

Karen Horney

The Following Text Excerpt from PERSONALITY, 3rd Ed., Jerry M. Burger

Karen Danielsen was born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1865, the daughter of a sea captain and his young, second wife. From her earliest years on, she faced the injustices and rejection that came from being a rebellious woman in a man's world. Her father was a strict authoritarian who used Bible verse to promote his views on the superiority of men. Karen's older brother, Berndt, was awarded opportunities, including college and an eventual law degree, that her father believed unnecessary for a female. Karen responded to this by vowing in elementary school to always be first in her class, and at age 12 decided she would one day go to medical school.

Karen's mother persuaded her father to allow Karen to go to college, where she met and married Oskar Horney in 1909. In 1915 she received her medical degree from the University of Berlin, one of the very few female students in one of the few schools to accept women. She underwent psychoanalysis as part of her psychoanalytic training but found it insufficient for dealing with her lifelong bouts with depression. At one point, her husband was reported to have rescued her from a suicide attempt (Rubins, 1978). Despite her depression, her doubts about psychoanalysis, and a number of personal problems - including the premature death of her brother, a strained marriage, and eventual divorce - her career prospered. She worked at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute and later emigrated to America where she joined the New York Psychoanalytic Institute in 1934.



However, it was not in Horney's character to check her growing dissatisfaction with several important aspects of Freud's theory. This open questioning created great strain with the other members of the institute, who in 1941 voted to disqualify her as an instructor. According to most reports of this event, Horney received the vote in a dramatically silent room. She responded by leaving the meeting in a dignified and proud manner, without uttering a word. Horney went on to establish her own highly successful American Institute for Psychoanalysis. By the time of her death in 1952, it was clear she had made great progress in her battle against the male-dominated and paternalistic psychoanalytic school of thought.

r e l a t e d | l i n k s :