

Karen Horney: Neurosis And Human Growth

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Introduction

In this episode of the podcast, we discuss the work of Karen Horney, M.D., titled, *Neurosis and Human Growth: The Struggle Towards Self Realization*. In the book, Horney discusses the concept of neurosis as it stands juxtaposed against what she deems healthy growth and human development. We will be discussing this concept and some of her prevalent theories introduced in the writing, such as the development of neurosis, the contrast to the healthy individual, the components of growth, the tyranny of the “should,” the search for glory, and neurotic claims.

We hope that you will be inspired to pick up this book by Karen Horney and join us in thinking about her important work.

Who is Karen Horney?

Karen Horney was a revolutionary thinker of her time, ushering in a new outgrowth of psychoanalytic thought. Originally from Germany, where she completed her medical (University of Berlin, 1913) and psychiatric (Berlin-Lankwitz, Germany, 1918) training, she eventually moved to the United States in 1932 after being invited by Dr. Franz Alexander the prior year. Her initial work in the U.S. was as the associate director of the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute. She later moved to New York where she lived until her death in 1952. While her ideas and thoughts stem from previous psychoanalytic schools, such as those established by individuals like Sigmund Freud, she chose to break from the traditional focus of psychoanalytic thought. One of her main reasons for this was the desire to address the moral and cultural pressures of society and how this impacts psychological development. This was different in that it accounted for differences in expectations or norms for a particular individual and how that individual’s life experience drives development. Horney also parted from the central focus of Freudian psychoanalytic thought: “libidinal conflict.” Her work draws on the ideas of many other influences such as: George Groddeck, William James, Erich Fromm, George Simmel, Abram Kardiner, Soren Kierkegaard, and Zen Buddhism.

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What is neurosis?

A core tenet of the book is Horney's concept of neurosis and the neurotic process. As she states, "The neurotic process is a special form of human development, and, because of the waste of constructive energies which it involves, a particularly unfortunate one" (Horney, page 13). In her portrayal of the concept, it is considered a focus within life and development that leads away from an individual's true nature and calling. It is a process by which an individual grows alienated from his or her inner self—the core of who they are as an individual. This alienation comes forth via the expenditure of energy for the purpose of fitting into the mold of the rigid system of inner expectations, which are absorbed based on their particular environment and early relationships. Neurosis could be described as a source of energy which builds the mask that people wear, a mask built from what they believe others expect of them (similar to Winnicott's false self) which requires enormous amounts of energy to maintain and stifles the true or authentic self. They spend extraneous amounts of emotional energy to protect this false, idealized image of themselves. This idealized self can be considered "a comprehensive neurotic solution—i.e., a solution not only for a particular conflict but one that implicitly promises to satisfy all the inner needs that have arisen in an individual at a given time" (Horney, page 23). A neurosis may develop as a way of managing difficult emotions and experiences throughout one's life. And so while it may take a lot of energy to maintain, we can also respect the individual's process in trying to manage these difficult emotions in the best way that they could at that time and in that stage of development.

Ultimately, neurosis is a constantly changing phenomenon: "It is a *process* that grows by its own momentum, that with ruthless logic of its own envelopes more and more areas of personality" (Horney, page 333).

How does neurosis develop (What is the neurotic process)?

Horney believed that neurosis develops in childhood, based on the environment in which a child is raised. In a cyclical fashion, neurosis could be influenced by neuroses in the caretakers of a child. If a caretaker is consumed by their own inner beliefs/concepts they may fail to see the child as an individual. They may also project their own neurosis onto the child and into the child's sense of self and self in the world. They may be dominating, overprotective, indulgent,

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indifferent, or hypocritical towards the child, based on their own neurotic experience of the world. Being raised in this environment leads to what Horney describes as basic anxiety and a profound sense of insecurity—insecurity in the self, self-agency and in the relationship with the caregiver. Specifically, “it is his feeling of being isolated and helpless in a world conceived as potentially hostile” (Horney, page 18). As a result, the child is left alone with this anxiety, and must form a mechanism to cope and get through this hostile world. This can come as either moving toward, against, or away from others, portrayed through compliance, aggressiveness, or aloofness, respectively.

According to Horney, part of the development of this neurotic belief comes through the very nature of society and societal structure. The way Horney describes this is that “living in a competitive society, and feeling at bottom...isolated and hostile, he can only develop an urgent need to lift himself above others” (Horney, page 21). When feeling less than those around them, the individual drives for the need to be better due to the innately stratified nature of society. There is a totem pole that can be, and in neurosis need be, climbed to advance in a tiered structure of wealth and glory. The problem is that it is the neurotic character who is climbing the totem pole, and so the sense of accomplishment is not felt as a victory for the self but for the mask or false self, the neurotic version of the self.

What does Karen Horney consider the “healthy” individual?

The “healthy” individual, most simply put, is the person who moves towards self-realization. Horney describes everyone having their own conception of the *real self* which is “that central inner force, common to all human beings and yet unique to each, which is the deep source of growth” (Horney, page 17). Rather than an idealized conception, such as that created by neurosis, the healthy conception of self is that of reality. It requires an awareness of the inner goals, desires, gifts, and values of an individual that are specific to them and realistic to achieve, rather than a projected desire or need of the other.

The healthy individual is someone who:

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- 1) **Understands their true self.** They do not make themselves more or less than they truly are, but rather face an understanding and acceptance of themselves in the present moment.
- 2) **Accepts responsibility.** Rather than try to place or displace blame for the consequences of an action, they take responsibility and accept that their actions have a specific outcome (intended or not).
- 3) **Acts for themselves.** It is easy to try to push hardships and difficulties away as a problem for someone else to solve, but the healthy individual steps up to act on their own behalf. This is often referred to as a sense of agency in psychodynamic thinking. That an individual has power to affect meaningful change in their life.

The Key Components of Growth

Horney defines growth as “free, healthy development in accordance with the potentials of one’s generic and individual nature”(Horney, page 17). To grow as a healthy individual, Horney believes there are several key components. These include:

- 1) **Favorable environment.** As expressed above, the environment that a child is raised in plays a huge role in neurotic development; a key to healthy growth is an environment that is nurturing to unique development. The parent sees and fosters the child’s sense-of-self and encourages and accepts that, rather than projecting their own desires and fears onto the child.
- 2) **Warmth.** While warmth is usually associated with the idea of shelter and basic needs, Horney’s usage refers to the individual being given emotional warmth, such that they feel “inner security and inner freedom” (Horney, page 18). This is also a sense of positive regard or unconditional love.
- 3) **The goodwill of others.** Interactions with others are as equally important as the development of the inner self. When someone is given assistance and kindness from others, it can “guide and encourage him to become a mature and fulfilled individual” (Horney, page 18). They have the experience of being an individual worthy of the goodwill of others.

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- 4) **Healthy friction.** Conflict in and of itself is not innately bad or negative. Having a healthy/moderate amount of tension or disagreement with others allows for growth of the individual within the confines of reality. In current psychodynamic thought, this is described as “rupture and repair.” This applies to personal relationships as well as the therapeutic relationship. There will always be a mismatch or misattunement in relationships that may cause conflict. A healthy relationship is able to recognize the rupture and then work to repair it. Having the experience that a relationship can have conflict and still survive as a relationship solidifies the sense-of-self as having agency. “I can disagree with someone, share that with them, and we can continue to be in relationship with each other.” Real relationships have conflict and rupture all the time. Being able to tolerate a rupture speaks to the security in the sense-of-self.

What is the “search for glory”?

The search for glory is the focusing of energy to become the false or idealized self. It is a drive of an individual to find glory or praise in themselves. A person comes to see themselves as this perfect idealized self and seeks to find the external validation of it. While this transfer in focus can be a core tenet of the neurotic process, it is not one easily seen by those around them. As Horney explains, “this transfer of his center of gravity is an entirely inward process: there is no observable or conspicuous outward change in him. The change is in the core of his being, in his feeling about himself” (Horney, page 23).

This search for glory comprises two main characteristics and has three notable attributes as discussed by Horney.

The Characteristics:

- 1) **Compulsive Nature.** In attempting to achieve glory, a person acts under the pretense that it is something they **MUST** do to avoid danger. It is not necessarily something that an individual comes to desire or obtain of their own volition, but rather something that they need to do in order to avoid some negative outcome they foresee. It may be an unconscious process. The negative outcome may just be avoiding the anxiety of society/others seeing the flawed true self. This compulsive nature is a drive to perfection that can cause an individual to disregard themselves and reality: “The compulsiveness of

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the neurotic person's need for indiscriminate supremacy makes him indifferent to truth, whether concerning himself, others, or facts" (Horney, page 30).

In looking at the compulsive nature, the intensity of the compulsion is related to the intensity of the fear of future danger. As we perceive something to be more important or more anxiety-provoking, more threatening, we react more strongly to it and neglect other things. For example, the inner thought of a therapist who neglects friends, family, and self-care for learning every bit of knowledge regarding their craft might be: "I MUST be the most helpful therapist ever or my patients will die. Or even worse, I will be bad and unworthy."

- 2) **Imagination.** The imagination is a powerful tool in the search for glory. With it, the individual can imagine what they most want to obtain and achieve. It can endow an individual "with unlimited powers and with exalted faculties; he becomes a hero, a genius, a supreme lover, a saint, a god" (Horney, page 22). Being able to create this mental image of glory drives the behaviors necessary in the pursuit of making it a reality. This is not to say that imagination is negative; it is essential to all individuals and in several positive aspects of life, such as the imagination of joyful situations. However, imagination is easily distorted by neurosis and the idealized image. In place of the real self, the imagination begins to explore the glory of the false self. In doing so, their natural limitations and the limitations of reality become distorted.

A comparison that Horney draws is to that of the desert wanderer. This individual, "under the duress of fatigue and thirst, sees a mirage, [and] may take actual efforts to reach it, but the mirage—the glory—which should end his distress is itself a product of imagination" (Horney, pages 31-32). The glory is the thing that will save the individual, but the glory itself is an imagined aspect of themselves. It isn't any more real than the mirage.

Examples of this could include a person who thinks that he is above time and physical limitations so that he skips meals and sacrifices sleep to the point of self-exhaustion and collapse. Or someone who refuses to consider any flaws or limitations and reacts with rage whenever reality kicks in. As the image in their mind falls further away from reality, their actions become detrimental in the pursuit of something greater.

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The Attributes:

- 1) **Need for perfection:** “It aims at nothing less than molding the whole personality into the idealized self” (Horney, pages 24-25). In the pursuit of glory, the individual self falls wayside to the perfect self. Their entire being is consumed by this idealized image and the individual molds their personality around perfectionism. The person must follow all of their internal rules.
- 2) **Neurotic ambition:** This is “the drive toward external success” (Horney, page 25). To obtain glory, the individual must pursue lofty goals. They seek to obtain the external successes that align with the false self, driving them towards one pursuit or another. This external validation helps the individual feel more secure in the moment.
- 3) **Vindictive triumph:** It is “closely linked up with the drive for actual development and success but...its chief aim is to put others to shame or defeat them through one’s very success” (Horney, pages 26-27). The concept of glory and perfection necessitate that others are less than. Vindictive triumph leads to trying to defeat others, returning to the concept that the idealized self is bred in part by the nature of competition in society itself.

An overall summary of the concept of the search for glory and its connection to neurosis can be seen in this summation of the neurotic’s version of reality: “Nothing is impossible to *me*” (Horney, page 35). This individual is so perfect, ambitious, and triumphant that nothing is impossible, but only when it concerns them and not anyone (or anything) else. There can be no reality-testing here, no admission of conflict or fault. At the same time, the search for glory is less about the journey to obtain glory and more about the mere possession of it. The neurotic individual “does not want to climb a mountain; he wants to be on the peak” (Horney, page 38). This introduces the neurotic claims.

What are “neurotic claims”?

Feeding into the cycle of neurosis and a grandiose sense-of-self is what Horney describes as neurotic claims, defining this as “neurotic needs which individuals have unwittingly turned into

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claims” (Horney, page 42). These are claims that are born from egocentrism and vindictiveness. It is the belief that “he is entitled to be treated by others, or by fate, in accord with his grandiose notions about himself. Everyone ought to cater to his illusions” (Horney, page 41). That individual is the center of the universe; everything must cater to them and their false sense-of-self. Anything that is not in alignment with their needs/desires/beliefs is considered an infraction against them. In more childish or simplistic terms, it isn’t fair when they don’t get what they want. And yet, similar to wanting to be at the peak of a mountain without climbing it, the individual believes they ought to be handed everything they desire without necessarily putting in the effort themselves.

Neurotic claims are easy to see and unchallenging to succumb to in everyday life. In reality, almost everyone either falls into the category of having neurotic claims themselves or knows someone who does. Those people “whose need is to always be *right* feel entitled never to be criticized, doubted, or questioned” (Horney, page 43). There are many different forms of neurotic claims and many different variations in which they can play out.

In the book, Horney gives the example of a businessman trying to catch a train. He becomes angry that the train doesn’t leave at the time most convenient for him. When his friend tries to point out how trivial this is, the businessman brushes the friend aside. He, the businessman, is busy and important and therefore his concern is not so trivial. This is a neurotic claim in that he expects the transportation to work for his benefit when in reality his convenience is not any more important than anyone else’s. While it isn’t unreasonable to *want* this convenience, the expectation that his desire be met is where the neurosis of the claim comes into play.

Here Horney also divulges her own tendency to neurotic claim, explaining a similar unconscious claim as an example in her own life. During a return from a visit to Mexico, she was turned away from her flight “because of priorities” not pertaining to her (others were more important than her in getting this specific flight). Her initial reaction was indignation. When the priorities were such that they harmed her, the reaction was anger. Yet, on principle alone she did admit that priorities were, logically, appropriate. At first the train ride that she had to endure instead made her greatly fatigued. But, on further reflection she realized how ridiculous she was being and was able to enjoy her trip home despite the new inconvenience it had created.

Many people could presumably fall victim to similar unconscious claims. The key is to be able to step back and identify that they are happening, to see cause and effect. But as Horney says, “patients presented with such sequences of cause and effect may start to argue, to become

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befogged or evasive” (Horney, page 45). This could be seen in relation to several psychiatric conditions, though Horney does not necessarily go through and explain the relation to each and every one.

Relationship between the “false self” and the “shoulds”

Related to her concept of neurosis is Horney’s presentation of the “false self.” In her theory, this is the perfectionist, god-like image that a person holds about themselves as a result of neurosis. In contrast to the healthy individual and their understanding of their true self, the individual who falls victim to neurosis builds upon the false self. It becomes a positive feedback system, wherein neurosis feeds into the perception of the false, idealized self, which takes away from the connection to the true self. Thus, the false self becomes more vulnerable to the grips of neurosis and continues the cycle, moving further from becoming a healthy individual.

This system is fed by many of the other concepts that Horney discusses (laid out elsewhere in this summary): neurotic pride, the tyranny of should, and self-hate and self-contempt. One of the main components in this cycle of neurosis and false self are the “shoulds.” These are the demands that define the false self and are a composite of thousands of internalized environmental messages on what the ideal self should be or should do—in other words, the things that should be done in order to obtain this perfection of the false self they have created. While the neurotic claims related to things outside the self, the should is that which demands from within.

The Tyranny of the “Should”

At first glance, the idea of shoulds does not seem particularly dangerous or devious. However, the underlying impetus to neurosis and an idealized self comes in the form of should-ing. In using a should statement, an individual becomes trapped by the need to be something other than themselves. Horney perfectly encapsulates this tyranny as she states:

He holds before his soul his image of perfection and unconsciously tells himself:

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“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 everybody, to always be productive” (Horney, page 64).

This concept is an important part of her core theories as laid out in the book. In believing that they should be better or should be different, an individual tries to become something else and does not leave room for those key aspects of the healthy individual. It requires a lot of psychic energy to accommodate all of these shoulds and the individual has nothing left to invest in the real self. The individual can become so rigid in their shoulds that there is little flexibility or creativity available to them.

Should statements are something that many people and patients relate to. It is easy to think to ourselves, “I should have done x.” It’s a struggle many face that holds true across time. They are the “impressions of demands on self which, though understandable, are altogether too difficult or rigid” (Horney, page 65). While to some there is a belief that recognizing this very improbability leads to fixing the problem, this is in itself a should. They believe they should become better after realizing how absurd the expectation is and are upset to realize that it doesn’t change anything. That is because “inner dictates, much like political tyranny in a police state, operate with a supreme disregard for the person’s own psychic conditions” (Horney, page 67).

Another way the should becomes harmful and an impedance to growth is when shoulds contradict one another. In such a situation, there is no outcome in which the individual does not still have the belief they should be doing something else. That is, the individual “may be thrown out of gear if he is caught between two contradictory shoulds” (Horney, page 75). This can be seen in the concept of work/life balance. A working man or woman may believe they should be the best at their job and devote time to it, but at the same time that they should put family first. They can’t fully do either without the other suffering. There is also a reduction in anxiety if the individual acknowledges to themselves what they should be doing. For example, someone might say “I should never be mad at my mom,” when they actually do feel angry at the mother. **Shoulds have a way of denying an unacceptable affect or feeling, and substituting it with a way of being that is more socially acceptable and also less-anxiety provoking for the individual.** Shoulds have a way of reducing anxiety in a fantastical way. If I say I shouldn’t do this or that, it has a way of undoing or dismissing the intolerable feeling.

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In this way, the more shoulds an individual has, the more dissatisfied they can become with the way they truly are as their real self. In that way it becomes easy to see how the should grows the false self and denies the true self and the self's desires.

What is neurotic pride?

In all that Horney discusses regarding the false self and the neurotic process, she turns towards what the development truly lacks: self-confidence and self-respect. In the pursuit of glory, the expression of neurotic claims and the attempted fulfillment of shoulds, an individual doesn't develop the sense of self-worth they need to feel secure. As Horney puts it, "instead of solid self-confidence he gets a glittering gift of the most questionable value: neurotic pride" (Horney, page 87). This is not, as confidence entails, a belief in their own merits, but rather a falsified reliance on the prestige of their associations or images. Horney considers neurotic pride "unsubstantial," as it is part of "support [of] the glorified version of oneself" (Horney, page 89). It isn't about what one genuinely offers, but what one externally obtains in alignment with the ideal image of themselves, of the mask.

This neurotic pride comes with a form of insecurity. The social connections or titles created in the pursuit of the false sense-of-self lead an individual to "not feel part of it," as they do "not have a feeling of belonging, but rather [use] it for [their] personal prestige" (Horney, page 90). Pride is born not in reality but in imagination. Horney references a mother who has the pride of playing her role as caregiver perfectly when in reality that perfection is merely in her head. To connect neurotic pride to modern times, this can easily be seen in aspects of social media. An individual may post the image of their "perfect" life and create an air of superiority in doing so while their true self is not nearly as picture perfect. They may not even realize they aren't the person in their posts because they are too proud to address their reality.

When neurotic pride is questioned or damaged it can lead to feelings of humiliation or shame. Part of this comes from the mere nature of neurotic pride, in that it is "the combination of it being vitally important to the individual and at the same time rendering him extremely vulnerable" (Horney, page 103). Because of how much this person needs to have pride, they become easily hurt by anything that questions it. It can also touch on a primitive anxiety—if there is some shortcoming that is recognized, it threatens to tumble the whole image. (This related to the previously mentioned attribute of the search of glory being the vindictive

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triumph.) The individual needs to have success as they triumph over those who would question it.

What are self-hate and self-contempt?

As a part of this pride system, Horney introduces self-hate and self-contempt. As she states, “pride and self-hate belong inseparably together; they are two expressions of one process” (Horney, page 109). Pride in the ideal self leads to hatred of the true self. The expression of the neurotic process involves both. As Horney states, “the glorified self becomes not only a phantom to be pursued; it also becomes a measuring rod with which to measure his actual being” (Horney, page 110). This leads to self-hate and self-contempt.

These are strategies employed by the pride system to help keep down the real self throughout these pursuits of glory and perfection. In order to distance the idealized, false self even more from the true self, self-hate and self-contempt continuously fight to devalue the real self; “There is the unique, ideal person; and there is an omnipresent stranger (the actual self), always interfering, disturbing, embarrassing” (Horney, page 111). The more that hatred and contempt for this self grows, the more disdain and repulsion there is for the true self. This drives that desire for the false self even more, adding to the cycle of neurosis and stunting the growth that would lead to self-actualization. It breeds war within the self.

The concept of self-hate (along with pride) is what helps determine the shoulds as discussed in early chapters of the book. The more the individual dislikes themselves, the more they believe they “should” be something or someone else. However, the individual may also want to protect themselves from their own self-hatred by trying to soothe anxieties, blame others, or take it out on others. This can occur “when a person is on the verge of realizing, unconsciously, that he cannot possibly measure up to his particular shoulds” (Horney, page 121). It becomes a form of defense against the anxiety of accepting the reality of their true self.

In addition to trying to avoid their own anxiety of acknowledging and accepting their true self, an individual may also feel anxious and therefore opposed to others seeing their true self. This can become a form of externalizing or projecting an individual's own insecurities. That is to say, they may “externalize the self-accusations [they] may feel that everybody is imputing ulterior motives to everything [they do]” (Horney, page 129). The insecurity grows to a point that the

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self-hatred they feel becomes assigned to an external hatred from those around them. The hatred is projected to those around them, where it may feel less internally conflictual.

Related to self-hate comes the concept of self-contempt: “undermining self-confidence” (Horney, page 132). This is the need to compare oneself. In every situation, they look at those around them and think that those individuals are somehow better than they are or have an advantage. While a neurotic individual believes they should be better than everyone else, they may not always see themselves that way. Additionally, they become vulnerable to the criticisms of others because of the anxiety that these criticisms create. This can eventually lead to the feeling that the individual themselves is at fault and therefore worthy of the abuses of those around them. Because they rely on external validation of their greatness, they will internalize these criticisms as wholly true. They are unable to reflect on these criticisms, to consider whether they are valid and consistent with their sense of self. Instead, they are accepted as wholly true of the self.

Overall, the concepts of self-hatred and self-contempt drive the desire for the ideal self (and its validation) while introducing the insecurities and self doubts that the individual must also face and overcome. The consequence of this can be summarized with the comment that “when he makes a pact with the devil, who promises him glory, he has to go to hell—to the hell within himself” (Horney, page 154).

Other Important Concepts:

The Alienation from Self

In the context of making a sort of pact with the devil, the idea of alienation from self is the result of that deal. That is to say “the abandoning of self corresponds to the selling of one’s soul” (Horney, page 155). The concept of self, real self, is dependent on a full acceptance and understanding of a whole individual, both good and bad. Truly connected self “not merely are body and mind, deed and thought or feeling, consonant and harmonious, but [function] without inner conflict” (Horney, page 157). In selling the soul to neurotic pride and the other downfalls of neurosis, the individual has a fractured self and loses a connection with their actual being.

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General Measures to Relieve Tension

With everything that Horney discusses, it becomes apparent that there is a mounting threat of impairment in the individual afflicted by neurosis. In order to address this the individual *must* find a way to relieve the increasing tensions, because “by now (under the rending impact of the conflicts and tensions mentioned) the danger of psychic destruction is imminent” (Horney, page 177). These forms of relief include:

- 1) **Alienation from self:** discussed above
- 2) **Externalization of inner experiences:** “Intrapsychic processes..are perceived or felt as occurring between the self and the outside world” (Horney, page 178).
- 3) **Compartmentalization/psychic fragmentation:** To “experience himself in a piecemeal way, as if we were the sum total of disconnected parts” (Horney, page 179).
- 4) **Automatic control:** “Checks not only the acting on impulses or the expression of feeling but the impulses and feelings themselves” (Horney, page 181).
- 5) **Supremacy of the mind:** “While feelings, because unruly, are suspects to be controlled, the mind (imagination and reason) expands like a genie from a bottle” (Horney, pages 182-183).

The Appeals: The “solutions” of problems of neurosis

1) The Expansive Solutions: The Appeal to Mastery

While the individual may house two sides such as Jekyll and Hyde (a true self and the false, grandiose self), he comes to predominantly identify as that grandiose self. Simply put, “the appeal of life lies in its mastery” (Horney, page 192). That individual is master of everything and can master everything. However, it leaves them vulnerable to the fears and failures of criticisms. Horney hesitatingly calls one of these expansive solutions narcissism, as “the person is his idealized self and seems to adore it” (Horney, page 194). The other two solutions are perfectionism and arrogant vindictiveness. Each is a variant on the main appeal of trying to achieve a mastery of life.

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2) The Self-Effacing Solution: The Appeal of Love

As a contrast to the expansive solution, the self-effacing solution goes in the complete opposite direction. In this way, rather than attempt to be superior to everyone, this individual “tends to subordinate himself to others, to be dependent upon them, to appease them” (Horney, page 215). This individual leans heavily on the ideas of self-hate and self-contempt. In solving the issues of neurosis, “he has solved his inner conflict by suppressing all expansive attitudes and drives and making self-abnegating trends predominate” (Horney, page 216). This, however, leads to the problem of measuring worth in terms of love which is dependent on those around them.

Morbid Dependency: A major flaw of the appeal of love

As noted, the self-effacing individual becomes dependent on those around them. They need to love and be loved. This opens the doors to a toxicity “in which the partners torment each other and in which the dependent partner is in danger of destroying himself, slowly and painfully” (Horney, page 243). This toxic relationship is what Horney considers morbid dependency. In modern times this might be simply labeled an abusive relationship. It should also be noted that this is not truly love. This is a relationship free of conflict and one in which neither person is truly known or recognized as an individual. In this way, it may be a repetition of an early relationship pattern. The self-effacing individual denies any needs of the self or agency of the self in order to be in a relationship, at all costs. Horney is calling it love here, but it is really quite superficial and another version of the false self. The person in the relationship is false and puts a self-effacing mask on to be able to be connected to someone else. There is no rupture and repair, there is no ability to tolerate conflict or misattunement. The relationship is only able to exist because the self-effacing individual denies themselves and their needs/desires in the relationship. This is not love, but a maintenance of a dysfunctional equilibrium.

3) Resignation: The Appeal of Freedom

The final appeal relies on an attitude of disinterest. For this individual, “if he can muster and maintain an attitude of ‘don’t care,’ he feels less bothered by his inner conflicts and can attain a semblance of inner peace” (Horney, page 259). While this individual may pass as “normal” they are not at peace with themselves. They are simply attempting to

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avoid conflict, which is not the same. The characteristics of this individual include being an onlooker to their own life, having no drive for achievement, lacking goals/plans, and restricting wishes. These individuals can grow detached. They are also sensitive to coercion and adverse to change.

Neurotic Disturbances

In Human Relationships

While her book focuses on the individual and their intrapersonal conflicts, there are obviously implications for neurotic disturbance in relation to others, as well. In reality, “neurotic claims, while growing from inner needs, are mainly directed towards others” (Horney, page 291). The neurotic individual does not have the same perception of reality and individuals as healthy individuals do. For a neurotic individual, he “sees others *in the light of the needs* engendered by the pride system” (Horney, 292). In essence, others are inextricably tied to them (in their view). The distortions can come in three main forms: giving someone an inaccurate characteristic, being unable to see an actual flaw, and becoming hypocritical in that they recognize trends in others they themselves have and ignore. Relationships with others can cause insecurities and be volatile in different ways, as well.

In Work

Similar to relationships, work also requires interaction with the external world. As such, it too can be impacted by neurotic disturbance. For the expansive type (appeal to mastery), they “tend to overrate their capacities or their special gifts” (Horney, page 311). This type of individual sees themselves as more important in the work environment and tends not to give/share credit for work. They also see themselves as infallible. Almost entirely opposite, the self-effacing type (appeal to love), “tends to set his aims too low or underrate his gifts as well as the importance and the value of his work” (Horney, page 316). They are more likely to believe they are incapable of something and could impair their own success/efficiency. While the resigned individual (appeal to freedom) may similarly aim to do less, they “settle for less because to do so is part and parcel of his general resignation from active living” (Horney, page 324). A self-effacing individual prefers to work for others while the resigned type prefers to work alone.

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The Road of Psychoanalytic Therapy

“It is the road to reorientation through self-knowledge” (Horney, page 341).

As laid out by the various descriptions and attributes of the neurotic process, it is one that will lead an individual to become more alienated from true self as it continues on. It is also a process of flux that continually adds new conflicts/issues requiring new solutions. Here, Horney warns, “we must be clear of the seriousness of the involvement in order to guard against false optimism, envisioning quick and easy cures” (Horney, page 333). The road of psychoanalytic therapy is not some simple cure. It too is a process and is guided greatly based on the goals and understanding of the analyst (therapist) directing the therapy. In her form, “we want to help the patient find himself, and with that the possibility of working towards his self-realization” (Horney, page 334). Though, admittedly, it takes work to help the patient feel that he can recognize and let go of all the aspects talked about in the book. And in some cases, the pride involved in the neurotic process may itself become a barrier to seeking help to begin with. The process and the road have to work towards slowly disillusioning the false self and removing those barriers set to the realization of the true self. The full effect is to help the patient try to improve his abilities in that he strives “toward a clearer and deeper experiencing of his feelings, wishes, and beliefs,” as well as towards better use of talents, better perception of self, improved relationships, and the pursuit of fulfilling work (Horney, page 364).

Horney spends the vast majority of the book discussing the problems of neurosis but leaves only one chapter of the book to discuss the concept of treatment. Yet, as she contends, “everything I [have] said pertained to therapy” (Horney, page 341). Although Horney does not emphasize this, we believe that this process can not take place without a strong therapeutic alliance, empathy that reduces shame, and patience for the process.

Theoretical Considerations

As noted at the beginning of this article, Karen Horney drew influences from several other thinkers and her theories stem from those of Sigmund Freud. At the conclusion of the book Horney describes how her theories have evolved and are a continually evolving process. She also compares her ideas to Freud’s to briefly explain some differences. Her overall conclusion is that, “Freud’s philosophy, in this deep sense, is a pessimistic one. Ours, with all its cognizance of the tragic elements of neurosis, is an optimistic one” (Horney, page 378).

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Conclusions

“To work at ourselves becomes not only the prime moral obligation, but at the same time, in a very real sense, the prime moral *privilege*” (Horney, page 15).

While Karen Horney’s *Neurosis and Human Growth: The Struggle Towards Self Realization* was published in 1950, the principles she discusses are extremely relevant today. The full nuances and breadth of her arguments and theories cannot be laid out here in their entirety. She gives many incredible examples and encourages working towards the real self, as it is a privilege to reach that actualization of being. Both in personal life and in an understanding of patients, the ideas and concepts she lays out become relevant to trying to live your best life and avoid wasting energy and talent. While the pursuit of glory and self-indulgence is easy to desire, striving for such perfection and neurosis can quickly become a spiral towards unhappiness. Constantly doing what “should” be done leaves little room for an appreciation for what is in the here and now.

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