

AI-04664 Self-Effacing vs Expanding

What is self-effacing? What is expanding ? What is joy dampening? (Horney). Where is the normal healthy human belongs in the framework. List example.

Explain, list the pillars, list 22 examples
What it means? Deep dive and provide the psychological pillars.
Describe how a person typically thinks, behaves, and makes decisions.
Provide 22 concrete examples demonstrating these traits in real-life situations.
Then create a 22-point guidelines from the discussion.

Yes. Karen Horney’s framework is especially useful here because **self-effacing, expanding, and joy-dampening** describe different ways a person can organize their personality around managing anxiety, insecurity, and relationships.

One clarification: **“self-effacing” and “expanding” are Horneyan orientations; “joy-dampening” is better understood as a related defensive pattern rather than one of Horney’s three canonical interpersonal movements.** Horney’s three major movements are **moving toward people, against people, and away from people.**

1. The basic idea

Horney believed that when a person experiences **basic anxiety**—a feeling of being isolated, unsafe, powerless, or unsupported—they develop strategies to make life feel more predictable.

Those strategies can become rigid.

A useful simplified model is:

Basic anxiety → defensive strategy → personality pattern → automatic thoughts → behavior → decisions → reinforcement of the pattern

The three broad Horneyan directions are:

Orientation	Core movement	Implicit question
Self-effacing	Moving toward people	“How can I be acceptable, needed, and loved?”
Expanding	Moving against people	“How can I become strong, superior, successful, or untouchable?”
Detached	Moving away from people	“How can I avoid needing anyone?”

The interesting part is that **the same person can use all three**, depending on circumstances.

2. Self-effacing

What it means

Self-effacing means **minimizing oneself in order to preserve connection, safety, approval, or belonging.**

The person may suppress:

- wants
- anger
- disagreement
- ambition
- needs
- preferences
- boundaries
- legitimate entitlement

The underlying psychological bargain is often:

“If I don't make trouble, don't demand much, and remain useful/agreeable, I will be safe and valued.”

This isn't the same as genuine humility.

Healthy humility vs. self-effacement

Healthy humility:

“I don't need to prove I'm better than anyone.”

Self-effacement:

“My needs probably don't matter as much as everyone else's.”

That distinction is crucial.

Psychological pillars of self-effacement

1. **Need for approval**
2. **Need to be liked**
3. **Conflict avoidance**
4. **Self-minimization**
5. **Excessive accommodation**
6. **Dependence on external validation**
7. **Difficulty asserting boundaries**
8. **Suppression of anger**
9. **Fear of rejection**
10. **Fear of being perceived as selfish**
11. **Over-functioning for others**
12. **Difficulty identifying one's own desires**

Typical internal logic

“If I disappoint them, they may reject me.”

“It's easier to give in.”

“I don't want to be difficult.”

“They need it more than I do.”

“Maybe I'm asking too much.”

3. Expanding

Horney's **expansive/expanding solution** moves in the opposite direction.

Instead of reducing oneself, the person attempts to **increase the self**.

That can involve:

- achievement
- power
- prestige
- superiority
- competence
- control
- independence
- winning
- status
- invulnerability

The implicit psychological bargain becomes:

“If I become strong enough, successful enough, impressive enough, or powerful enough, nobody can hurt or control me.”

This is much more than ordinary ambition.

A healthy ambitious person can say:

“I want to succeed.”

An expansive defensive person may psychologically require:

“I must succeed because failure threatens my sense of worth.”

Psychological pillars of expanding

1. **Power**
2. **Prestige**
3. **Achievement**
4. **Competition**
5. **Control**
6. **Self-sufficiency**
7. **Status**
8. **Superiority**
9. **Invulnerability**
10. **Recognition**
11. **Winning**
12. **Avoidance of weakness**
13. **Avoidance of dependency**
14. **Need for admiration**
15. **Intolerance of humiliation**

Typical internal logic

“I have to stay on top.”

“Never let them see weakness.”

"If I'm not exceptional, I'm nobody."

"I can't depend on anyone."

"I need to be the one in control."

4. Joy-dampening

This is particularly interesting.

Joy dampening means psychologically reducing, interrupting, distrusting, or avoiding positive emotional experiences.

Instead of allowing happiness to fully register, the person automatically introduces:

- doubt
- criticism
- guilt
- anxiety
- pessimism
- anticipation of loss
- embarrassment
- rationalization

into the experience.

For example:

"This is great!"

immediately becomes:

"Yeah, but something will probably go wrong."

Or:

"I'm really proud of myself."

becomes:

"It's not that big of a deal."

The person doesn't necessarily consciously decide to be unhappy.

The dampening can become **automatic**.

5. The psychological pillars of joy dampening

I would conceptualize it through these pillars:

1. Fear of disappointment

"If I get too excited, I'll be devastated when it ends."

2. Fear of loss

"Anything good can disappear."

3. Fear of vulnerability

"If I let myself enjoy this, I'm exposed."

4. Guilt about pleasure

"I shouldn't enjoy myself when others are struggling."

5. Suspicion of happiness

"Things are going too well."

6. Perfectionism

"If it's not perfect, it isn't really good."

7. Emotional inhibition

"Don't get too excited."

8. Anticipatory anxiety

"What could go wrong?"

9. Self-devaluation

"I don't deserve this."

10. Control

"Don't lose emotional control."

11. Fear of envy

"If people see me happy/successful, they'll resent me."

12. Defensive pessimism

"Expect the worst so you won't be surprised."

6. How the three patterns differ

A useful way to remember them:

Self-effacing

"Make myself smaller."

Expanding

"Make myself bigger."

Detached

"Make myself unnecessary."

Joy-dampening

"Make the good feeling smaller."

And that produces four very different strategies:

Situation	Self-effacing	Expanding	Detached	Joy-dampening
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Criticism	"Maybe they're right."	"They're wrong."	"I don't care."	"It doesn't matter anyway."
Success	"I got lucky."	"I'm exceptional."	"Whatever."	"It's not that important."
Conflict	"I'll give in."	"I'll win."	"I'll leave."	"Nothing good comes from people."
Love	"Please don't leave."	"Don't control me."	"I don't need you."	"It won't last."
Failure	"I'm inadequate."	"Someone else caused it."	"I don't care."	"Why celebrate anything?"

7. How such a person typically thinks

The important word is **typically**.

These aren't diagnoses. They're recurring psychological tendencies.

Self-effacing thinking

- "What do they want from me?"
- "How do I keep everyone happy?"
- "Maybe I should compromise."
- "I don't want to disappoint them."
- "My needs aren't that important."
- "If I say no, they'll be upset."

Expanding thinking

- "Who has the advantage?"
- "How do I win?"
- "How do I become indispensable?"
- "I can't let them see weakness."
- "I should be better than this."
- "Nobody gets to control me."

Joy-dampening thinking

- "Don't get too excited."
- "Something will go wrong."
- "This probably won't last."
- "It's not really that special."
- "I shouldn't celebrate yet."
- "What if I lose it?"

8. How decisions get made

These patterns can fundamentally alter decision-making.

Self-effacing decision algorithm

Other person's needs → anticipated reaction → relationship preservation → own preference

Instead of:

My values → options → consequences → decision

Expanding decision algorithm

Power/status → advantage → competence → winning → decision

Joy-dampening algorithm

Positive opportunity → possible downside → anticipated loss → emotional withdrawal

The result can look rational from the outside while being driven primarily by **threat management**.

9. 22 concrete real-life examples

1. Restaurant

Friends ask where to eat.

Self-effacing:

"Anywhere is fine."

Even though they strongly prefer another restaurant.

2. Workplace disagreement

A colleague makes an incorrect decision.

Self-effacing:

"I don't want to make a big deal about it."

They remain silent.

Expanding:

"I'll prove them wrong."

3. Asking for a raise

Self-effacing:

"I've only been here a year. Maybe I don't deserve one."

Expanding:

"I should be making more than everyone else."

4. Receiving praise

Someone says:

"You did an excellent job."

Self-effacing:

"Honestly, anyone could have done it."

5. Receiving praise

Expanding:

"I knew I was the best person for the job."

6. Receiving praise

Joy-dampening:

"Yeah, but let's see how long that lasts."

7. Vacation

They finally arrive at a beautiful destination.

Joy-dampening:

"It's nice, but the weather could get worse tomorrow."

The experience never fully becomes enjoyable.

8. Financial success

An investment performs exceptionally well.

Joy-dampening:

"Don't celebrate. It could crash tomorrow."

Prudence becomes emotional suppression.

9. Relationship

Their partner asks:

"What do you want to do tonight?"

Self-effacing:

"Whatever you want."

Repeatedly.

10. Relationship conflict

Partner says:

"I didn't like what you did."

Self-effacing:

"I'm sorry. I'll change."

They don't examine whether the criticism is reasonable.

11. Relationship conflict

Expanding:

"You're not going to talk to me like that."

The issue becomes a contest of dominance.

12. Relationship conflict

Detached:

"Fine. I'm done."

Emotional withdrawal replaces negotiation.

13. New opportunity

They receive an exciting job offer.

Joy-dampening:

"There's probably some catch."

They find reasons not to enjoy or pursue it.

14. Asking for help

Expanding:

"I don't need anyone."

Even when assistance would clearly be useful.

15. Someone sets a boundary

Self-effacing:

"I guess I was asking too much."

They immediately retreat.

16. Someone sets a boundary

Expanding:

"They're trying to control me."

A normal boundary is interpreted as domination.

17. Personal achievement

They accomplish a difficult goal.

Self-effacing:

"It wasn't really that difficult."

18. Personal achievement

Expanding:

"This proves I'm capable of more than everyone else."

19. Personal achievement

Joy-dampening:

"Okay, but what's next?"

The achievement is never emotionally consumed.

20. Gift receiving

Someone gives them something generous.

Self-effacing:

“You shouldn't have spent money on me.”

They experience receiving as uncomfortable.

21. Failure

They make a mistake.

Self-effacing:

“I knew I wasn't good enough.”

22. Failure

Expanding:

“The system was against me.”

The person protects self-esteem by externalizing the failure.

10. The deeper psychological structure

The three Horneyan movements can be understood as different answers to the same fundamental problem:

“How do I become safe in a world where other people can hurt, reject, dominate, or abandon me?”

Self-effacing answer

Become lovable.

“If I'm good enough to people, they'll protect me.”

Expanding answer

Become powerful.

“If I'm strong enough, nobody can hurt me.”

Detached answer

Become independent.

“If I don't need anyone, nobody can hurt me.”

Joy-dampening answer

Don't become emotionally invested.

“If I don't become too happy, I won't have as much to lose.”

This is why these patterns can coexist.

Someone can:

please people → become resentful → become controlling → withdraw → dampen positive emotions → repeat.

11. The hidden cost

The defensive strategy eventually creates the very problem it was designed to prevent.

Self-effacing paradox

"I'll suppress myself so people won't reject me."

Result:

People don't actually know the authentic person.

Eventually:

suppression → resentment → passive aggression → exhaustion

Expanding paradox

"I'll become powerful so nobody can hurt me."

Result:

People may experience the person as intimidating, arrogant, competitive, or controlling.

Eventually:

control → interpersonal distance → isolation → greater need for control

Detached paradox

"I'll avoid needing anyone."

Result:

Reduced intimacy.

Eventually:

distance → loneliness → confirmation that relationships aren't safe

Joy-dampening paradox

"I'll prevent disappointment by not getting too happy."

Result:

Reduced capacity to experience satisfaction.

Eventually:

anticipatory loss → emotional inhibition → reduced reward → pessimistic worldview

12. The healthier alternative

The goal isn't to eliminate these tendencies.

It's to develop **flexibility**.

Instead of:

Self-effacement

“What does everyone else want?”

Ask:

“What do I want, and what do they want?”

Instead of:

Expansion

“How do I win?”

Ask:

“What outcome is actually valuable?”

Instead of:

Detachment

“I don't need anyone.”

Ask:

“Who can I appropriately depend on?”

Instead of:

Joy-dampening

“What could go wrong?”

Ask:

“Can I enjoy what's good right now while accepting uncertainty?”

That is psychological maturity:

not dependence → independence → interdependence

and

not pessimism → naïve optimism → realistic appreciation.

13. 22-point guidelines

1. **Notice when you automatically make yourself smaller.**
2. **Separate humility from self-erasure.**
3. **Practice stating your genuine preference.**
4. **Learn to say “no” without excessive justification.**
5. **Don't equate disagreement with rejection.**
6. **Allow yourself to receive without immediately reciprocating.**
7. **Distinguish kindness from people-pleasing.**
8. **Notice when helping others becomes self-neglect.**
9. **Ask whether you're trying to win or solve the problem.**
10. **Separate achievement from personal worth.**
11. **Don't confuse competence with superiority.**
12. **Allow yourself to be imperfect without losing status.**

13. **Notice when control is replacing trust.**
14. **Practice asking for help without interpreting it as weakness.**
15. **Don't automatically interpret boundaries as rejection or domination.**
16. **Notice when withdrawal is being used to avoid vulnerability.**
17. **Don't automatically predict that good experiences will end badly.**
18. **Allow positive experiences to register before analyzing them.**
19. **Don't devalue achievements immediately after accomplishing them.**
20. **Replace "What could go wrong?" with "What is actually happening?"**
21. **Accept that pleasure and uncertainty can coexist.**
22. **Aim for flexibility rather than adopting a permanently self-effacing, expansive, or detached identity.**

The central principle

Horney's framework ultimately points toward something deeper than simply identifying "types" of people:

Psychological health is the ability to respond to life without being dominated by one defensive strategy.

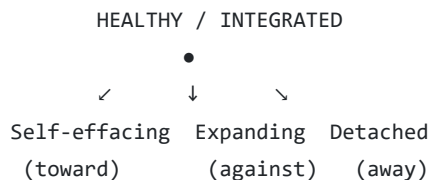
You can be **humble without becoming small, powerful without becoming domineering, independent without becoming isolated, and cautious without destroying your capacity for joy.**

Where is the normal healthy human belongs in the framework. List example.

Exactly—that is the important missing piece. **A psychologically healthy person is not a fourth rigid "type."** In a Horney-inspired framework, health is better represented as **flexibility and integration** rather than permanently living in one direction.

Where does the healthy person belong?

Think of the framework like this:



The healthy person can **move toward, against, or away from people when appropriate**, but does not *need* one of these strategies to maintain psychological stability.

Healthy person

"I can connect with you without losing myself."

"I can compete without needing superiority."

"I can be independent without denying my need for others."

"I can enjoy something without pretending it will last forever."

That's the crucial distinction.

Healthy vs. defensive versions

Situation	Healthy response	Self-effacing	Expanding	Detached	Joy-dampening
Someone disagrees	"Let's understand why."	"You're probably right."	"I'll prove you wrong."	"Whatever."	"This will become a problem."
Someone says no	"Okay, I respect that."	"What did I do wrong?"	"Who are you to tell me no?"	"I don't need you anyway."	"Relationships always disappoint."
Achievement	"I'm proud of that."	"It was luck."	"I'm better than others."	"It doesn't matter."	"Something will go wrong next."
Asking for help	"I could use some help."	"Sorry to bother you."	"I don't need anyone."	"I'll do it myself."	"Depending on people is dangerous."
Conflict	"Let's work this out."	"I'll give in."	"I'll win."	"I'm leaving."	"This relationship won't work anyway."
Boundary	"That's reasonable."	"I'll accommodate."	"You're controlling me."	"I'll disconnect."	"This will eventually cause rejection."
Success	Enjoys it	Minimizes it	Uses it for status	Dismisses it	Anticipates its loss
Failure	Learns	Self-blames	Blames others	Withdraws	Concludes nothing works

22 examples of healthy functioning

1. Choosing a restaurant

Friend asks where you want to eat.

Healthy:

"I'd really like Thai tonight. How about you?"

You express your preference **without demanding it**.

2. Saying no

Someone asks you to do something inconvenient.

Healthy:

"I can't do that today, but I can help Saturday."

Neither submission nor hostility.

3. Receiving criticism

Someone points out a mistake.

Healthy:

"That's fair. I missed that. I'll fix it."

No collapse of self-esteem and no need to attack the critic.

4. Receiving praise

Someone compliments your work.

Healthy:

“Thank you. I worked hard on it.”

You don't inflate yourself or minimize yourself.

5. Achievement

You accomplish something difficult.

Healthy:

“I'm genuinely proud of that.”

You allow yourself to experience satisfaction.

6. Competition

Someone performs better than you.

Healthy:

“They were better today. I'll learn from it.”

Competition becomes information rather than a threat to identity.

7. Losing

You lose a competition.

Healthy:

“That didn't go the way I wanted. Let's see what I can improve.”

Failure doesn't become **“I'm worthless.”**

8. Winning

You win.

Healthy:

“That was great!”

You don't need:

“I'm better than everyone.”

9. Asking for help

You encounter something you can't efficiently solve alone.

Healthy:

“I could figure this out eventually, but asking them would be smarter.”

Help isn't interpreted as weakness.

10. Being independent

You enjoy doing something alone.

Healthy:

"I like being by myself, but I also enjoy good company."

Independence doesn't become isolation.

11. Relationship disagreement

Your partner wants something different.

Healthy:

"We disagree. Let's see whether there's a compromise."

The relationship doesn't become a battlefield.

12. Relationship boundary

Your partner says:

"I need some time alone."

Healthy:

"Okay. Let me know when you're ready to talk."

You don't automatically interpret it as abandonment.

13. Someone rejects you

You ask someone out and they decline.

Healthy:

"No problem. I respect that."

You don't conclude:

"I'm unlovable."

Nor:

"They're an idiot."

14. Someone likes you

Healthy:

"I'm happy they like me. I'll take the time to see whether we're compatible."

You don't immediately surrender yourself to maintain their affection.

15. Something wonderful happens

You receive unexpectedly good news.

Healthy:

"This is fantastic!"

You don't immediately follow it with:

“Something terrible will happen.”

You allow the positive emotion to exist.

16. Uncertainty

You don't know what will happen tomorrow.

Healthy:

“There are risks, but I'll deal with them if they happen.”

That's different from both naïve optimism and defensive pessimism.

17. Spending money

You purchase something you've wanted.

Healthy:

“I can afford it, I value it, and I'm going to enjoy it.”

No guilt and no compulsive justification.

18. Being wrong

You discover that your opinion was incorrect.

Healthy:

“I was wrong. Good to know.”

The ego doesn't need to defend itself.

19. Someone is better than you

A colleague possesses a skill you don't.

Healthy:

“They're excellent at that. Maybe I can learn from them.”

Admiration doesn't threaten identity.

20. Someone is worse than you

You're considerably better at something.

Healthy:

“I'm more experienced in this area.”

You don't need to humiliate them.

21. Leaving a relationship

A relationship becomes unhealthy.

Healthy:

"I care about this person, but this relationship isn't working for me."

Leaving isn't necessarily avoidance.

22. Staying in a relationship

A relationship becomes difficult.

Healthy:

"This is hard, but it's worth working through."

Staying isn't necessarily dependency.

The really important distinction

The same **behavior** can look identical externally while coming from completely different psychological systems.

For example:

Healthy person says:

"I'll help you."

Because:

"I genuinely want to."

Self-effacing person says:

"I'll help you."

Because:

"You'll be disappointed in me if I don't."

Healthy person says:

"I'll handle this myself."

Because:

"I'm capable of doing it."

Expanding person says:

"I'll handle this myself."

Because:

"I must prove I don't need anybody."

Healthy person says:

"I'd rather spend tonight alone."

Because:

"I enjoy solitude."

Detached person says:

"I'd rather spend tonight alone."

Because:

"People aren't worth the trouble."

Healthy person says:

"I'm really happy about this."

Because:

"This is a genuinely good moment."

Joy-dampening person says:

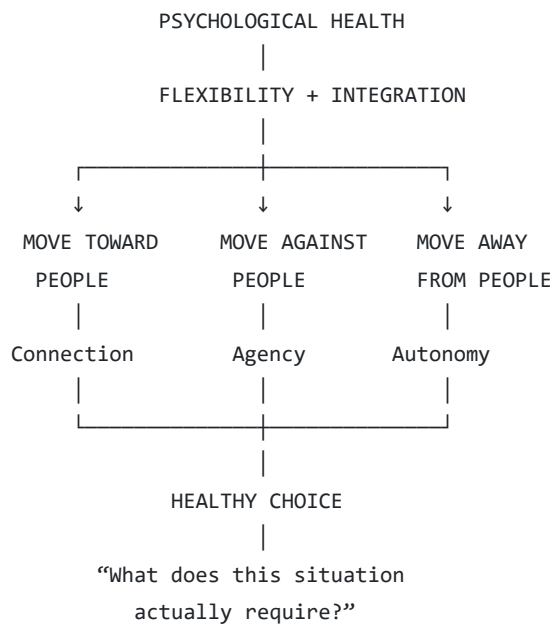
"Don't get too excited."

Because:

"If I suppress the joy now, I won't be hurt later."

A useful model

I'd therefore modify the framework we discussed earlier:



The **healthy person doesn't ask:**

"Which personality strategy should I use?"

They implicitly ask:

"What is appropriate here?"

Sometimes the answer is **connection**.

Sometimes it's **assertiveness**.

Sometimes it's **solitude**.

Sometimes it's **letting someone help**.

Sometimes it's **walking away**.

Sometimes it's **celebrating**.

Sometimes it's **being cautious**.

That's the dividing line:

Defensive personality:

"I behave this way because I need to protect myself."

Healthy personality:

"I behave this way because it fits the reality of the situation."

That distinction is probably the most useful way to apply Horney's framework without turning it into a personality-labeling exercise.

Can a strict parental upbringing drive a 20 yom child (in LSD and other drugs) towards attempting to murder the parents? This event actually happened a month ago near to my heart and I talked to the parents as a consoling listening friend. I hear their story and I'm touched. I did not give any advice but just a few sentences such as "you've given everything to your child", "limit the question why", "keep talking to friends". But deep in me, sometimes I feel that being Asian, we drive our children to insanity via high expectation, boundary violation and dominance. I wish early on I've known Horney's framework of neurotic personality. Tell more and expand.

Yes — **a highly controlling upbringing can be one contributor to a young person's psychological vulnerability**, but I would be very careful about drawing a straight line from *strict Asian parenting* → *drug use* → *attempted murder*. That would be far too simple, and in the case you heard, we simply don't know enough to assign causality.

What you are sensing, however, is psychologically important.

A 20-year-old who is using LSD and other drugs, becomes severely paranoid, loses behavioral control, and attempts to kill his parents may represent the convergence of **multiple systems**:

temperament + developmental conflict + family dynamics + accumulated resentment + substance effects + possible psychiatric vulnerability + immediate circumstances

And sometimes the final event is dramatically different from anything the family could have predicted.

Recent research supports an important distinction: **parental behavioral control is not inherently harmful**, and some monitoring/rules can actually protect against substance use. The more concerning pattern is **psychological control**—intrusion into the child's internal world, guilt, coercion, conditional love, humiliation, manipulation, and suppression of autonomy. A 2025 meta-analysis found psychological control associated with greater internalizing symptoms in youth across Majority World cultures, including Asian contexts. ([PubMed](#))

And a very large 2025 meta-analysis found that parental monitoring and behavioral control were generally associated with *less* adolescent substance use, particularly when control involved parental knowledge and child disclosure. ([PubMed](#))

That distinction is **extremely important**.

1. The question I think you are really asking

I don't think your deepest question is:

"Did the parents cause this?"

It sounds more like:

"Can parents unintentionally create a psychological environment in which a vulnerable child eventually experiences the family as an oppressive system rather than a source of safety?"

Yes.

That can happen.

But it doesn't mean the parents wanted it, intended it, or could have predicted the eventual catastrophe.

And it certainly doesn't mean the parents deserve what happened.

2. Horney gives us an interesting lens

This is where your previous discussion becomes surprisingly relevant.

Imagine a child growing up with:

- very high expectations
- little autonomy
- constant comparison
- conditional approval
- intrusive parental involvement
- punishment for disagreement
- limited privacy
- strong obedience expectations
- emotional invalidation
- "because I said so"
- family reputation emphasized
- achievement treated as moral worth
- parents deciding what constitutes a successful life

The child may gradually learn:

"My authentic self is not acceptable."

That's a very different message from:

"My parents have rules because they love me."

The first attacks the developing **self**.

The second establishes **boundaries around behavior**.

3. The distinction between authority and domination

This is probably the most important lesson.

Healthy authority

"You cannot use drugs in this house."

"You need to be home by midnight."

"You need to contribute to the household."

"There will be consequences if you break this rule."

But underneath:

"You are still a person with your own mind, dignity and future."

Psychological domination

"You will become what we want."

"You don't know what is best for yourself."

"You embarrass this family."

"After everything we've sacrificed for you..."

"You owe us."

"You don't get to disagree with us."

"Your privacy doesn't matter because you're our child."

The external behavior may look similar—**rules**—but psychologically they're radically different.

4. Horney's concept of the "real self" becomes relevant

One of Horney's most powerful ideas was the tension between the **real self** and an imposed or idealized self.

A child needs to gradually discover:

Who am I?

But suppose the family continuously answers:

"You are who we need you to be."

Then the child can become divided.

Outer self

The obedient son.

The successful son.

The respectful son.

The doctor/lawyer/engineer.

The son who doesn't embarrass the family.

Inner self

Angry.

Confused.

Sexually developing.

Curious.

Independent.

Resentful.

Experimenting.

Wanting different things.

Wanting freedom.

Wanting to say **NO**.

The greater the distance between the two, the greater the psychological pressure can become.

5. And here's where self-effacing becomes interesting

A child raised in this environment may initially become **self-effacing**.

"I'll be good."

"I'll make them proud."

"I'll do what they want."

"I'll suppress my anger."

"I'll become successful."

This can work for years.

The child receives approval.

The family feels successful.

Everyone believes:

"He's doing fine."

But the suppressed material doesn't necessarily disappear.

6. Self-effacement can eventually turn into expansion

This is one of the things I find particularly interesting about Horney.

The person who spent years saying:

"Yes, Mom."

may eventually become:

"Nobody is going to control me ever again."

That's a dramatic psychological reversal.

The person moves from:

Moving toward

"I'll comply so you will love me."

to:

Moving against

"I'll become powerful enough that you can't control me."

And eventually potentially:

Moving away

"I don't need any of you."

This doesn't mean every rebellious young adult follows this trajectory.

But it gives us a useful conceptual model.

7. Add drugs to the equation

This is where things can become extraordinarily dangerous.

LSD and other psychoactive substances can dramatically alter:

- perception
- salience
- judgment
- emotional intensity
- interpretation of other people's behavior
- sense of reality

In a psychologically vulnerable person, intoxication can interact with paranoia, severe agitation, psychosis, or pre-existing psychiatric vulnerability.

That doesn't mean:

LSD → murder

That's not an appropriate causal model.

Rather:

Underlying vulnerability + interpersonal conflict + substance intoxication + impaired reality testing + acute circumstances → potentially catastrophic behavior

And that distinction matters enormously.

8. The family conflict can become the "meaning" attached to the altered state

Imagine someone already carrying years of:

"My parents control me."

Then during a severe intoxication or psychotic episode, ordinary events may acquire an entirely different meaning.

A parent says:

"You need to calm down."

The son may experience:

"They're imprisoning me."

Parent tries to stop him from leaving:

"They're attacking me."

Parent calls for help:

"They're trying to destroy me."

The altered brain can transform an ordinary interpersonal interaction into a perceived existential threat.

That's one reason these situations can become so frightening.

9. But don't make the opposite mistake

There is an equally dangerous conclusion:

"The parents were strict, therefore they created the violence."

No.

We cannot know that.

Research actually argues against such simplistic interpretations. Parenting styles have statistically **small to very small associations** with substance use, and authoritative parenting tends to be associated with lower substance use. ([PubMed Central \(PMC\)](#))

And research on intrusive parenting finds associations with both internalizing and externalizing symptoms, but these are **associations**, not proof that a particular parent caused a particular outcome. ([Springer](#))

A person is not a machine programmed by his parents.

10. The Asian-parenting issue

I think your self-reflection is valuable, but I'd modify the conclusion.

Don't say:

"Asian parents drive children insane."

That's too broad.

A better formulation is:

"Some collectivist family systems can place unusually strong emphasis on obedience, family reputation, parental authority, sacrifice, and achievement, and those values can become psychologically harmful when combined with coercive control and inadequate autonomy."

That's much more defensible.

And importantly, **collectivism itself isn't pathological**.

There are tremendous strengths:

- family loyalty
- intergenerational support
- responsibility
- sacrifice
- cooperation
- respect
- social connectedness

The problem occurs when:

family obligation > individual autonomy

becomes:

individual autonomy = betrayal of the family.

11. The dangerous equation

One particularly destructive message is:

"After everything we've done for you, you owe us."

A healthy child can hear:

"Your parents sacrificed for you."

and experience:

gratitude.

An unhealthy family system can communicate:

"Because we sacrificed for you, you surrender your autonomy."

That produces something very different:

debt → obligation → resentment → guilt → suppression

And eventually:

"I can never become my own person."

12. Boundary violation is particularly important

You mentioned **boundary violation**.

That's probably more important than simple strictness.

A parent can be strict while respecting boundaries.

For example:

"No drugs."

That's a behavioral boundary.

But:

"I must know every thought you're having, every message you send, every person you talk to, and every decision you make."

That's potentially psychological intrusion.

The difference is:

Behavioral control

"I control certain behaviors while you're living under my roof."

versus

Psychological control

"I control your internal autonomy."

The latter has been repeatedly associated with psychological difficulties in young people. ([PubMed](#))

13. The irony about drug prevention

There's another fascinating point.

Parents sometimes think:

"If I control my child more, I'll prevent drugs."

But the research suggests the useful ingredient isn't simply **more control**.

It's **knowledge + communication + relationship + appropriate boundaries**.

The 2025 meta-analysis involving more than **2 million participants across 571 studies** found that parental knowledge and youth disclosure were particularly important, while parental solicitation was less strongly associated with reduced substance use. ([PubMed](#))

In plain English:

Knowing your child is more powerful than interrogating your child.

That's a profound distinction.

14. What you did with the parents was actually appropriate

You said:

"You've given everything to your child."

"Limit the question why."

"Keep talking to friends."

I think you instinctively did something very wise:

You didn't try to solve an unsolvable event.

After a catastrophe, parents can become trapped in:

Why?

Why didn't I see it?

Why did he do this?

What did I do?

Where did I fail?

Why didn't my parenting work?

Why didn't he tell us?

Why did this happen to our family?

Why?

Why?

Why?

There may never be a satisfying answer.

And sometimes **"why" becomes a form of self-punishment rather than understanding**.

Your suggestion to keep talking to friends is particularly important because traumatic events can produce isolation and repetitive rumination.

You gave them something they probably needed more than a theory:

a human being willing to listen.

15. I would add one important caveat

Because this involved an actual attempted murder, the parents should not treat it primarily as a **parenting problem**.

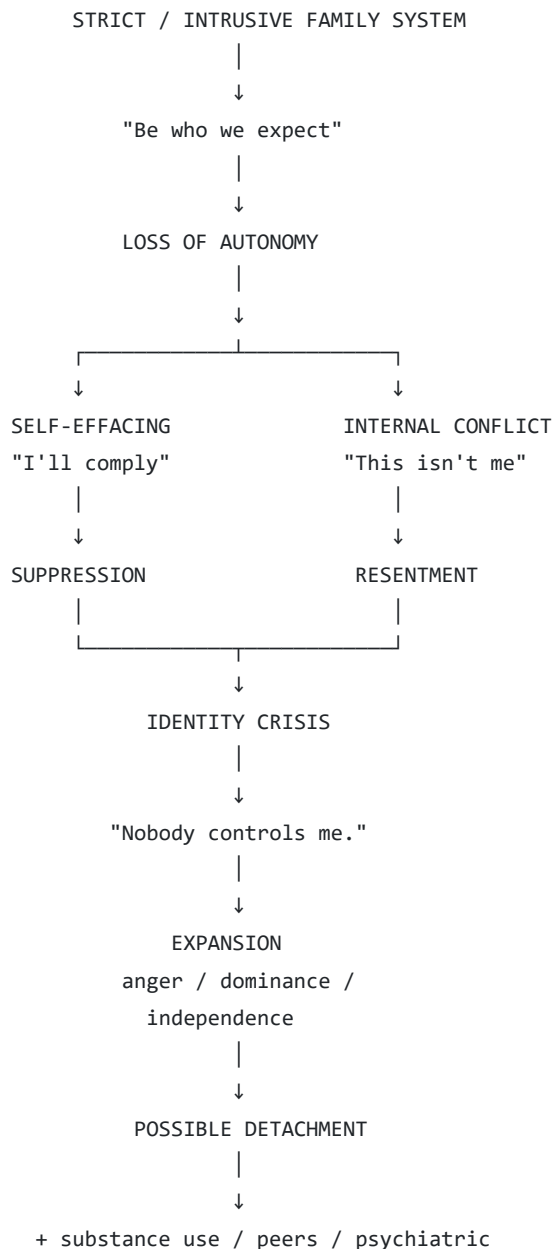
It is potentially a **serious psychiatric/substance-use/safety problem**.

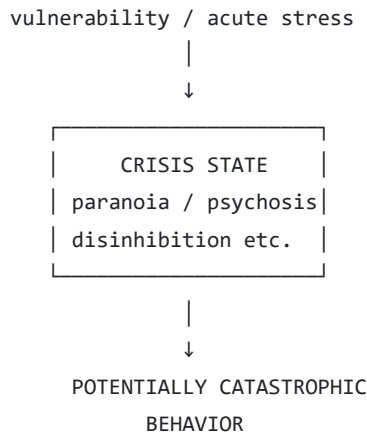
If the son remains a danger to himself or others, or there are continuing threats, paranoia, psychosis, intoxication, weapons access, or escalating behavior, the family needs professional crisis/psychiatric and legal safety support rather than attempting to manage it through family conversation alone.

And after something this traumatic, **the parents themselves deserve professional trauma support**. They don't have to wait until they are "falling apart" to seek it.

16. The Horney framework gives you an interesting developmental hypothesis

I'd draw it this way:





But this is a conceptual pathway, not a claim about what happened in this particular family.

17. The healthier developmental pathway

This is what I wish more parents were taught.

Instead of:

"We own your future."

Teach:

"We are responsible for helping you become capable of owning your future."

Instead of:

"Obey because we're your parents."

Teach:

"Here's the rule, here's why it exists, and here's where you eventually get to make your own decision."

Instead of:

"Don't embarrass the family."

Teach:

"Your character matters more than our reputation."

Instead of:

"We sacrificed everything for you."

Teach:

"Our sacrifices were our choice. You don't owe us your identity."

Instead of:

"You must become successful."

Teach:

"Become someone you can respect."

That's the transition from **control to guidance**.

18. And this connects directly to the "healthy person" we discussed

The ultimate objective isn't:

self-effacing child

or

expanding child

or

detached child.

It's:

Integrated adult

Who can say:

"I love my parents."

AND

"I disagree with them."

"I'm grateful for what they gave me."

AND

"I don't owe them my entire future."

"I can accept advice."

AND

"I can make my own decisions."

"I can belong to my family."

AND

"I can still be myself."

That's **individuation without abandonment.**

19. Perhaps the deepest lesson for parents

A child doesn't need parents who never frustrate them.

Children actually need:

rules + consequences + expectations + protection + disappointment + accountability.

But they also need:

autonomy + privacy + psychological safety + emotional validation + the ability to disagree + unconditional human worth.

The sweet spot is:

High standards + high warmth + appropriate boundaries + increasing autonomy.

Not:

High standards + high control + low autonomy.

Research generally calls the healthier pattern **authoritative parenting**, and meta-analytic evidence associates it with lower substance use than authoritarian parenting, although the effects are modest and parenting is only one part of the picture. (PubMed Central (PMC))

20. And something about your own reaction

I think there's a reason this event stayed with you.

You weren't simply listening to a tragic story.

You were probably mentally going backward through the entire parent-child relationship:

"What if we understood this stuff earlier?"

That's a painful thought.

But be careful not to convert hindsight into guilt.

Parents raise children using the psychological knowledge available to them **at that time**.

You cannot go back and give a 1990s parent a 2026 understanding of psychological control, autonomy development, attachment, substance-use prevention, Horney, neuroscience, and developmental psychology.

What you *can* do is extract the lesson now.

And perhaps the lesson isn't:

"Parents shouldn't be strict."

It's much more powerful:

"Raise children strongly enough to withstand the world, but freely enough that they can eventually become themselves."

And perhaps the Horney version is even simpler:

Don't make the child choose between belonging and becoming an individual.

That is where **healthy integration** lives.

(PubMed)

Gemini

In Karen Horney's psychoanalytic framework—most fully articulated in *Neurosis and Human Growth* (1950)—the human psyche handles fundamental insecurity (**basic anxiety**) by adopting strategic maneuvers. When childhood environments lack emotional warmth, authenticity, and security, a child cannot safely develop their authentic core—what Horney calls the **Real Self**.

To survive, the individual creates an **Idealized Self** and relies on one of three primary interpersonal strategies: **Self-Effacing** (Moving Toward), **Expansive** (Moving Against), or **Resigned/Detached** (Moving Away).

Key Concepts Defined

- **The Self-Effacing Solution ("Moving Toward"):** Driven by the unconscious motto, "*If I make you love me, you will not hurt me*". The individual surrenders personal power, minimizes their own needs, and seeks safety through submission, compliance, helpfulness, and suffering.
- **The Expansive Solution ("Moving Against"):** Driven by the motto, "*If I have power, no one can hurt me*". The individual copes by seeking mastery, dominance, perfection, or recognition to master life through sheer will.
- **Joy Dampening (The Suppression of Spontaneity):** In both strategies, genuine joy is perceived as dangerous. Spontaneous joy, pride, or pleasure makes a person vulnerable to rejection (for the self-effacing type) or loss of control/weakness (for the expansive type). Consequently, the individual compulsively dampens positive emotions, enthusiasm, and authentic desires to keep their inner defensive system stable.

Where the Normal, Healthy Human Belongs

The healthy individual does **not** belong to any single strategy exclusively. Health is defined by **flexibility, spontaneity, and alignment with the Real Self**.

- **The Neurotic** uses one move compulsively and rigidly (e.g., *always* complying, or *always* dominating), while suppressing the other drives, creating severe internal conflict.
- **The Healthy Person** integrates all three movements naturally based on context:
 - **Moving Toward:** Ability to yield, love, trust, ask for help, and express genuine affection.
 - **Moving Against:** Ability to fight for one's rights, stand firm, be competitive when appropriate, and exert strong leadership.
 - **Moving Away:** Ability to enjoy solitude, maintain independence, reflect, and establish boundaries.

Example of Health vs. Neurosis in Action

Imagine receiving unexpected critical feedback on a project at work:

- **Self-Effacing Neurotic:** Apologizes excessively, internalizes all blame, feels deep self-hate, and works overtime to appease the boss despite unfair criticism.
- **Expansive Neurotic:** Explodes in defense, attacks the reviewer's competence, denies any mistakes, and seeks to undermine the critic to preserve their grand self-image.
- **Healthy Individual:** Integrates the moves. First, steps back to reflect in solitude (**Moving Away**); listens constructively to valid points without losing self-worth (**Moving Toward**); and firmly defends their work where the critique is inaccurate (**Moving Against**).

The Psychological Pillars

1. The Dynamic Interpersonal Orientations

- **Self-Effacing (Compliance):** Needs affection, approval, and a powerful partner. Uses helplessness, self-sacrifice, and humility as leverage.
- **Expansive (Aggression):** Divided into three subtypes:
 - 1. *Narcissistic:* Overly optimistic, relying on unquestioned self-admiration.
 - 2. *Perfectionistic:* Relies on high moral/intellectual standards to feel superior.
 - 3. *Arrogant-Vindictive:* Relies on hardness, revenge, and overt dominance.
- **Resigned (Detachment):** Needs self-sufficiency, privacy, and freedom from obligation to prevent anyone from getting close enough to hurt them.

2. The Intrapsychic Architecture

- **The Real Self:** The innate core of potential requiring a supportive environment to bloom (warmth, unconditional acceptance, safety).
- **The Idealized Self:** A glorified image created to replace the felt inadequacy of the actual self.
- **The Search for Glory:** The compulsive drive to actualize the Idealized Self through perfectionism, ambition, or exaggerated virtue.
- **The Tyranny of the Shoulds:** Unforgiving inner demands ("*I should never get angry,*" "*I should always win*") enforced by severe self-hate whenever the individual fails to live up to the idealized image.

Psychological Profiles: Thought, Behavior, & Decision-Making

Character Dimension	Self-Effacing Type	Expansive Type	Healthy Individual
Primary Thought Patterns	"I am weak, helpless, and flawed. Others are stronger and wiser. I must avoid conflict at all costs."	"I must be superior, victorious, and flawless. Showing weakness or doubt is fatal."	"I am inherently valuable with real strengths and real limits. Growth is a life-long process."
Behavioral Habits	Apologetic, accommodating, suppresses anger, hides success, defers decisions to others, dampens joy to avoid envy.	Domineering, highly competitive, demanding, critical, quick to anger, projects confidence, dismisses others' feelings.	Direct, authentic, adaptable, comfortable with both intimacy and solitude, capable of celebrating own/others' success.

Decision-Making Style	Driven by fear of disapproval. Asks: <i>"What do others expect of me? What choice avoids conflict?"</i>	Driven by need for control/status. Asks: <i>"How does this maximize my leverage, power, or image?"</i>	Driven by personal values and reality. Asks: <i>"What aligns with my goals, respects others, and makes logical sense?"</i>
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22 Concrete Real-Life Examples

1. **Self-Effacing (Workplace):** An employee works unpaid weekends covering a colleague's tasks because saying "no" triggers unbearable anxiety about being seen as selfish.
2. **Self-Effacing (Relationships):** A partner immediately apologizes during an argument—even when insulted—to restore harmony at the expense of self-respect.
3. **Self-Effacing (Joy Dampening):** Winning an award at work, a manager quickly tells everyone, *"It was just luck, anyone could have done it,"* suppressing pride to prevent potential hostility.
4. **Self-Effacing (Decision Making):** Ordering at a restaurant, a person changes their order to match their friend's preference so as not to seem "demanding."
5. **Self-Effacing (Subordinated Ambition):** An artist intentionally downplays their skill and avoids promoting their portfolio because standing out feels dangerous.
6. **Self-Effacing (Emotional Suppression):** A person feels intense anger at a boundary violation but converts it into a sudden tension headache and increased guilt.
7. **Self-Effacing (The Unconscious Bargain):** Subconsciously believing, *"Because I suffer so quietly for everyone, life owes me happiness without me asking for it."*
8. **Expansive - Narcissistic (Credit Allocation):** A team leader takes sole credit for a successful project launched by junior engineers, genuinely believing their presence was the sole reason for success.
9. **Expansive - Perfectionistic (Micromanagement):** A parent inspects their child's completed homework with a magnifying glass, rewriting full sections because an error invalidates the effort.
10. **Expansive - Arrogant-Vindictive (Negotiation):** A business executive ruins a vendor's contract over a minor disagreement to ensure the vendor learns "never to cross me."
11. **Expansive (Joy Dampening):** Upon finishing a marathon in top-5 placement, an athlete feels immediate bitterness and disgust because they didn't break the course record.
12. **Expansive (Decision Making):** Choosing a car based strictly on how much status and envy it will command among neighbors rather than utility or budget.
13. **Expansive (Vulnerability Shield):** Refusing to admit confusion during a complex technical meeting, instead making up answers to preserve an aura of absolute competence.

- 14. **Expansive (Exploitative Trend):** Viewing friendships strictly as strategic alliances that can be leveraged for career growth or social access.
- 15. **Healthy (Flexible Boundary):** Politely but firmly declining an extra work project on Friday evening to safeguard personal rest and family time.
- 16. **Healthy (Authentic Joy):** Celebrating a personal milestone with genuine enthusiasm without feeling guilty or needing to boast.
- 17. **Healthy (Conflict Resolution):** Facing a disagreement directly, expressing how one feels using "I" statements, and actively listening to the opposing view.
- 18. **Healthy (Self-Acceptance):** Admitting a mistake at work immediately, taking corrective action, and moving forward without crippling shame or defensive anger.
- 19. **Healthy (Solitude & Autonomy):** Spending a solo weekend pursuing personal hobbies without feeling lonely, isolated, or guilty for taking space.
- 20. **Healthy (Constructive Aggression):** Standing up against unjust treatment or advocating for a colleague who is being spoken over in a meeting.
- 21. **Healthy (Vulnerability):** Asking for help when struggling with an overwhelming workload or personal problem without viewing it as a failure.
- 22. **Healthy (Realistic Ambition):** Pursuing a challenging long-term goal out of genuine interest and intrinsic fulfillment rather than a drive for external glory.

22-Point Guidelines for Psychological Growth & Alignment

- 1. **Recognize Your Primary Move:** Identify whether your automatic instinct under stress is to comply (toward), dominate (against), or withdraw (away).
- 2. **Distinguish the Real Self from the Idealized Image:** Notice when you act out of authentic desire versus living up to a grandiose, unrealistic self-expectation.
- 3. **Audit Your "Shoulds":** Replace rigid internal demands ("*I must always be calm*") with flexible preferences ("*I prefer to handle this calmly, but it's okay if I feel upset*").
- 4. **Notice Joy Dampening:** Catch yourself when you shrink your enthusiasm, minimize achievements, or refuse to celebrate out of guilt or fear of judgment.
- 5. **Practice Contextual Flexibility:** Consciously choose the move that fits the situation rather than relying on your default reflex.
- 6. **Reclaim Healthy Aggression:** If self-effacing, practice saying "no" to small requests without offering justifications or apologies.

7. **Reclaim Healthy Vulnerability:** If expansive, practice admitting when you don't know an answer or when you need assistance.
8. **Reclaim Healthy Attachment:** If resigned/detached, practice reaching out to a trusted friend when feeling overwhelmed rather than retreating.
9. **Examine Your Unconscious Bargains:** Identify what you expect life or people to give you in exchange for your specific defensive behaviors.
10. **Separate Worth from Achievement:** Remind yourself that human value is intrinsic, not dependent on perfection, status, or praise.
11. **Allow Honest Anger:** Recognize that anger is a normal signal that a boundary has been crossed, not proof that you are "bad" or "out of control."
12. **Surrender the Search for Glory:** Give up the exhausting quest to be heroic or flawless, and settle into the richer reality of being human.
13. **Validate Internal Realities:** Prioritize your inner values over external applause or public recognition.
14. **Cultivate Solitude Without Isolation:** Use alone time for genuine rest and introspection rather than as a protective fortress against others.
15. **Accept Imperfection as Safety:** Normalize making mistakes; view errors as natural data points for learning rather than threats to your identity.
16. **Stop Using Suffering as Leverage:** Avoid relying on martyrdom, illness, or helplessness to secure care or influence others.
17. **Refuse to Exploit:** Treat others as ends in themselves rather than tools or stepping stones for your personal security.
18. **Develop Self-Compassion Over Self-Hate:** When falling short of a goal, respond with constructive self-sympathy rather than harsh internal punishment.
19. **Own Your Choices:** Take responsibility for your decisions instead of blaming circumstances (expansive) or attributing everything to fate/others (self-effacing).
20. **Tolerate Disapproval:** Build tolerance for the fact that not everyone will like, understand, or agree with you—and that you can remain safe regardless.
21. **Celebrate Others' Success:** Notice if another's achievement triggers envy or self-pity, and deliberately pivot to genuine appreciation.
22. **Commit to Continuous Self-Realization:** Focus daily energy on uncovering and developing your unique innate talents rather than maintaining a defensive mask.

For a deeper dive into Karen Horney's breakdown of the interpersonal coping strategies, check out this video explanation on [Karen Horney's Three Neurotic Strategies](#). It clearly illustrates the psychological mechanics behind moving toward, against, and away from others.

Can a strict parental upbringing drive a 20 yom child (in LSD and other drugs) towards attempting to murder the parents? This event actually happened a month ago near to my heart and I talked to the parents as a consoling listening friend. I hear their story and I'm touched. I did not give any advice but just a few sentences such as "you've given everything to your child", "limit the question why", "keep talking to friends". But deep in me, sometimes I feel that being Asian, we drive our children to insanity via high expectation, boundary violation and dominance. I wish early on I've knows Horney's framework of neurotic personality. Tell more and expand.

This is a profoundly tragic event, and your instinct to provide non-judgmental comfort to the parents was appropriate. When parents are faced with a catastrophic trauma like an attempted murder by their child, offering a safe, quiet space and suggesting they keep connected with supportive friends is far more constructive than offering premature analyses or placing blame.

At the same time, your internal reflection touches on deep psychological realities. Can a strict, high-pressure, boundary-violating upbringing drive a 20-year-old on mind-altering substances to attempt parricide? **Yes, extreme structural family dynamics can act as the underlying gunpowder—though it almost always requires a severe chemical trigger (like substance-induced psychosis) to light the fuse.**

Part 1: How Strict Upbringing and Horney's Framework Intersect with Extreme Violence

Karen Horney's psychoanalytic model provides a clear lens through which to understand how severe control, high expectations, and boundary violations deform a growing personality.

1. "Basic Evil" and the Repression of "Basic Hostility"

Horney posited that when parents fail to provide genuine warmth, respect, and emotional autonomy—instead imposing **excessive domination, over-control, perfectionism, or conditional love**—the child experiences what she called **Basic Evil**.

The child's natural response to having their selfhood suppressed is rage, or **Basic Hostility**. However, a dependent child in a high-control household cannot express anger. If they show rage, they fear losing protection, triggering severe punishment, or being cast out. Therefore, the child is forced to **repress that anger deep into the unconscious**, giving rise to **Basic Anxiety**—a constant, underlying feeling of being isolated and helpless in a hostile world.

2. The Idealized Self vs. The Real Self

In high-expectation cultural environments (often prevalent in strict Asian or immigrant families focused on status, academics, and compliance), a child is frequently taught that their **Real Self** (their genuine feelings, flaws, and desires) is unacceptable.

- To be loved or accepted, they must conform to an **Idealized Self**—the "perfect son," the highest achiever, the compliant child.
- The pressure to live up to this ideal creates what Horney termed **The Tyranny of the Shoulds** (*"I should never fail," "I should never disobey"*).
- Beneath a mask of compliance, an ocean of unexpressed hostility and self-hate builds over years.

3. The Sudden Volcanic Explosion

When a person's defensive structure relies on intense compliance or perfectionism, their repressed anger does not disappear; it accumulates. In clinical psychology, this is known as an **Overcontrolled Hostility** pattern: an individual appears mild, obedient, and quiet for years while building massive internal pressure, until a psychological break causes the dam to burst in a catastrophic act of violence.

Part 2: The Catalyst — Substance-Induced Psychosis (LSD)

While systemic family trauma creates the inner pressure cooker, **LSD and heavy drug use fundamentally alter the equation.**

1. **Breakdown of Ego Defenses:** LSD is a potent hallucinogen that destabilizes the ego's psychological defenses. It lowers the barriers that keep repressed unconscious feelings (like buried rage, fear, and paranoia) contained.
2. **Persecutory Psychosis:** Psychedelics, especially when used in high doses or alongside chronic stress/polysubstance abuse, can trigger acute drug-induced psychosis or terror. The user may experience severe paranoia, believing their parents are literal demons, captors, or existential threats trying to destroy them.
3. **Loss of Impulse Control:** Under hallucinogenic psychosis, a person loses the ability to distinguish reality from internal projection. If 15–20 years of suppressed hostility, feeling controlled, and feeling trapped escape all at once while the brain is in a state of chemical terror, the individual may lash out violently in perceived self-defense or desperate liberation.

Part 3: Cultural Context — High Expectations & Boundary Violation

In many traditional Asian family structures, parenting strategies rely heavily on high authority, interdependence, and high achievement expectations. While these dynamics often stem from a place of parental love, sacrifice, and a desire to secure the child's future, they can manifest as psychological pressure when misaligned with a child's needs:

- **Enmeshment and Boundary Violations:** Children may feel they are treated as extensions of the parents' pride or legacy rather than separate individuals. Their private thoughts, career choices, or personal boundaries are often viewed as disrespect.

- **Conditional Acceptance:** The child unconsciously internalizes that they are valued for their **performance and compliance**, not for who they authentically are.
- **Suppression of Emotional Expression:** Conflict and emotional vulnerability are discouraged to maintain family harmony. The child learns that showing distress, sadness, or anger is a personal failure, leaving them with no healthy emotional release valves.

When a young adult in this environment leaves home or reaches a transitional age (around 20), the psychological conflict between **the urge to separate/become an individual** and **the compulsion to obey** can lead to severe identity diffusion, deep depression, or a complete mental breakdown.

Balancing Compassion and Reality

As a listening friend to the parents, it remains crucial to hold space for their grief without assigning direct legal or moral guilt for the tragedy:

- **Multifactorial Reality:** No single variable—be it strict parenting, genetics, neurobiology, or drugs—explains parricide on its own. It is an intersection of long-term psychological vulnerability (the suppressed conflict) and acute neurochemical disruption (the hallucinogens/psychosis).
- **Parental Blindspots:** Parents who practice high-control parenting usually do so out of deeply ingrained cultural conditioning and an anxious desire to protect their child's future. They rarely recognize the quiet emotional damage occurring beneath the surface until a crisis occurs.

Continuing to support them while holding these complex psychological truths in your own mind allows you to offer gentle empathy to the family while acknowledging the real, deep impact of emotional freedom and boundaries in child development.