility
(Results from childhood feelings of rejection or neglect
By patents or from a defense against basic anxiety

Basic Anxiety
Results from parental threats or from a defense
Against hostility

Defenses against Anxiety

Normal Defenses

Neurotic Defenses

Spontaneous Movement

Compulsive Movement

Toward People
(friendly, loving personality)

Toward People
(compliant personality)

Against People
(a survivor in a competitive society)

Against People
(aggressive personality)

Away from People
(autonomous, serene personality)

Away from People
(detached personality)

What is normal vs. neurotic?

What are Horney's Neurotic Trends?

Neurotic Trends

Personality	Compliant	Aggressive	Detached
Basic conflict or source of neurotic trend	feelings of helplessness	Protection against hostility of others	Feelings of isolation
Neurotic needs	1. affection & Approval	4. power	9. self-sufficient and Independence
	2. powerful partner	5. exploitation	10. perfection and prestige
	3. narrow limits to life	6. recognition and unassailability	
		7. personal admiration	
		8. personal achievement	
Normal analog	friendly, loving	ability to survive in a competitive society	autonomous and serene

Intrapsychic conflict

The two important intrapsychic conflicts are the
- idealized self image
  - In a healthy situation, individuals develop a healthy self-confidence and security
  - In an unhealthy environemtn the individual tries to develop a sens of self-realization so as not to feel isolated and inferior
  - They desperately acquire a stable sense of identity that is exaggerated and this *idealized self-image* can take on one of three forms
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    - The *neurotic search for glory*
      - *Need for perfection* (should's & should nots)
        - *Tyranny of the should's*
      - *Neurotic ambition*
        - *Compulsive drive toward superiority*
      - *Drive toward a vindictive triumph*
        - *Put others to shame…humiliating others*

    - *Neurotic claims*
      - *Sense of entitlement…idealized view of themselves*

    - *Neurotic pride*
      - *False pride based not on the true self but on a spurious image of the idealized self*

- self-hatred
  - *Self-hatred* (relentless demands on the self)
  - *Merciless self-accusation*
  - *Self-contempt*
  - *Self-frustration*
  - *Self-torment or self-torture*
  - *Self-destructive actions & impulses*

Feminine Psychology

- Basic anxiety based not on sex but on cultural issues
- Basic anxiety is at the core of men's needs to subjugate women's issues to wish to humiliate men
- Concept of penis envy is not tenable
- *Masculine protest* is a pathological belief that men are superior to women leading to a neurotic desire to be a man
  - *OR,* a wish for all those qualities or privileges which in our culture are regarded as masculine

Psychotherapy
- Focus is on changing one or all of the neurotic trends
- Help patients gradually grow in a direction of self-realization by:
  - Giving up their idealized self-image
  - Relinquishing their neurotic search for glory
  - And, changing self-hatred to an acceptance of the real self

- Even though patients have a strong investment in maintaining the status quo, they do not, generally, wish to remain ill.
- The three neurotic trends tend to be cast in favorable terms like *love, mastery,* and *freedom.*
- Because patients usually see their behavior in positive terms, their actions appear to them to be healthy, right, and desirable
- The therapist's task then is to convince patients that their present solutions are perpetuating rather than alleviating the core neurosis or problem which takes time and effort to change!
- There is NO quick fix.
- Patients must understand the differences between their idealized self-image and their real self.
- This is accomplished through dream analysis, free association, and talking.

<u>Critique</u>

- There is generally a lack of research on how this applies to normal personalities.
- Not really sure what the term *self-realization* actually means.
- Her theory fall short on its ability to generate research and to submit its terms to falsifiability (few testable hypotheses)(1).
- Her theory, however, in terms of neurotics is well organized (5) but not so with normal people.
- Her guide to action of practitioners is better but there are few details on exactly what to do with patients (2)
- Her theory has low internal consistency and uses terms and concepts in different ways (2)
- While her writing is very clear her use of simple terms in her work gives her a high mark (4)
- Her theory of humanity is deterministic while the individual, to some extent, has free choice (F>D)
- Her theory is both optimistic and pessimistic with a tendency toward the curative powers of human (O>P)
- Her theory is both causal and teleological (C=T)
- She believed in the strength and influence of the conscious, social motivation over the unconscious (C>UC)
- Her emphasis on the social nature of humans as well as cultural influences places her theory as more social than biological (S>B)
- Finally, she places emphasis on the similarities between people rather than on their uniqueness (S>U).