

# Chapter 6

## Horney: Psychoanalytic Social Theory

### Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, students should be able to accomplish the following objectives:

1. Compare Horney's theory with that of Freud's.
2. Discuss Horney's concepts of basic hostility and basic anxiety.
3. List and discuss Horney's categories of neurotic needs.
4. Describe Horney's three neurotic trends.
5. Explain Horney's concept of intrapsychic conflicts.
6. Discuss the modes of expression for self-hatred.
7. Discuss Horney's concept of feminine psychology.
8. Discuss research on morbid dependency and explain how it relates to Horney's view of moving toward other people.
9. Discuss research on competitiveness and explain how it relates to Horney's concept of moving against other people.
10. Explain how Horney's depiction of neurotic personality relates to normal personality.

### Lecture Outline

#### I. Overview of Psychoanalytic Social Theory

The **psychoanalytic social theory** of Karen Horney (pronounced Horn-eye) was built on the assumption that social and cultural conditions, especially childhood experiences, are largely responsible for shaping personality. Although Horney's writings are concerned mostly with the neurotic personality, many of her ideas can also be applied to normal individuals. As with other personality theorists, Horney's views on personality are a reflection of her life experiences.

#### II. Biography of Karen Horney

Karen Horney was born in Germany in 1885, the younger of two children born to a stern, devoutly religious old sea captain and his young wife. Horney was one of the first women in Germany to be admitted to medical school, where she specialized in psychiatry. She also became acquainted with Freud's writings and was analyzed by Karl Abraham, one of Freud's close associates. In 1932, Horney, eventually, left Germany for a position as associate director of the newly established Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute. After 2 years in Chicago, Horney then moved to New York, where she taught at the New School for Social Research. She soon abandoned orthodox psychoanalysis in favor of a more socially oriented theory. Horney died in 1952 at the age of 65.

### III. Introduction to Psychoanalytic Social Theory

Although Horney wrote nearly exclusively about neuroses and neurotic personalities, her works suggest much that is appropriate to normal, healthy development. She agreed with Freud that early childhood traumas are important, but she differed from him in her insistence that social rather than biological forces are paramount in personality development.

#### A. Horney and Freud Compared

Horney criticized Freudian theory on at least three accounts.

- She cautioned that strict adherence to orthodox psychoanalysis would lead to stagnation in both theoretical thought and therapeutic practice (Horney, 1937).
- She objected to Freud's ideas on feminine psychology.
- She stressed the view that psychoanalysis should move beyond instinct theory and emphasize the importance of cultural influences in shaping personality.

#### B. The Impact of Culture

Horney emphasized cultural influences as the primary bases for both neurotic and normal personality development. Modern culture, she contended, is based on competition among individuals. Competitiveness and the *basic hostility* it spawns result in feelings of *isolation*. These feelings of being alone in a potentially hostile world lead to intensified *needs for affection*, which, in turn, cause people to overvalue love. Rather than benefiting from the need for love, neurotics strive in pathological ways to find it.

#### C. The Importance of Childhood Experiences

Horney believed that neurotic conflict can stem from almost any developmental stage, but childhood is the age from which the vast majority of problems arise. A variety of traumatic events, such as sexual abuse, beatings, open rejection, or pervasive neglect, may leave their impressions on a child's future development; but Horney (1937) insisted that these debilitating experiences can almost invariably be traced to lack of genuine warmth and affection.

### IV. Basic Hostility and Basic Anxiety

Children need to experience both genuine love and healthy discipline. Such conditions provide them with feelings of safety and satisfaction and permit them to grow in accordance with their real self. Because of their own neurotic needs, parents often dominate, neglect, overprotect, reject, or overindulge. If parents do not satisfy the child's needs for safety and satisfaction, the child develops feelings of **basic hostility** toward the parents. However, children also often repress their feelings of basic hostility, which leads to feelings of deep insecurity and a vague sense of apprehension called **basic anxiety**. People can protect themselves from basic anxiety in the following ways:

- *Affection*

- *Submissiveness*
- *Power or prestige*
- *Possession*
- *Withdrawal*

These protective devices did not necessarily indicate a neurosis, and Horney believed that all people use them to some extent.

## V. Compulsive Drives

Neurotics are frequently trapped in a vicious circle, in which their compulsive need to reduce basic anxiety leads to behaviors that perpetuate low self-esteem, generalized hostility, inappropriate striving for power, inflated feelings of superiority, and persistent apprehension, all of which result in more basic anxiety.

### A. Neurotic Needs

In her early theory, Horney identified 10 categories of **neurotic needs** that characterize neurotics in their attempt to combat basic anxiety. These included the neurotic need:

- for affection and approval
- for a powerful partner
- to restrict one's life within narrow borders
- for power
- to exploit others
- for social recognition or prestige
- for personal admiration
- for ambition and personal achievement
- for self-sufficiency and independence
- for perfection and unassailability

The 10 categories of neurotic needs overlap one another, and a single person might employ more than one.

### B. Neurotic Trends

As Horney's theory evolved, she began to see that the 10 neurotic needs could be grouped into three general categories, each relating to a person's basic attitude toward self and others. In 1945, she identified the three basic attitudes, or **neurotic trends**, as the following:

- *Moving toward people*
- *Moving against people*
- *Moving away from people*

People can use each of the neurotic trends to solve basic conflict, but unfortunately these

solutions are essentially nonproductive or neurotic. Horney (1950) used the term **basic conflict** because very young children are driven in all three directions—toward, against, and away from people.

Horney's concept of **moving toward people** does *not* mean moving toward them in the spirit of genuine love. Rather, it refers to a neurotic need to protect oneself against feelings of helplessness. Just as compliant people assume that everyone is nice, aggressive people take for granted that everyone is hostile. As a result, they adopt the strategy of **moving against people**. In order to solve the basic conflict of *isolation*, some people behave in a detached manner and adopt a neurotic trend of **moving away from people**. This strategy is an expression of needs for privacy, independence, and self-sufficiency.

## VI. Intrapsychic Conflicts

Horney did not neglect the impact of intrapsychic factors in the development of personality. Intrapsychic processes originate from interpersonal experiences; but as they become part of a person's belief system, they develop a life of their own—an existence separate from the interpersonal conflicts that gave them life. The **idealized self-image** is an attempt to solve conflicts by painting a godlike picture of oneself. **Self-hatred** is an interrelated yet equally irrational and powerful tendency to despise one's real self.

### A. The Idealized Self-Image

Early negative influences often impede people's natural tendency toward *self-realization*, a situation that leaves them with feelings of isolation and inferiority. Feeling alienated from themselves, people need desperately to acquire a stable *sense of identity*. This dilemma can be solved only by creating an idealized self-image, an extravagantly positive view of themselves that exists only in their personal belief system. Horney recognized three aspects of the idealized self-image discussed in the following section.

As neurotics come to believe in the reality of their idealized self, they begin to incorporate it into all aspects of their lives—their goals, their self-concept, and their relations with others. Horney (1950) referred to this comprehensive drive toward actualizing the ideal self as the **neurotic search for glory**, the first aspect of the idealized image. In addition to self-idealization, the neurotic search for glory includes three other elements:

- *The need for perfection* (the **tyranny of the should**)
- *Neurotic ambition*
- *The drive toward a vindictive triumph*

The second aspect of the idealized image is **neurotic claims**. In their search for glory, neurotics build a fantasy world—a world that is out of sync with the real world. Because their demands are very much in accordance with their idealized self-image, they fail to see that their claims of special privilege are unreasonable. The third aspect of an idealized image is **neurotic pride**, a false pride based not on a realistic view of the true self but on a spurious image of the idealized

self.

## **B. Self-Hatred**

Neurotic individuals dislike themselves because reality always falls short of their idealized view of the self. Therefore, they learn self-hatred, which can be expressed as:

*Relentless demands on the self*

*Merciless self-accusation*

*Self-contempt*

*Self-frustration*

*Self-torment or self-torture*

*self-destructive actions and impulses*

## **VII. Feminine Psychology**

Horney believed that psychic differences between men and women are not the result of anatomy but rather of cultural and social expectations. Her view of the *Oedipus complex* differed markedly from Freud's, in that, she insisted that any sexual attraction or hostility of child to parent would be the result of learning and not biology.

## **VIII. Psychotherapy**

The general goal of Horney's psychotherapy was to help patients grow toward self-realization, give up their idealized self-image, relinquish their neurotic search for glory, and change self-hatred to an acceptance of the real self. Horney believed that, fortunately, people possess an inherent curative force that allows them to move inevitably in the direction of self-realization once self-understanding and self-analysis are achieved. Although a therapist can help encourage patients toward self-understanding, ultimately successful therapy is built on self-analysis (Horney, 1942, 1950).

## **IX. Related Research**

Horney's psychoanalytic social theory itself has not directly motivated a great deal of research in modern personality psychology, with one exception. Frederick Coolidge and his colleagues have spent some years developing and validating an instrument designed to classify individuals on Horney's neurotic trends. The Horney Coolidge Tridimensional Inventory, or HCTI (Coolidge, Moor, Yamazaki, Stewart, & Segal, 2001; Coolidge, Segal, Benight, & Danielian, 2004; Coolidge, Segal, Estey, & Neuzil, 2011 ) has three subscales reflecting the compliant, aggressive and detached trends, and has been shown to correlate well with their intuitively related personality disorders in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5)*, demonstrating its construct validity (Coolidge et al., 2004).

### **A. The Neurotic Search for Glory in the Lab**

Diana Pinto and her colleagues (2012) designed an interesting behavioral test of Horney's theory that inauthentic individuals (those who are compelled to realize the idealized self) engage in self-preserving tendencies such as anger and aggression toward others whom they see as threats. Drawing from Horney's theorizing, Pinto and colleagues (2012) predicted that undergraduate students who were more inauthentic would behave more aggressively in unfair situations. To test this hypothesis, they used a version of the "point subtraction aggression paradigm" (PSAP; Carre & McCormick, 2008), which is a laboratory task where participants play a game for monetary rewards against an "opponent" (the game is played on a computer, with a programmed opponent). Results revealed that aggressive responses were predicted by authenticity, such that low levels of authentic living predicted greater aggressive responses. The authors wrote that their findings were "consistent with Horney's perspective which suggests that inauthentic individuals engage in self-serving punitive behaviors toward others."

### **B. Can Neuroticism Ever Be a Good Thing?**

For the most part, Horney's theory, as well as most of the work in personality psychology, paints neuroticism rather negatively. Recent research has begun investigating conditions under which neuroticism might not be all negative and, ironically, may actually have some benefits.

Michael Robinson and colleagues (Robinson, Ode, Wilkowski, & Amodio, 2007) asked how one could be a "successful neurotic." Since neurotics are predisposed to avoid threats, Robinson and his colleagues predicted that the ability to recognize threats and avoid them successfully could decrease negative mood. They found that their experiments supported this prediction. Many neurotic people are skilled at avoiding negative outcomes, and this avoidance does actually improve their daily moods, making them feel better.

## **X. Critique of Horney**

Horney's social psychoanalytic theory provides interesting perspectives on the nature of humanity, but it suffers from lack of current research that might support her suppositions. The strength of Horney's theory is her lucid portrayal of the neurotic personality. As scientific theory, however, it rates very low in generating research, low on its ability to be falsified, to organize knowledge, and to serve as a guide to action. The theory receives a moderate rating on internal consistency and parsimony.

## **XI. Concept of Humanity**

Horney's concept of humanity was based almost entirely on her clinical experiences with neurotic patients; therefore, her view of human personality is strongly colored by her concept of neurosis. In summary, Horney's view of humanity is rated high on free choice, optimism, unconscious influences, and social factors; average on causality versus teleology; and low on uniqueness.