

Karen Horney & Feminine Psychology

SIUE PSYC 340

Karen Horney

Life of Horney



- Karen Horney was a German “neo-Freudian” psychoanalyst.
- Like Adler and Jung, she questioned some of Freud’s ideas.
- In 1922, she founded feminine psychology.

Life of Horney

- Born as Karen Danielsen in 1885 in Germany
- Believed her parents loved her older brother more
 - Adored her domineering father but could not win his affection
 - Attached to her domineering mother by being an adoring, obedient daughter
- Began to experience symptoms of depression in childhood
 - Compensated by deliberately becoming ambitious and rebellious at the age of 8

Life of Horney

- Married Oskar Horney in 1909 and lost both parents within a year
 - Gave birth to the first of three daughters in 1911
 - Contemplated suicide after Oskar's personality-altering bout of meningitis and her brother's death in the early 1920s
 - Left Oskar in 1926 and divorced in 1937



Life of Horney

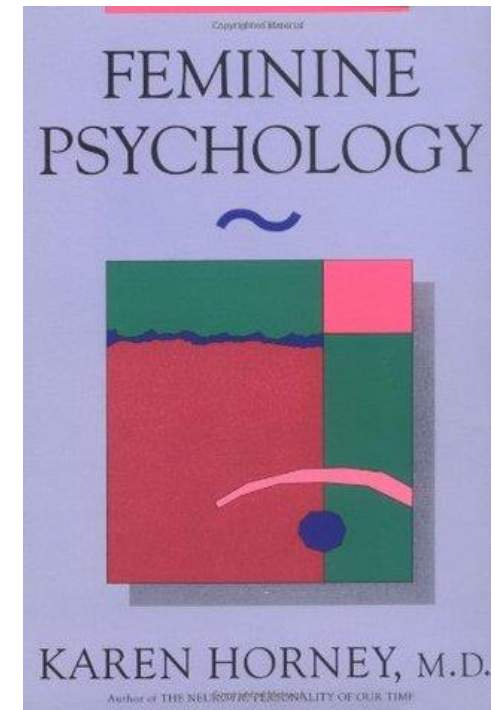
- Began Freudian psychoanalysis in 1910 to cope with depression
 - Was told her problems were due to an attraction to forceful men, a residue of her childhood Oedipal longings for her powerful father
 - Later turned to Adlerian theory
- Earned a MD in 1913 from the University of Berlin
 - Taught and trained analysts at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute from 1920-1932

Life of Horney

- Began to deviate from Freudian psychoanalysis in the 1930s
- Moved to the U.S. in 1932 in response to the rise of Nazism and Freud's dissatisfaction with her
 - Taught and trained analysts at various institutions
 - Published several [books](#) in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s

Life of Horney

- Eventually ostracized by her fellow analysts in NYC in the 1940s
 - Founded the *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* and the Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis
- Died in 1952 in NYC
 - *Feminine Psychology* (1967), published posthumously, gained attention in the 1960s during the women's rights movement



Horney's Theory

- Horney said parents' behaviors either satisfy or frustrate their children's **safety need**, which is a need to feel secure and free from fear.
 - If raised with love, acceptance, and trust, children can withstand life's trauma.
 - The more frightened children become, the more they repress their hostility.
 - Frustrated needs lead to basic anxiety and neurotic behavior.



Horney's Theory



- Parents may undermine their child's need for safety by:
 - Showing a preference for a sibling
 - Ridiculing, humiliating, or unfairly punishing the child
 - Breaking promises
 - Isolating the child from peers

Basic Anxiety

- **Basic anxiety:** “Insidiously increasing, all-pervading feeling of being lonely and helpless in a hostile world” that forms the foundation of neurosis
- During childhood, we use four (4) mechanisms to defend against basic anxiety: securing love, being submissive, attaining power, and withdrawing.
 - Motivate a person to seek security and reassurance
 - Could become a permanent part of the personality and assume the characteristics of a drive or need in determining the individual's behavior

Basic Anxiety

Securing love and affection from others involves accommodating others' wants, bribing others, or threatening others.

Being submissive involves complying with the wishes of individuals or groups and repressing personal desires.

Attaining power enables a person to compensate for helplessness and achieve security through success or superiority.

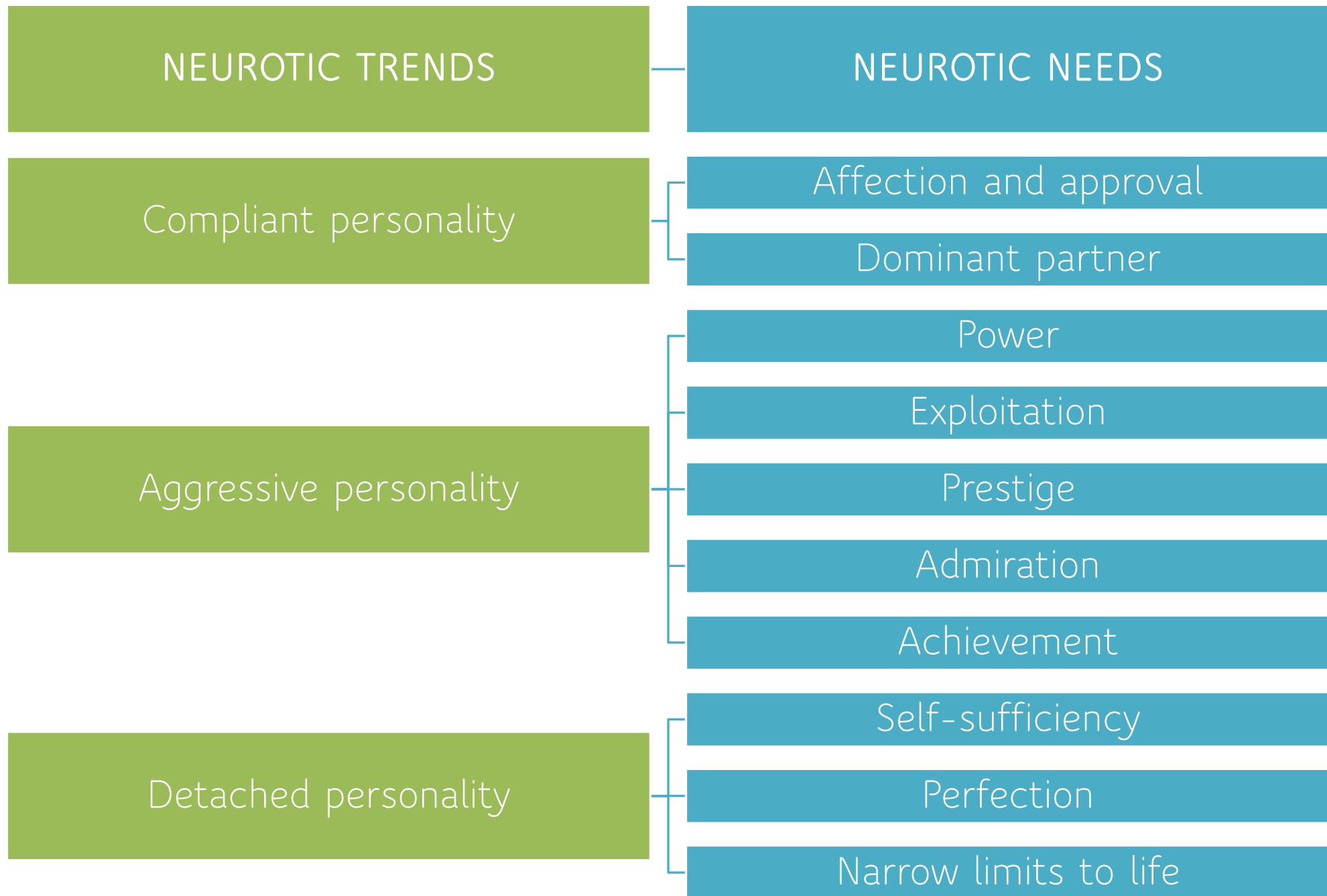
Withdrawing from others involves psychological distance and a minimizing of emotional needs.

Neurotic Needs and Trends

- **Neurotic needs:** Irrational defenses against anxiety
 - Listed 10 that are manifested by everyone to some degree
 - Not neurotic in an everyday sense
 - Classified as neurotic (and a cause for concern) when pursued intensively and compulsively as the “only” way to resolve anxiety

Neurotic Needs and Trends

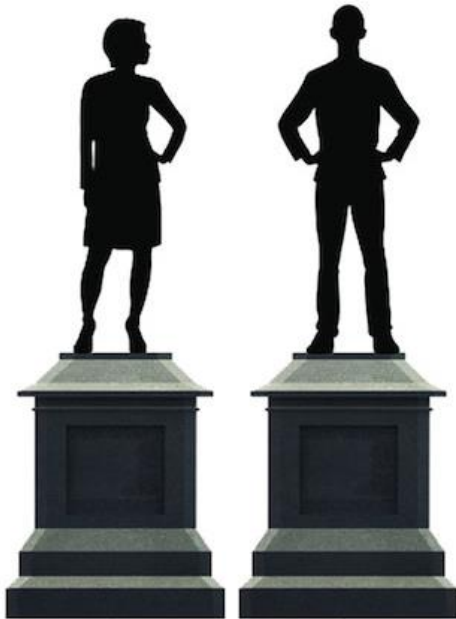
- **Neurotic trends:** Categories of behaviors and attitudes toward oneself and others that express a person's needs
 - Grouped the 10 needs in 3 categories
 - Evolve from and elaborate on the self-protective mechanisms
 - Involve compulsive attitudes and behavior
 - Displayed indiscriminately (in any and all situations)



Neurotic Trends

- **Compliant personality:** Movement toward people
 - Need for affection, approval, and reassurance
 - Driven to be loved, wanted, and protected
 - Become excessively dependent on others
 - Rejection increases efforts and use of manipulation to regain affection
 - Similar to Adler's getting type

Neurotic Trends



- **Aggressive personality:** Movement against people
 - Need for superiority and power
 - Driven to excel and receive affirmations of their success from others
 - Makes no effort to appease others but will argue, criticize, demand, and do whatever is necessary to achieve and retain superiority and power
 - Similar to Adler's dominant type

Neurotic Trends

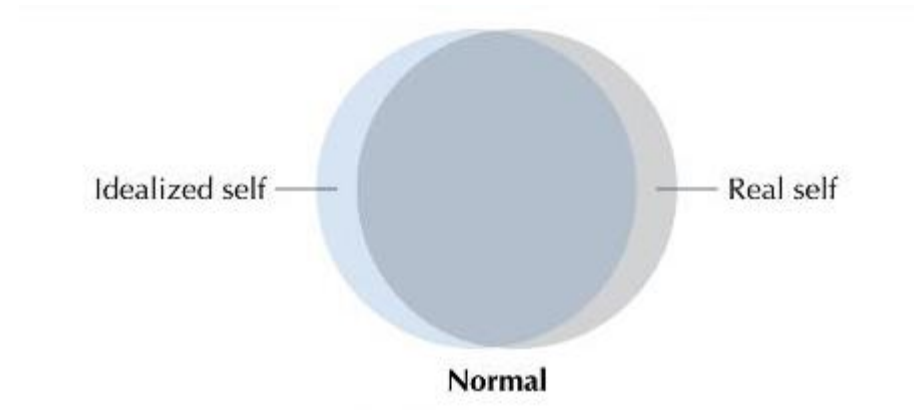
- **Detached personality:** Movement away from people
 - Need to feel superior but expect their greatness to be recognized automatically without struggle or effort on their part
 - Driven to maintain an emotional distance and privacy
 - Suppress feelings toward others, particularly feelings of love and hate
 - Rely on their own resources, which must be well-developed
 - Similar to Adler's avoiding type

Neurotic Needs and Trends

- A neurotic person has 1 dominant trend, whereas the other 2 are present to a lesser degree.
 - Experiences **conflict** between the 3 incompatible trends
- In the person who is not neurotic, all 3 trends can be expressed as circumstances warrant.
 - Flexible in behaviors and attitudes
 - Can adapt to changing situations

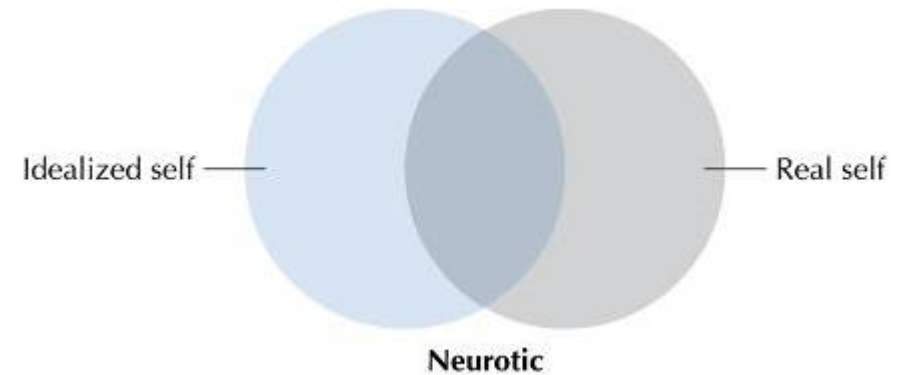
Idealized Self-Image

- Everyone constructs an **idealized self-image** (a picture of themselves) to unify the personality.
- The self-image of normal people is based on a realistic self-appraisal of their strengths and weaknesses.
 - Flexible, dynamic, and attainable
 - Provides a sense of unity



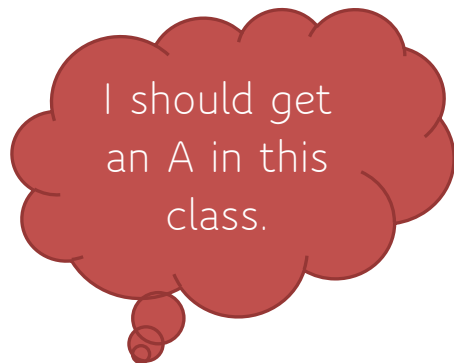
Neurotic Needs and Trends

- In neurotic people, the self-image is based on an unrealistic ideal of absolute perfection.
 - Static, inflexible, and unattainable
 - Fails to unify the personality
 - Discrepancy with the real self causes conflict and frustration



Neurotic Needs and Trends

- Neurotic people try to realize this unattainable ideal by engaging in the **tyranny of the should**.
 - Involves a denial of the real self (which they find undesirable) and a striving to become what they think they should become (“inner dictates” or “shoulds”)
 - Results in a state of self-hatred with no ability to forgive themselves or others



Neurotic Needs and Trends

- Neurotic people may project their conflicts onto the outside world, a self-protective mechanism called **externalization**.
 - Involves depicting external forces as the source of the conflicts
 - Involves experiencing conflicts as though they were occurring outside of oneself

Horney's Views on Development

- Disagreed with Freud's assertion that biological forces condemn us to conflict, anxiety, neurosis, or universality in personality
- Highlighted the impact of social forces in childhood and adulthood
- Suggested personality is flexible and changes as we strive to reach the ultimate (and innate) goal of self-realization



Feminine Psychology

- Early in her career, Horney strongly disagreed with Freud's views on women.
 - Argued his notion of penis envy, that women are envious and resentful of male genitalia, was based on inadequate evidence (i.e., interviews with neurotic women)
- In 1922, she started working on her own version of psychoanalysis, what she called **feminine psychology**.
 - Recognized the impact of social and cultural forces on personality development
 - Encompassed psychological conflicts inherent in womanhood and women's roles

Feminine Psychology

- She countered Freud's notion of penis envy with her concept of **womb envy**, suggesting men were envious and resentful of women for possessing a womb and being able to give birth.
 - Manifested unconsciously in behaviors designed to belittle women and reinforce their inferior status
 - Overcompensate by seeking achievement in their work



Feminine Psychology

- Horney disagreed with Freud's biological basis for women's inferiority feelings.
 - Provided a socio-cultural basis instead
 - Suggested the feelings were the result of being treated as an inferior in a male-dominated society
 - Claimed the feelings could lead to the **flight from womanhood**, whereby women deny their femininity and wish, unconsciously, that they were men
 - Can inhibit sexual desire and result in resentment toward men

Feminine Psychology

- Horney also disagreed with Freud's contention that Oedipus feelings are universal and based on sexual/biological forces.
 - Provided a socio-cultural basis instead
 - Suggested the feelings were the result of parents undermining the child's security
 - Reinterpreted the situation as a neurotic conflict between dependence and hostility toward parents

Feminine Psychology



- Horney pointed out the differences between the traditional ideal of womanhood and the contemporary view.
 - Said the discrepancies between love and work create psychological conflicts
 - Noted that different cultures view women's roles in different ways
 - Urged women to seek their own identity by developing their abilities and pursuing careers

Horney's Methods

- Modified Freud's free association and dream analysis techniques
 - Used free association to observe her patients' emotional reactions toward her, believing these reactions could explain their attitudes toward other people
 - Said dreams are attempts to solve problems and could reveal a person's true self
- Suggested analysis should be an "exquisitely cooperative enterprise" between patient and therapist

Assessments

- Did not rely on personality tests, but others created tests based on her work
- [Compliant, Aggressive, and Detached \(CAD\) personality types](#)
 - Cohen's (1967) 35-item self-report inventory of Horney's neurotic trends
- Horney-Coolidge Tridimensional Indicator (HCTI)
 - Coolidge et al. (2001) 57-item self-report inventory of neurotic trends

Research on Horney's Theory

- Support for 3 neurotic trends redefined as dependent (moving toward people), ill-tempered (moving against people), and shy (moving away from people)
- Neurotic competitiveness associated with narcissism, neuroticism, dogmatism, authoritarianism, mistrust, low self-esteem, and poor psychological health
 - Competing to win (CW) to dominate others
 - Competing to excel (CE) to surpass one's personal goals associated with high self-esteem and low depression

Strengths of Horney's Theory

- Her theory has a commonsense appeal, is easily understood, and is relevant in today's culture.
- She tried to be rigorous and scientific in her clinical observations, formulating hypotheses and testing them in therapeutic situations.
- Neurotic trends are still seen as a valuable way to categorize deviant behavior.
- Her work had a significant impact on the personality theories developed by Erik Erikson and Abraham Maslow.

Criticisms of Horney's Theory

- Her theory denied the role of sexual, biological, and unconscious forces.
- Her theory was not as completely or consistently developed as Freud's theory.
- She relied on the case method.
- Her observations and interpretations were too greatly influenced by middle-class American culture.