Horney & Humanistic Psychoanalysis

Major Concepts (continued)

Horney's Mature Theory

According to Horney, people have a real self that requires favorable conditions to be actualized. When they are motivated by their defensive strategies instead of their genuine feelings, they become alienated from their real selves. Horney divided defensive strategies into two kinds: interpersonal, which we use in our dealings with other people, and intrapsychic, which we employ in our own minds. She focused mainly on interpersonal strategies in *Our Inner Conflicts* (1945) and on the intrapsychic in *Neurosis and Human Growth* (1950).

The Real Self

Horney came to see the central feature of neurosis as alienation from the real self because of oppressive forces in the environment. The object of therapy is to "restore the individual to himself, to help him regain his spontaneity and find his center of gravity in himself" (Horney, 1939, p. 11). The real self is not a fixed entity but a set of intrinsic potentialities -- including temperament, talents, capacities, and predispositions -- that are part of our genetic makeup and need a favorable environment in which to develop. It is not a product of learning, since one cannot be taught to be oneself; but neither is it impervious to external influence, since it is actualized through interactions with an external world that can provide many paths of development.

People can actualize themselves in different ways under different conditions, but there are certain conditions in childhood that everyone requires for self-realization. These include "an atmosphere of warmth" that enables children to express their own thoughts and feelings, the good will of others to supply their various needs, and "healthy friction with the wishes and will" of those around them (Horney, 1950, p. 18). When their own neuroses prevent parents from loving the child or even thinking "of him as the particular individual he is," the child develops a feeling of basic anxiety that prevents him "from relating himself to others with the spontaneity of his real feelings" and forces him to develop defensive strategies (Horney, 1950, p. 18).

Interpersonal Strategies of Defense

According to Horney, people try to cope with their basic anxiety by adopting a compliant or self-effacing solution and moving toward people, by adopting an aggressive or expansive solution and moving against people, or by becoming detached or resigned and moving away from people. Healthy people move appropriately and flexibly in all three directions, but in neurotic development these moves become compulsive and indiscriminate. Each solution involves a constellation of behavior patterns and personality traits, a conception of justice, and a set of beliefs about human nature, human values, and the human condition. Each also involves a "deal" or bargain with fate in which obedience to the dictates of
that solution is supposed to be rewarded.

The Compliant Solution

People in whom compliant trends are dominant try to overcome their basic anxiety by gaining affection and approval and controlling others through their dependency. Their values "lie in the direction of goodness, sympathy, love, generosity, unselfishness, humility; while egotism, ambition, callousness, unscrupulosity, wielding of power are abhorred" (Horney, 1945, p. 54). They embrace Christian values, but in a compulsive way, because they are necessary to their defense system. They must believe in turning the other cheek, and they must see the world as displaying a providential order in which virtue is rewarded. Their bargain is that if they are good, loving people who shun pride and do not seek their own gain or glory, they will be well treated by fate and other people. If their bargain is not honored, they may despair of divine justice, they may conclude that they are at fault, or they may have recourse to belief in a justice that transcends human understanding. They need to believe not only in the fairness of the world order but also in the goodness of human nature, and here, too, they are vulnerable to disappointment. Self-effacing people must repress their aggressive tendencies in order to make their bargain work, but they are frequently attracted to expansive people through whom they can participate vicariously in the mastery of life. They often develop a "morbid dependency" on their partner.

Expansive Solutions: Narcissistic, Perfectionistic,
and Arrogant-Vindictive

People in whom expansive tendencies are predominant have goals, traits, and values that are opposite to those of the self-effacing solution. What appeals to them most is not love, but mastery. They abhor helplessness, are ashamed of suffering, and need to achieve success, prestige, or recognition. In Neurosis and Human Growth (1950), Horney divided the expansive solutions into three distinct kinds -- narcissistic, perfectionistic, and arrogant-vindictive. There are thus five major solutions in all.

Narcissistic people seek to master life "by self-admiration and the exercise of charm" (Horney, 1950, p. 212). They were often favored and admired children, gifted beyond average, who grew up feeling the world to be a fostering parent and themselves to be favorites of fortune. They have an unquestioned belief in their abilities and feel that there is no one they cannot win. Their insecurity is manifested in the fact that they may speak incessantly of their exploits or wonderful qualities and need endless confirmation of their estimate of themselves in the form of admiration and devotion. Their bargain is that if they hold onto their dreams and their exaggerated claims for themselves, life is bound to give them what they want. If it does not, they may experience a psychological collapse, since they are ill-equipped to cope with reality.

Perfectionistic people have extremely high standards, moral and intellectual, on the basis of which they look down upon others. They take great pride in their rectitude and aim for a "flawless excellence" in the whole conduct of life. Because of the difficulty of living up to their standards, they tend to equate knowing about moral values with being a good person. While they deceive themselves in this way, they may insist that others live up to their standards of perfection and despise them for failing to do so, thus externalizing their self-condemnation. Perfectionists have a legalistic bargain in which being fair, just, and dutiful entitles them "to fair treatment by others and by life in general. This conviction of an infallible justice operating in life gives [them] a feeling of mastery" (Horney, 1950, p. 197). Through the height of their standards, they compel fate. Ill-fortune or errors of their own making threaten their bargain and may overwhelm them with feelings of helplessness or self-hate.

Arrogant-vindictive people are motivated chiefly by a need for vindictive triumphs. Whereas
narcissists received early admiration and perfectionists grew up under the pressure of rigid standards, arrogant-vindictive people were harshly treated in childhood and have a need to retaliate for the injuries they have suffered. They feel "that the world is an arena where, in the Darwinian sense, only the fittest survive and the strong annihilate the weak" (Horney, 1945, p. 64). The only moral law inherent in the order of things is that might makes right. In their relations with others they are competitive, ruthless, and cynical. They want to be hard and tough and regard all manifestation of feeling as a sign of weakness. Their bargain is essentially with themselves. They do not count on the world to give them anything but are convinced that they can reach their ambitious goals if they remain true to their vision of life as a battle and do not allow themselves to be influenced by traditional morality or their softer feelings. If their expansive solution collapses, self-effacing trends may emerge.

Detachment

Predominantly detached people pursue neither love nor mastery but rather worship freedom, peace, and self-sufficiency. They disdain the pursuit of worldly success and have a profound aversion to effort. They have a strong need for superiority and usually look on their fellows with condescension, but they realize their ambition in imagination rather than through actual accomplishments. They handle a threatening world by removing themselves from its power and shutting others out of their inner lives. In order to avoid being dependent on the environment, they try to subdue their inner cravings and to be content with little. They do not usually rail against life but resign themselves to things as they are and accept their fate with ironic humor or stoical dignity. Their bargain is that if they ask nothing of others, others will not bother them; that if they try for nothing, they will not fail; and that if they expect little of life, they will not be disappointed.

Intrapsychic Strategies of Defense

While interpersonal difficulties are creating the moves toward, against, and away from people, and the conflicts between them, concomitant intrapsychic problems are producing their own defensive strategies. Self-idealization generates what Horney calls the pride system, which includes neurotic pride, neurotic claims, tyrannical shoulds, and increased self-hate.

The Idealized Image and the Search for Glory

To compensate for feelings of weakness, worthlessness, and inadequacy, we create, with the aid of our imagination, an idealized image of ourselves that we endow with "unlimited powers and exalted faculties" (Horney, 1950, p. 22). The process of self-idealization must be understood in relation to the interpersonal strategies, since the idealized image is based on our predominant defense and the attributes it exalts. The idealized image of self-effacing people "is a composite of 'lovable' qualities, such as unselfishness, goodness, generosity, humility, saintliness, nobility, sympathy." It also glorifies "helplessness, suffering, and martyrdom" and deep feelings for art, nature, and other human beings (Horney, 1950, p. 222). Arrogant-vindictive people see themselves as invincible masters of all situations. They are smarter, tougher, more realistic than other people and therefore can get the better of them. They take pride in their vigilance, foresight, and planning and feel that nothing can hurt them. The narcissistic person is "the anointed, the man of destiny, the prophet, the great giver, the benefactor of mankind" (Horney, 1950, p. 194). Narcissists see themselves as having unlimited energies and as being capable of great achievements, effortlessly attained. Perfectionists see themselves as models of rectitude whose performance is invariably excellent. They have perfect judgment and are just and dutiful in their human relationships. The idealized image of detached or resigned people "is a composite of self-sufficiency, independence, self-contained serenity, freedom from desires and passions," and stoic indifference to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune (Horney, 1950, p. 277). They aspire to be free from restraint and impervious to pressure. In each solution, the idealized image may be modeled in
whole or in part on a religious or cultural ideal or an example from history or personal experience.

The idealized image does not ultimately make us feel better about ourselves but rather leads to increased self-hate and additional inner conflict. Although the qualities with which we endow ourselves are dictated by our predominant interpersonal strategy, the subordinate solutions are also represented; and since each solution glorifies a different set of traits, the idealized image has contradictory aspects, all of which we must try to actualize. Moreover, since we can feel worthwhile only if we are our idealized image, everything that falls short is deemed worthless, and there develops a despised image that becomes the focus of self-contempt. A great many people shuttle, said Horney, between "a feeling of arrogant omnipotence and of being the scum of the earth" (Horney, 1950, p. 188).

With the formation of the idealized image, we embark on a search for glory, the object of which is to actualize our idealized self. What is considered to be glorious will vary with each solution. The search for glory constitutes a private religion the rules of which are determined by our particular neurosis, but we may also participate in the glory systems that are a prominent feature of every culture. These include organized religions, various forms of group identification, wars and military service, and competitions, honors, and hierarchical arrangements of all kinds.

The Pride System

The creation of the idealized image produces not only the search for glory but also neurotic pride, neurotic claims, tyrannical shoulds, and self-hate, all of which will vary with our predominant solution.

Neurotic pride substitutes a pride in the attributes of the idealized self for realistic self-confidence and self-esteem. Threats to pride produce anxiety and hostility; its collapse results in self-contempt and despair. On the basis of our pride, we make neurotic claims on the world in which we demand to be treated in accordance with our grandiose conception of ourselves. The claims are "pervaded by expectations of magic" (Horney, 1950, p. 62). They intensify our vulnerability, for their frustration deflates our pride and confronts us with the sense of powerlessness and inadequacy from which we are fleeing.

The idealized image generates not only pride and claims but also what Horney calls the tyranny of the should. The function of the shoulds is to compel us to live up to our grandiose conception of ourselves. The shoulds are determined largely by the character traits and values associated with our predominant solution, but since our subordinate trends are also represented in the idealized image, we are often caught in a "crossfire of conflicting shoulds." For example, the self-effacing person wants to be good, noble, loving, forgiving, generous; but he has an aggressive side that tells him to "go all out for his advantage" and to "hit back at anybody who offends him. Accordingly he despises himself at bottom for any trace of 'cowardice,' or ineffectualness and compliance. He is thus under a constant crossfire. He is damned if he does something, and he is damned if he does not" (Horney, 1950, p. 221). This is a good description of Hamlet (see Paris, 1991a). "It is the threat of a punitive self-hate that lurks behind [the shoulds]," observed Horney, that "truly makes them a regime of terror" (Horney, 1950, p. 85).

The shoulds are the basis of our bargain with fate. No matter what the solution, our bargain is that our claims will be honored if we live up to our shoulds. We seek magically to control external reality by obeying our inner dictates. We do not see our claims as unreasonable, of course, but only as what we have a right to expect, given our grandiose conception of ourselves, and we will feel that life is unfair if our expectations are frustrated. Our sense of justice is determined by our predominant solution and the bargain associated with it.
Self-hate is the end product of the intrapsychic strategies of defense, each of which tends to magnify our feelings of inadequacy and failure. Self-hate is essentially the rage the idealized self feels toward the self we actually are for not being what it "should" be. Horney sees self-hate as "perhaps the greatest tragedy of the human mind. Man in reaching out for the Infinite and Absolute also starts destroying himself. When he makes a pact with the devil, who promises him glory, he has to go to hell—to the hell within himself" (Horney, 1950, p. 154).

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