

Victoria Dunaeva, 2019

Volume 5 Issue 2, pp. 594-602

Date of Publication: 24th September 2019

DOI- <https://dx.doi.org/10.20319/pijss.2019.52.594602>

This paper can be cited as: Dunaeva, V. (2019). *Neurotic Behavior as a Contemporary Social Phenomenon*.

PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences, 5(2), 594-602

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NEUROTIC BEHAVIOR AS A CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL PHENOMENON

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Abstract

Contemporary world requires excellent psychological adaptation. It is very important for people to recognize the power within themselves and understand lessons they are learning. If they listen carefully themselves, it would be easier for them to live without fears, hesitations, obsessions and other kinds of neurotic behavior. However, survival efforts of many individuals turn out to be futile and they are not capable to adjust to values of modern society. They feel unable to keep the rhythm of changing life and cope with the challenge of its time: globalization. Dynamics of their lives and their negative emotions related to it become out of their control. In this chapter I would like to present my observations as a clinical psychologist. I am going to explore the following issues: what does mean today to be neurotic? What are the signs of neurotic personality? How do psychologists explain the reasons for neurotic behaviour of contemporary people? Why humans cannot be adapted to modern life?

Keywords

Neuroticism, Anxiety, Personality, Stress, Emotions

1. Introduction

Neuroticism is considered one of Big Five personality traits in the study of psychology (Johnson, 2000). According to most of psychological studies, people with neurotic behaviour are more likely than average experience such feelings as anxiety, worry, fear, anger, frustration, jealousy, guilt, depressed mood, and loneliness

(Thompson, 2008). They have a long-term tendency to be in a negative or anxious emotional state. The term 'neurotic' was used by psychiatrists for most of the 20th Century to describe a broad category of conditions that were associated with poor functioning and depression. In many situations the behaviour of individuals was social inappropriate and prevented their work and relationships with members of family. Nowadays, psychologists associate with neuroticism emotional distress and unconscious conflict (Ormel, 2013). A neurotic personality is characterized by constant often disproportionate, worrying and fear (Canli, 2008). A person is eager to be a perfectionist during everyday activities, and become frustrated due to events that are beyond control. People who are neurotic don't tend to handle stress and their emotions well and may experience anxiety and depression. In other cases people cannot acknowledge and feel own emotions and, as a result, their behavior look like "neurotic" (chaotic or slow gesture, emotional isolation, avoidance from communication, troubles with adaptation to new surrounding). Neuroticism generally corresponds to the sensitivity of the negative affect system, where a person is easily upset, often down or irritable, and demonstrates high emotional reactivity to stress (Ormel, 2013). Neuroticism can lead an individual to focus on the negative aspects of life, rather than the positives. A person feels jealousy and becomes suspicious about other people when sees them in an advantaged position.

Psychologists emphasize that neuroticism show up in small habits and emotional reactions, for example, when a person avoids some things, or otherwise, focuses on some rituals. According to Daniel Goleman, neurotic personality can be too much suppressed or overly expressed (Goleman, 2014). A person responds in a neurotic way when he/she feels threatened or insecure. If we cannot accept behavior of other people, it is also may show our level of neuroticism. For instance, we become overly irritated and anxious when somebody is running late and we cannot focus on anything else than calling him and thinking what happened. Neuroticism can influence negatively on our relationships – for example, we start to have rigid expectations for our partner or family members and get frustrated easily when they don't respond our often unexpressed wishes. It should be also mentioned that people high in neuroticism can make life difficult for themselves and for those who know them (Canli, 2008).

Many contemporary psychological research has shown that people who are highly neurotic tend to respond to stress with irritability, fear, or other negative emotional responses, including frightening body sensations. According to Atsushi Oshio from Waseda University 'such habits contribute to a feeling of disintegration instead of a unified and balanced feeling' (Oshio, 2018).

2. Why Humans cannot be Adapted to Modern Life

As Mark Williams and Danny Penman notice, we live now in the world which attack us with plenty often useless information (Williams & Penman, 2011). When too much sloshing around in the mind, our working memory start to overflow. We get tired very quickly, even small stimuli become burdensome for us. Overloading working memory don't allow us to select information that make us indecisive in some situations. We get uncertainty about our memory, because we find ourselves more forgetful. We become powerless and exhausted, that increase our fear associated with being unaware of what's going on around us (Williams & Penman, 2011).

The big challenge comes also from social anxiety. Everybody now is afraid of something. As Daniel Goleman wrote, 'life today seem ruled to a troubling degree by impulse; a flood of advertisement drives us, to desire a sea of goods and spend today without regard to how we will pay tomorrow' (Goleman, 2014). As a result, many people turn out in situation of total bankruptcy, without awareness how it can happen. People who don't experience it unconsciously start be nervous about eventual troubles and failures associated with their job, relationship etc. Hypochondria, or in other words, "illness anxiety" haunts more and more people. Anxious people fixate on anything even a lot bit threatening (Goleman, 2014). Most of emotional conflicts experienced on the background general social anxiety lead people to be afraid of any situation in which they can get anxious.

Probably in the practice of each psychologist there are times when most of clients come with similar emotional conflicts. In my current practice I am observing people who completely lost their orientation in the life and feel frustration and panics. In many cases their emotional condition is so disturbing that they are not capable to go to work, to take care for their children and house. Under influence of negative judgments of themselves they cannot maintain personal relations and come to quick decision to end the marriage or love-affair. In some cases emotional crisis of my clients were evoked by very stressful life events, as financial failure, lost of job, huge debt and lack of possibilities and vision how to get out of it. Others clients are emotionally shocked with betrayal of their life partners, cannot forgive themselves "own blindness" for many years. It is difficult for them to forgive others and themselves for mistakes. As turned out, during long time they have lived under strong pressure of unexpressed feelings, wishes, regrets. The process of 'healing' of their emotional wounds requires some time, but they are suffering and feel only lack of belief.

It isn't surprising that nowadays many people - well-educated, knowing how to make money, having high social position – apply to shamans, fortune-tellers, guru etc. They are eager to choose the right directions in their life, need the help to do something with chaos which flows into their order and meanings. And subconsciously they live the life in agreement with the one what 'augur' says.

Some things in their life happen as they were told and they begin believing in extra-ordinary abilities of fortune-tellers, becoming dependent from consultations of each decision with them.

Most of augurs (being good psychologist due to practice and good observation) use uncertainty of clients, holding them in feeling of powerless, making them being depend from their service. They use such terms, as 'karma', 'energetic vampires', 'curse', promising to liberate them from it. Contemporary fortune tellers create image of persons who are capable to 'transform reality' and they don't show any doubt in own power and abilities. Sadness, bitterness, frustration of their clients are just good tools for their practice. All they can propose to 'people in need' is the certainty. They seem to be aware about rules of outside world which at some moment becomes dangerous and overwhelming for their clients.

They play role 'good, supportive, attentive parents' for those people who are disorientated and feeling miserable. Canadian psychoanalyst Eric Berne defined the emotional state of powerlessness of people as „child state” (Berne, 2015). According to Berne, this is the part of our ego in which we behave, feel and think similarly to how we did as a child. For instance, when a woman hears that her husband wants to divorce her, she falls into panics, cries and asks not to leave her alone (because at that stressful moment she feels exactly as in her childhood when her parents often disappeared for a long time).

In this context it should be mentioned the influence of adverse childhood on emotional condition of contemporary people. 'The little world of childhood with its familiar surroundings is a model of the greater world' – Carl Jung stressed. We often follow hidden emotional conflicts and see the world as we perceived it in our childhood. It isn't a conscious process.

According to Dennis Charney, one of the leading experts in neurobiology, people traumatized in childhood may have definite changes in brain (Charney, 2018). Charney found that the biology of depression, anxiety disorders and phobias has been linked to a dysfunction of the stress hormone system which influences the brain's circuits and networks involved in the regulation of mood and the natural ability to respond to stress. Charney pays special attention to such dramatic situations in which people feel a complete lack of control over their life. According to his observations, on one side, the brain of the young child is plastic and child has remarkable 'resilience' when faced with stress. On the hand, there is one important condition for it: children should feel parental protection. As Dennis Charney says: 'If you grow up in a stress-free environment, you're not prepared for the inevitable stresses and strains that life presents'.

When child is devastating by parents' divorce or feels very lonely having very busy, 'absent' mother, he/she tries to survive as it is possible. Some children distract themselves by working hard – for example, achieving excellent grades in schools, getting acceptance and praise from teachers

(instead of parents). When they become adult, they find a job which requires from them big efforts and based on results/grades/points. In most cases they don't like the type of their job and they feel very stressful and tired with it. However, this job allow them to prove their 'exclusivity' and 'right to be here'. They follow the same rules in personal relations, sacrificing themselves for family (husband/wife/children/old parents). As a result, they have less and less time for themselves and come to feeling that life passing them by.

Most of my clients suffer from not only depression, phobias, anxiety, but also from chronic and psychosomatic diseases. In many cases they had a 'difficult' childhood with a sick or depressed mother, a drinking or strict father, or frequent conflicts within their family. They experienced feeling of loneliness, uselessness and fear. In adult life, they often 'sacrifice' own wishes, needs and emotions in order to avoid conflict in their family and 'satisfy' their friends, colleagues, and neighbours. They cannot be assertive and they are easily manipulated by others who provoke guilt in them. Their main emotions are sorrow, powerlessness, repressed anger and hurt. They mainly use such destructive and useless for adult person defence mechanism as regression.

Defense mechanisms are psychological strategies that we unconsciously use to protect ourselves from anxiety arising from negative thoughts or feelings. Regression mechanism manifests as childish behavior. For example, a child who is afraid to go to school, get under the bed and doesn't make any noise. An adult person, who uses the same mechanism, prefers staying in bed at home instead to go to hospital for necessary and urgent medical research. Regression is a form of retreat which help people to go back in time when they felt safer – even for a moment. However, in adult life this mechanism cannot help people to face challenge and reduce of symptoms of stress for a long time.

3. The Influence of Vision of Success

Other reason for feeling of constant anxiety is living under the influence of vision of success.

Social environment creates conditions which make many people to think about 'achievements', 'goals', 'ambitions'. It seems to people that they are surrounded by plenty of possibilities – another perspective study, next training dedicated to personal development, one more credit card which allows to improve living standard. There are so many examples discussed in mass media about unbelievable and quick success of ordinary people (who promote, for example, own blog or create strange and bright self-image). It seems to be so simple, but so successful that some people begin to have doubt in themselves (why they cannot do that way?). It can explain growing popularity of big novel 'Atlas Shrugged' which was written by Ayn Rand in 1957. The book which Rand wrote for 12 years received mostly negative reviews after first publication. During last decades 'Atlas

'Shrugged' has achieved enduring popularity and position of bestseller in USA and countries of Europe. What did change? The story of Atlas Shrugged expresses Rand's philosophy on ethical egoism and rational selfishness, in which all of us should follow main rules of survival: rationality, independence, productiveness, and pride. Whatever the system, in which we live, does, we should follow our own ideals of happiness, hard work and heroic individualism. Established three years after Rand's death in 1982, the Ayn Rand Institute in California each year donates 400,000 copies of Atlas Shrugged, to high school students. Psychologists stress that the popularity of this book is connected with 'profound wish to have right to be happy' of contemporary people. That's why this novel is presently used as a basic material for training dedicated to 'positive psychology of work' and philosophy about 'making money'. 'If someone doesn't have money or power, it's her own fault' - one of heroes of Rand's novel claims.

However, the truth is that we shouldn't be 'productive' and 'successful' if we don't care about it or just don't feel to have power for it at some moment. We can allow ourselves to be weak, when we feel it. Otherwise, we can achieve some goals, make money and be 'visible' for outside world, but on the emotional level we become more and more vulnerable and unstable.

Those people who get success without anchoring their confidence often become stressful and cannot feel satisfaction because of their constant self-doubt (Nugent, 2015). They start to get tired with further results of their activity, feeling trapped with it. They still don't have stable belief in themselves that underpins them. More money means often more fear and anxiety for them. They get so-called impostor syndrome, in which people are unable to internalize their accomplishments (Yalom, 2000). External evidence of their success or their competence don't have any meaning for them, because they begin to be convinced that they are frauds and do not deserve the success they have achieved. They begin having persistent fear of being exposed as non-competent, stupid, funny. Those people who are 'trapped' with this syndrome showcase symptoms related to depression, strong anxiety, and low self-confidence.

In relationships, impostor syndrome manifests in the form of doubt of individuals to be 'good enough', to be worth the beneficial relationships they possess. This syndrome appears when we maintain a relationship with somebody who seems to be more gorgeous, brilliant, successful than we are. Instead of increasing our self-confidence it may reduce it.

It should be mentioned that impostor syndrome grows with time and may lead to self-sabotage with negative consequences: loss of job, financial waste, failure of relationships (when people do everything in order to spoil it). In many cases in the beginning they feel strange liberation when it happens. However, later they suffer from deep depression and asthenia, loss of energy and awareness of what to do with their own life. The repeated triggering of negative thoughts and emotions can start wearing

grooves in the mind and it have tendency to grow with time, making us be very critical to ourselves (Williams & Penman, 2011).

4. Conclusion

What can we do in this world which has so many expectations from us? Is it possible to live now without neurotic reactions and anxiety?

Daniel Sigel wrote in his new book titled 'Aware. The Science and Practice of Presence': 'One of the fundamental emergent properties of complex system of this reality of ours is called self-organization'. When it is not optimizing, it may lead to chaos or rigidity. Under influence of chaos in our mind we become unaware about our real emotional needs, our real abilities for self-realization and our real chances to have life which satisfy us. In order to avoid from burnout, it is important to develop own confidence, independently of results. Confidence doesn't always grow with our success, that's why it is important get confident with oneself first (Nugent, 2015). I connect my future research with topic of self-confidence and psychological techniques to enhance self-esteem. I believe that is very important to learn people how to have healthy self-esteem. I am sure that writing of self-help guide based on my practice of clinical psychologist, may help me to deal with research limitations. Yes, being human being, we may have weaknesses and sometimes make thing wrong, but we have also strong qualities and achievement. We should always remember of importance of "balanced view" and positive self-esteem (Fennell, 2016). Having a positive self-esteem can lead to sensation of happiness. Experiencing greater levels of happiness leads to greater levels of resilience. Happy people become more satisfied not simply because they feel better, but because they develop resources for living well (Akhtar & Payen, 2019).

Being confident in ourselves, we stop running towards goals and vision of happiness which outside world impose on us. We find out own rhythms of living, become more calm and more aware about own achievements. We start to understand how to use inner resources and how to take care about ourselves. Our way of thinking and perceiving information become more flexible, relaxed, coherent and stable. As many research show, life satisfaction depends more on personality traits than circumstances and living standard (Mayungbo, 2016).

During my practice I have been often observing in my clients growing awareness about themselves, which is rewarded by not only positive changes in their life, but also by their increasing calmness in any situations. The secret is in our 'seeing' the connection between our way of thinking, emotional patterns and our life-choices. When we believe in ourselves, we intuitively know what inner and outside resources we can use for solving of any problem in our life. We began 'read the

signs' right, without help of any fortune-teller. 'Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate' – it is brilliant quote of Carl Jung.

Our mind becomes more peaceful at the moment we have discovered that every path we choose isn't right or wrong, it is just our journey, our experience, our inner, invisible for others Talk with our Soul.

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