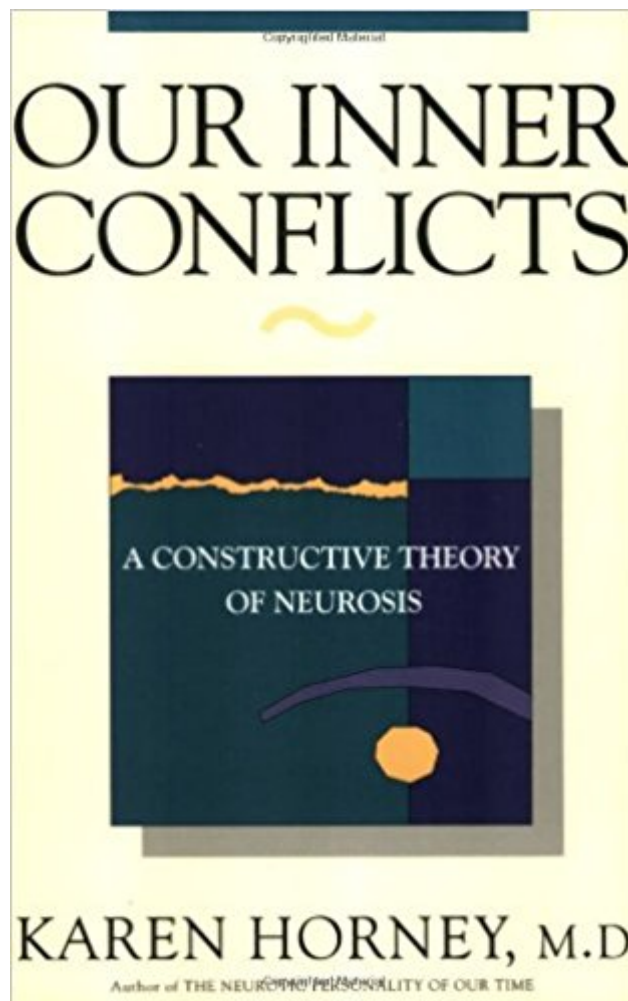




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# **Our Inner Conflicts: A Constructive Theory Of Neurosis**



## Synopsis

Here Karen Horney develops a dynamic theory of neurosis centered on the basic conflict among attitudes of "moving forward" "moving against," and "moving away from" people. Unlike Freud, Horney does not regard neurosis as rooted in instinct. In her words, her theory is constructive because "it allows us for the first time to tackle and resolve neurotic hopelessness. . . . Neurotic conflicts cannot be resolved by rational decision. . . . But [they] can be resolved by changing the conditions within the personality that brought them into being."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

One of the most original psychoanalysts after Freud, Karen Horney pioneered such now-familiar concepts as alienation, self-realization, and the idealized image, and she brought to psychoanalysis a new understanding of the importance of culture and environment.

Karen Horney (1885-1952) was one of the most influential psychoanalysts of the twentieth century. Her books include *Neurosis and Human Growth*, *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*, *New Ways in Psychoanalysis*, *Our Inner Conflicts*, *Self-Analysis*, *Feminine Psychology*, *Final Lectures*, and, as editor, *Are You Considering Psychoanalysis?*

For those of us that deal with emotional issues and are striving to better ourselves by examining our behavior and wanting to improve ourselves, this is a wonderful read and very helpful

...and traces, not just the "pathways" of inner conflict, but their intertwinings, demonstrating with case examples how problems in one area of one's life put roots into many areas.

As I understand it, the theory presented in this book runs as follows: There's a gap between our actual self and the image we have of our self (our idealized self) which causes an inner conflict which we tend to deny and make unconscious, but then shows its presence through symptoms (anxiety, unhappiness, health issues etc). The conflict is channeled into three types of personalities (Chap 3-5): Those who move towards, against or away from people. Those who move towards people tend to be compliant and want people to like them (pleasers, etc). Those who move against people tend to be aggressive, detest any sign of weakness and believe in the law of the jungle. Those who move away from people detach and seek for a form of self-sufficiency and to live in some kind of ivory tower with a "Do-Not-Disturb" sign on their doors. "Where the compliant looks at his fellow man with the silent question, 'Will he like me?' - and the aggressive type wants to know, 'How strong an adversary is he?' or 'Can he be useful to me?' - the detached person's first concern is 'Will he interfere with me? Will he want to influence me or will he leave me alone?' (pg 80). All three types are considered neurotic due to their rigidity and compulsiveness. A healthier person can flexibly give and receive love, stand up for himself when needed and withdraw at times for needed rest and reflection. All three types also employ a variety of defenses to deal with this interior conflict. Completely repress the actual self and identify fully with the idealized self (Chap 6). Externalize the conflict (Chap 7 fully devoted to this). Chap 8 covers the following defenses: blind spots (not seeing what's obvious to others), compartmentalizing (creating boxes and ignoring contradictions), rationalizing (self deception by reasoning), excessive self control (stressfully using will power to keep conflicts at bay), arbitrary rightness (picking a side in order to not deal with the inconvenience of doubt), elusiveness (creating confusion) and cynicism. Chap 9 - 12 looks at what happens when inner conflicts remain unresolved. This richly articulated and at times quite deep book, which apparently has been credited for inspiring other authors, could very well be "The Mother of All Self Help Books."

Heard about her from an Orthodox Christian podcast. Karen Horney was not Orthodox, but her ideas have similarities with some of the ideas held in the Orthodox Church regarding our lack of self-knowledge when left to our own devices. She has details about the ways we can have false ideas about ourselves. Speaks of how to grow past these false notions of self. Some chapter titles:

Moving Toward People; Moving Against People; Moving Away from People; The Idealized Image; Fears; Impoverishment of Personality. The conclusion is called: Resolution of Neurotic Conflicts.

Understanding ourselves requires sustained effort. Aristotle would describe this attitude as, "The Desire to Understand". Perhaps he knew, that in essence, we seek to orient ourselves to reality. What we learn from generations of thinkers that followed, is that a disordered life makes for internal chaos, and that, internal chaos makes lives disordered. Where the desire to understand is sabotaged, we develop skewed ways of judging reality. These skewed perceptions are the stuff of philosophy, psychology, science and literature. Among those psychiatrists who have contributed their theoretical and clinical insights to the field of analysis, is the legendary Karen Horney. Her books have stood the test of time because they are accessible and exquisitely written. The essentials are for her, the dynamic interplay of conflicting attitudes and values. "Our Inner Conflicts" (1945) is one of Horney's greatest achievements. She articulates the role culture plays in the conditioning of personality over time. Since Horney does this with such precision and compassion, I believe she truly embodies Aristotle's views on our innate desire to understand. If you share her goal of enlightened self-interest, "Our Inner Conflicts" will provide the emotional and intellectual tools to set your juices in motion. The opposite of flowing juices, is the ideal of stasis or maintaining the status quo. From an emotional standpoint, the status quo is not just familiar but required, once the imbalances have been deeply rooted. With an emphasis on the present, Horney uses the past for examining our frustrations and failures. There's no doubt, Horney wants the best for you, but, accountability and personal responsibility are required before human growth can be achieved. Intimates who invade our psychic space are not just the stuff of crime novels and thriller movies. Peculiarities of personality are something we actually experience first hand. Their manifold consequences are often severe. "Falling into the abyss of self-contempt", the compulsive neurotic acts indiscriminately and without reference to factual conditions". Divergent attitudes are forced into a structure where by one can "cover-up" the means by which one covers-over the means he uses to "cover-up". Without an awareness of or recognition of his true intentions, the neurotic is alienated from himself as well as from others. How the neurotic has numbed his sensitivity to others and finds in his "fault-finding" attitude the means to restore his self-esteem, describes the "aggressive type". The tendency with the aggressive is to "Move Against People" and is supported by the attitude, "Let them take care of themselves". The aggressive sees no need to be considerate of others and his attitude makes him a seasoned fighter. The "Compliant", therefore, is most often the "Aggressor's" target. Horney tells us, "Any neurotic attitude or conflict that crystallizes during analysis must be

understood in its relation to the personality as a whole". Horney calls this process, "working through". Here are the steps she asserts are necessary. First, bringing to the patient's awareness all the overt and hidden manifestations of the particular trend or conflict. Then, helping the patient to recognize its compulsive nature. Third, to help the patient to attain an appreciation both of its subjective value and its adverse consequences. Horney's main emphasis is on the impairment in moral integrity brought about by unresolved conflicts. In turn, I suggest Horney's readers should emphasize this point to themselves as well.

Karen Horney had a wonderful grasp of the English sentence. She writes in a very clear and accessible manner. Her ideas though complex are clearly explained. She demonstrates how the neurotic attempt to resolve conflicts in turn creates further difficulties. A brilliant systemic approach to personality dynamics. This book was written before 'Neurosis and Human Growth' but I believe that 'Our Inner Conflicts' was her best book as its focus was on how human interpersonal relations create needs as much as they are based upon them.

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