

Horney Lecture

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Hello everybody and welcome to this lecture on Karen Horney who calls her approach “Social and Cultural Psychoanalysis.” As you may recall from earlier, lectures psychoanalysis or the psychodynamic perspective begins with Freud, a dominant character, then goes on to Jung, another dominant character. Then as I mention in the lectures on Adler, Adler and Horney are what I like to call two bridge theorists in that they are considered to be in the psychodynamic tradition. Yet they anticipate in their theories so much of what comes later in the beginning of the 1950s, 60s and 70s. We have to point out that Horney’s approach is a very important one in the history of this psychology of personality. She calls her approach Social and Cultural Psychoanalysis for good reason because we can really give her credit in that, among the early personality theorists, she puts a huge amount of emphasis on how culture is so important in the shaping and developing of our personalities. Now to you and me, this seems ridiculously self-evident, at least to me, that the cultural backgrounds, and by cultural I mean the ethnic cultures, the family cultures, the religious cultures, the social cultures that we grow up in hugely shape our personalities. Horney acknowledges this and makes it a big deal, and, indeed, such a big deal, that she really puts this into her very title of her approach. Horney and Adler are similar, and I think as we go through Horney’s theory you will see this. In the last lecture I made the point in saying that Adler, on the one hand, his theory is hugely different than Freud and Jung’s, and Horney would be similar to Adler in pretty much all of those things. So just to . . .

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. . . capitulate this, like Adler, Horney’s theory changes significantly from her early writings, to, can we put this way, more mature, more independent writings. Like Adler she goes from being in the orbit of Freud, if I can put it that way, to really standing on her own. As with Adler, Horney emphasizes the crucial importance of social relationship. Particularly, to no surprise at all, those early social relationships of with their parents, but also children in that family dynamic that shapes us for the first ten/twenty years of our lives. Like Adler and many of the other people that followed Freud, including Jung, we have to point out that Horney deemphasizes the place of sex in personality dynamics. Freud, as many people have noted, seems to overemphasize the place of sex and give it this kind of dominating role in the shaping of personality. There is some reason for that, some culture reasons for that in Freud’s own day and time. But Jung, Adler, Horney, Cattell, plenty of the other theorists that follow simply make the observation that while sex is an important part in being human, it is just one element of all of the social relationships that shape us as human beings. So Horney does a good job as the important female theorist to give us a kind of step back and give us a larger perspective in contexts on social relationships.

Now Horney begins . . .

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. . . with this idea that all of us as human beings in our childhood come at it with two implicit, almost innate needs that we as human beings have. She calls these safety and satisfaction. Let’s just talk about these. First of all, satisfaction: she makes the somewhat straightforward observation that we all have needs that involve physiological survival. We need food, we need oxygen, we need water, we need sleep. We have all of these needs that we share with not only other human beings, but with pretty much every organism that is out there. We need to survive and so part of survival is these basic needs.

Beyond that, the second “S”: safety. We also have needs of security and freedom from fear, anxiety, worry. If you’re like me, I spend a fair amount of my time worrying about security. Security of myself, security of those I love. Security can be widely defined, it is really less physiological, let’s say, than satisfaction. It certainly involves physical security, whether we are worried about being attacked, we have locks on our doors and lights, we don’t go to certain places at certain times of the day or week. But there is also emotional security, we’re wary of people that perhaps seem to us to be a threat to hurt us emotionally. So emotional security is a very big part of this, we’re anxious about whether we will be able to support ourselves, whether we’ll be able to meet somebody that loves us. So safety is a big, huge aspect of our psychological selves. Now, I just want to point out that when I mentioned earlier that Horney is a bridge theorist (you may be aware enough about Maslow’s theory and his hierarchy of needs, that pyramid that all of us by now have seen in other classes, in other situations) that Horney’s two childhood needs - satisfaction and safety - are exactly the two bottom rungs, or the two bottom stories of Maslow’s pyramid or Maslow’s hierarchy, his physiological needs and safety needs. In that way, really, Horney anticipates Maslow’s theory quite beautifully. The fact that Maslow goes on and adds a number of other stages to this, I think Horney, although she doesn’t define these as needs, she certainly anticipates that in her theory. I think you will see that as we go through. So we all have these needs. We all have these childhood needs. You can’t escape them. We all have them.

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What happens here according to Horney is that because we have these needs, in response to those needs and the fact that none of us had a childhood or none of us has even an adulthood in which those needs are perfectly satisfied, you may have had the best family environment growing up, but even the ideal one is going to introduce certain cracks. In our awareness that hey, I have these needs and even though my parents love me, let’s say, and even though they do everything they possibly can, the world is a place that where my parents, at some point in time, may not be able to provide these. So Horney says that it’s a basic human condition, and that’s why she calls this basic anxiety, that as humans all of us will sooner or later, and for most of us it’s sooner, and in small to moderate to large amounts develop this basic anxiety which she defines as “a feeling of helplessness and isolation in a potentially hostile world.” Again, let’s just talk ideally for a minute, if your earlier family life was like a protective cocoon in which your needs were perfectly met, it’s not too long before the world breaks into that and whether we are watching television or we’re talking to friends or we’re at school, but we get a realization that hey, the world is a vampire as the Smashing Pumpkins said, but the world is a potentially harmful place. People get hurt. People die. Not everybody has their needs perfectly met and wow, if that can happen to somebody else that I’m watching on TV, then it could happen to me. So this basic anxiety, almost this core anxiety, Horney says begins at childhood. We are more or less protected from some of the extremes of this if we grow up in a loving, nurturing environment, but no one can protect us from the realization that wow, things can go wrong. There’s no guarantees here. Even though my parents are around, as a child you may look around at other families and see well, my friend’s parents are getting a divorce or wow, my friend’s mother or father lost their job. So we develop this underlining anxiety. And we all have it. Horney says this is psychologically foundational for the development of our personalities. In response to basic anxiety, according to Horney, we develop strategies . . .

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. . . and these are strategies of what she calls self-protection. Think about it; when you’re anxious about something, when I’m anxious about something, I don’t know about you but I really don’t like that feeling. Rarely do I stay with my anxiety voluntarily. Almost always I want to do something about that anxiety. Limit it, answer it, take care of it. People can do all kinds of things about anxiety. They can repress it. Drink. Use drugs. Fill the anxiety hole, if you will, with something else. Horney simply says that as children and as we grow older, she says there are four basic strategies that human beings come up with to try and manage or cope with our basic anxiety. These, you can see on the slide in front of you, are number

one gaining affection, number two being submissive, number three withdrawing, and number four attaining power. Now before we talk through these four, Horney would simply say that ideally since we all have to cope with basic anxiety, in the best of all possible worlds it's probably helpful if we developed as many strategies as possible. In other words, that it's psychologically beneficial for me to have variations on all four of these strategies so that I have as many, how can I put it this way, as many arrows in my quiver as possible to shoot at my anxiety. Horney would say that the problem that many of us develop is that we grow up in an environment in which just one or two of these strategies becomes our whole way of coping, and so as we move into adolescence and adulthood we only have one strategy, we only have two strategies, when it is much better to have a wider array of these strategies of self-protection. So what are these? Gaining affection would simply be when I feel anxious, if I could somehow identify the person or persons or organizations which are potentially threatening to me, if I can get those persons or those groups to like me, to approve of me, to need of me, then I can protect myself from threat, from anxiety, by ingratiating myself to gaining the affection of these potentially powerful sources to cause anxiety. Again, this makes a certain amount of logical sense, at least to me. I remember in third grade my, I think as I told you in earlier lectures, I grew up in Ethiopia in east Africa and my parents came to the United States for a period of time in third grade and I went to school. and there was a bully. I was bullied quite a lot by this very large boy. I guess he found it fascinating that I thought I was African and that I was a little bit weird because I hadn't watched television, I didn't know what people were talking about, I was a little dazed and confused. Going to this American school in which there were two hundred kids in my third grade class and the school I had come from there were eleven children. But he was a bully. I put up with for a while but, you know, I decided that the best thing to do was to get this kid to like me. So I just started to ask him questions about himself. I didn't fight back much but I started to compliment him, ask him questions, what he thought about this, I don't know, and it worked. He stopped bullying me. In fact, by the end of that time that I spent at that school in Ventnor, New Jersey, we had become actual good friends. The way it was towards the end was the was the biggest kid class and if anybody gave me grief at all, I didn't have to worry about being bullied at all. They had to worry about being bullied. So I was protected. But it worked for me. He just started to like me; I guess I was weird enough, strange enough, that he saw me as some kind of, I don't know, African mutant so he just stopped bullying me. So it worked. There are times in life where if someone can like you, we can protect ourselves quite a lot.

The second of these is being submissive. This just means giving in, quite frankly. Someone powerful says to me, "hey, do x, do y, do z," you know I go, "okay, yes sir, yes ma'am, I will." Sometimes we are threatened by anxiety and the best tool to do is to just recognize I have no, I'm not going to win this so let me just obey. My dad used to say this to me when I would be talking back to him. He would say, "hey, you know, not only are you disrespectful talking back to me, but you're kind of dumb, because I'm bigger, you're smaller. I have all the power, you pretty much have none. So count up the cost here because you may be able to say something, but you are going to eventually lose." It dawned on me that you know what? He's right. I guess I remember, I don't know how actually I changed, but I remember thinking to myself you know what? I can make my life a lot easier. Instead of fighting my dad, just kind of agreeing with him on certain things, you know placating him a little bit. Then on other things, pick your battles. Sometimes the best way to do it is to just be submissive, to give in. to say yes, you are right, I am wrong. I give in, I will do it. That can save us from a lot of needless stress and anxiety, particularly if there is no hope of us winning.

The third element of this is just withdrawing. If there is someone in your life, for instance, who is just a source of great turmoil and anxiety for you, one way to deal with them is to just avoid them. Avoid the situation. Avoid this person. Do what you can to minimize interaction, then, therefore, minimize the anxiety of having to deal with this person.

And then, finally, what Horney calls attaining power, which is just there is a time when you just got to fight. There is a time where you just got to draw the red line in the ground. A source of anxiety just needs to be battled. There is a time when a bully just needs to be punched, if I could put it that way.

I think you get the point, these four strategies, if we have all of them then when we face various situations in which we are dealing with basic anxiety, we can discern, okay, in this situation what is the wisest thing I can do? What's the best strategy? Should I fight? Should I just obey? Should I try and ingratiate myself and try and win this person's affection? Or should I just abandon interaction or avoid this as much as possible? As I said that the beginning of this slide, Horney said that some of us, for instance, if I grew up in an environment in which every time I have a conflict, it's going to be a fight, well, I am just going to have a lot of conflict. If I give you an example from a former student who years ago, I visited him. He had graduated and he was working at a boys' home. This is a home that the State of New Jersey had for young men who were fifteen to seventeen, who had gotten in trouble with the authorities repeatedly; and instead of sending them to prison, they sent them to this, kind of a prison, but it was a school/prison, and his...among the things he told me that he spent a lot of time on is he said these boys are like any other boys. They've just been raised in an environment where they learned one way to deal with conflict, and that that was to fight. And if you didn't fight, you were not much of a man. You could never back down from any conflict. You had to escalate it otherwise you couldn't even look yourself in the mirror. He said I spent a lot of time just talking about various scenarios: someone comes up to you and insults you. What are the possible ways that you can deal with this? Now, the boys initially said, "Well, you gotta insult them back and fight them." He just pointed out to me that these are just normal young men who have one way of dealing with conflict. And inevitably that one way of dealing with conflict made them the losers because they came up against people that had more power, like the police, like the, you know, the principal in the school, and so on and so forth. So it's a good example of Horney's point that any one of these, if you overuse, is not going to work. You need more than one of these, and ideally all four.

Now, Horney says that because of these strategies . . .

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. . . of protection, in which we try to cope with basic anxiety, none of us, even if you have all four of those methods of coping, of self-protecting, you are not going to come away unscathed from the wild and crazy world of growing up, as a kid, as an adolescent, as a young adult, as an adult. So what ends up happening is all of us, Horney says, all of us to one degree or another develop a bunch of what she calls neurotic needs, and I'm going to let you read about these in your textbook, but there are ten of them that she articulates. All of these neurotic needs are simply ways in which we inadequately, unhealthily, neurotically cope with basic anxiety, and so we develop these kind of coping patterns, coping mechanisms which to us seem like the best way to deal with things. But really if we were able to step back and see ourselves, you know from a larger view, if you were to zoom back kind of like a google maps, we can see that far from helping, us they actually lock us into a self-defeating behavior patterns. She calls these behavior patterns neurotic needs. Now the difficult thing about these, for most of us they are unconscious. We think that we're dealing with life and basic anxiety just fine, but it's not. We are so caught up into our own kind of enmeshed way of dealing with our day to day stuff that it's hard for us to step back and see whoa, okay, that's kind of stupid. That's not really working or, you know, that's an overkill. These neurotic needs are all attempts to deal with, and faulty attempts, inadequate attempts to deal with this basic anxiety. All of these neurotic needs begin in childhood one way or the other and they continue to adulthood. For some of us they begin in childhood and gradually lessen, maybe as we mature, or as we get insight into ourselves. For a lot of us, for most of us, Horney says they can begin in childhood and they actually get worse as we repeatedly and over and over again do the same things, commit the same old errors without any insight into how, as Einstein said that insanity, the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over, over, and over again and it not working. That would be an example,

Horney said, of how so many of us deal with basic anxiety. She also points out that every single one of these ten exist along a continuum of exceedingly mild, and almost not even there, to *extremely* intense and strong and almost *defining* our entire personality. That some of these neurotic needs, she said, people have really embraced this, it almost becomes a very definition and when everybody describes you, they describe you as this person with this or that neurotic need. Here is where Horney anticipates the later cognitive personality theories, Albert Ellis and the various other ones. Horney pretty much says that what these neurotic needs are is that we have come to the conclusion on the basis of our coping with basic anxiety, we have come to an inner belief and it is a faulty belief, it is a wrong belief. For instance, I must be approved of by everybody, or I must seem competent in every situation I am in, or I must, in a room, always be the one that everybody pays attention to. We have latched on to these beliefs, which are crazy on some levels and yet we live by them. Our behavior shows that every time I am in a room and someone else is getting more attention. I need to be dramatic or I need to be exaggerating or I need to somehow make sure the attention turns to me. We have all met people like that and just how irritating and how narcissistically dramatic they can be. So this continuum is that as you go through and read all the ten, I remember the first time I read those I thought wow, I probably have just about every one of these. Again, I don't know if I have every one of those in extreme way, even to me I don't seem that crazy. But Horney would simply say that most of us have some of these, at least in mild ways, and most of us have more than one, and I'll let you decide as you read those in your text. But let me conclude here by simply say that Horney says that there are three ways that most of us sort ourselves out as we get to adulthood . . .

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. . . and she called these three kind of these ways, these movements if you will, "trends." That is what a trend is. A trend is a movement towards something, away from something. It is just, you know, we have trends in fashion. We have trends in music. It's just the movement of something from A to B or X to Y or whatever. For Horney these trends, because she puts the emphasis upon our social relationships, how we interact with other people, clearly as children and then as we move on, so these trends really have to do with movement, and movement regarding other people. Important people in our lives or people we see as important, and so she just really organizes these neurotic needs that we manifest into kind of three overall categories, or buckets. So for instance, the compliant trend would be what she says moving towards. And the compliant trend would be a person, just generally, who basically deals with life by being easy to get along with, they're obedient, they are submissive, they're compliant, they're rule followers, when they come up with someone who to them appears more powerful than them, they just kind of acquiesce, they give in, they comply. So she would simply say that trend is moving *towards* people. The opposite of that would be the aggressive trend, moving against. This is the kind of person pretty much that's focused upon hostility. They're very conflict oriented. Everything is a battle for them. They don't do really well at getting along. They find their kind of identity in what they're against, who they fought against, who disagrees with them, who is an idiot at work. It's just conflict mode. Their relationship to other people is kind of against them in that it's always conflict based.

And finally the last would be detached and she would see this as moving away. Detached people pretty much deal with anxiety by avoiding people, you know, by not engaging. If they're in a group and people are talking politics and there's people that feel strongly on this side or that side, they are like eh, I am not even going to get involved in this. They're just a little detached, they're just a little bit, why bother? Let me just hangout by myself. So for Horney, and if you can think about yourself or maybe some important people to you, she would simply say that each of these trends tends to exist from the particular cluster of neurotic needs that maybe I have. So, if you think of your general relationship with other people, would you categorize yourself as, if you had to put yourself in one of these three categories, someone that pretty much gets along and acquiesces and gives in? Or someone that is not going to give in on anything; you know, everything is a battle for you. Or someone that just basically says ehh, I am just going to avoid these people or avoid conflict or avoid situation, I am just going to withdraw.

So for Horney, that would pretty much be her approach and if I could summarize these, so . . .

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. . . here's the moving towards people. And what I want to get out of these last couple of slides is that each of these trends has a healthy aspect to it. In other words, the healthy aspect of moving towards and getting along with people and when necessary or when important, you can just acquiesce when you need to, you know, that's healthy. Where you're friendly and you're easy to get along with and you're loving to others, that's the healthy moving towards people move. The neurotic aspect of that would be what she calls the need for affection, approval, the neurotic need for someone to pretty much take over your life. And these are needs, which again have legitimate aspects to them, but they become neurotic.

How about the . . .

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. . . moving against people? The combative, kind of hostile. Well, the healthy version of this is hey, life is competitive. If you're going to survive and thrive, you need to realize that it's not always just about getting along. Sometimes life provides a healthy...and competition doesn't have to be a zero sum game, there are losers and winners. But you know, if you don't enter into the fray and compete, if you always withdraw or give in, then who is going to stand up for you if you do not stand up for yourself? And you can see this is by far the biggest bucket of these neurotic needs. The neurotic need to restrict your life, for power, to exploit others, to be socially recognized, for personal admiration, for personal achievement. And you can see with some of these things, all of those are legitimate on the surface but when they begin to define you and become unreasonable, then you start to be moving against people in an unhealthy way.

And then finally and lastly . . .

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. . . moving away from people. Again, there's a healthy autonomy, there's a healthy distance. There's a healthy sense of you're you and I am me. There's a serenity that some people have, you know they just don't worry about what others think of them too much. They don't worry about who is recognizing them or not. They don't worry about oh, I need to correct that person because they said something I disagreed with politically. They can just let it go and say hey, who cares? Think what you want, I don't care. So there's a healthy autonomy, but when we move so far away from people that we really, in some ways, shut down healthy social interactions, again the neurotic need for self-sufficiency and independence, you know. I can't ask anybody for help ever. The neurotic need for perfection and unassailability. If anyone criticizes me, I don't want to have anything to do with them. You can see how it would get unhealthy.

Now, I love Karen Horney's theory. She is one of my favorites this entire semester. She's a great writer, too, and if you ever get a chance to just pick up one of her books and read it, I just think it is just, she just has a great handle, at least to me, on a practical, usable, understandable way of defining personality that you can use in everyday life. And so I strongly recommend her approach.

The last thing let me say about Karen Horney is, we need to give her a lot of credit. You can see that just about all the theorists we look at this semester and most of the early theorists in psychology were men. Yes, men. And Karen Horney has a really, really great place in this kind of pantheon of early personality theorists. I don't know if it was just because she was a woman, but maybe as a woman she had a pretty good perspective that the men didn't share which was hey, all you men making up these personality theories, you're assuming that women are just men with different genitals. There is a different perspective that we bring to bear. Horney really takes on Freud. I think quite admirable and Freud's kind of not even latent sexism, *overt* sexism. And pretty much says hey Freud, hey Sigmund, get a break, you know, take a break here. Women are not, as Freud saw them, this gender that simply has, as Freud put it, penis envy

and all women just want to be men and have a penis, to be quite crude about this. No. Women don't want a penis. But in a society and culture which gives every advantage to men, if the penis is symbolic of that, then women don't want that literally, they simply want to be treated in a way that's free and fair and provides as many opportunities, and as many resources as society provides men. So I really love Horney's kind of dueling with Freud. And she just makes sense. When you read Horney these days, she does not seem out of date at all. In fact, she seems in the late 2000 teens, she seems quite current. whereas when you read Freud, he seems like a time from another age. So I strongly recommend and commend her theory to you and particularly some of her books. Thank you for listening and we'll (quote, unquote) see you in the next lecture.