

The Many Faces of Anger

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Abstract

This article defines and describes seven types of anger: natural, adapted, responsive, rebellious, racket, Pig Parent, and Parent anger. The disowned aspects of the self behind some of these forms of angers are explored, and interventions for treating inappropriate or pathological anger are presented.

This article describes different types of anger expressed by individuals in different ego states (Berne, 1961), the discounted aspects of the self sometimes associated with these forms of anger, and practical interventions for managing and expressing anger and/or the disowned self.

Natural Anger

The most primitive type of anger is biological or natural anger. It is expressed by the Natural Child when the individual feels invaded or abandoned, whether as an infant, an older child, or an adult. This organismic response is a reaction to pain, for example, when one is accidentally stuck with a pin or stepped on. The body reacts without thinking: Pain experienced, angry response expressed. This anger is also a reaction to something being taken away, such as a breast from a hungry baby, some object of value that is stolen from an older child, or a mate or loved one that an adult loses. This angry response is natural, healthy, and part of the survival instinct.

Adaptations and Anger

Infants and toddlers, birth to six years old, react strongly with angry tantrums as they define themselves and are socialized by parents or caretakers. How the environment reacts to this natural anger affects the child's decisions about the value, validity, and effectiveness of this natural body response. Children may adapt by developing socially appropriate but effective ways of expressing their anger. On the other hand, if the response to their anger is punishment or

isolation, they may learn to discount these body reactions. Individuals who have done the latter often say as adults, "I'm never angry," or "We never argue." The disowned self in this type of person usually involves a third-degree issue. Someone who discounts anger at this level—that is, by not feeling or reacting to it—is operating from a severe "I'm not-OK" (my body doesn't matter, I don't matter) or a "You're not-OK" position (no use in reacting either, nothing will change, or things will get worse).

Treatment for this type of pathology is usually long and slow; it needs to build from a trusting therapeutic relationship to memory release and body work. Adult survivors of childhood abuse often disown their rage and dissociate instead. Between the natural angry feelings and the discounted, dissociated self lie great painful memories in the mind, heart, and body. Much has been written in the literature describing and treating these conditions (Olio & Cornell, 1991; Ruppert & Ziff, 1994; Schiff et al., 1975).

Three additional types of adaptation can develop in response to the appropriate or inappropriate socializing of natural anger. In transaction analysis, we call these adapted anger, rebellious anger, or Pig Parent anger.

Adapted Anger

Adapted anger is natural anger that is interrupted by thinking or fear before it is expressed. It can be healthy and appropriate, as in responsive anger (Garcia, 1991), when anger is interrupted by thinking and then expressed in ways that are socially appropriate but still effective in setting boundaries and making contact with others. Or it can be overadapted based on fear of repercussions that might arise from expressing anger. This latter form of over-adapted anger can take many behavioral forms, such as being overly "sweet" or "caretaking" in hopes of not making others angry, which for the person is scary. With this form of adaptation, the energy produced by the natural anger is turned inward, often causing headaches, ulcers, depression, and

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more serious physical ailments. Outwardly it is expressed through passive behaviors such as withdrawal, incapacitation, or violence (Schiff & Schiff, 1971), Schlemiel games (Berne, 1964), and controlling Victim positions (Karpman, 1968): "I'm so sorry I wrecked the car," "I forgot to mail the IRS forms," or "My affair wasn't intended to hurt you."

The discounted self in unhealthy, adapted anger is, of course, the healthy natural self, the real self that can make contact with others, set boundaries, and promote self-preservation. There is a great reservoir of energy that gets discounted by the adaptation. True and honest relationships are almost impossible for this type of person, and authentic contact with others is rare.

Responsive Anger

Healthy adapted anger, or responsive anger (Garcia, 1991), on the other hand, can be very effective in setting boundaries and making contact when others are intruding or alienating themselves. This is also a learned process that requires awareness of the natural, spontaneous reactions in oneself, thinking about them, and letting others know about them through clear statements: "I am angry at you because you accepted an invitation for me without checking with me," or "I get very angry when you ignore me." This type of adapted and responsive anger is essential in caring relationships. People who do not care anymore do not confront.

Rebellious Anger

Rebellious anger can be part of the natural developmental process as children define themselves by getting others to respond to them when they are oppositional: Parent says "do," child says, "no"; parent says, "don't," child does it anyway. This healthy rebellion occurs developmentally at approximately ages two, nine, and fifteen years (Levin, 1981). Appropriate parenting responses involve giving reasons for rules, listening, honoring the child's objections, changing rules if appropriate, and staying firm with the limits as set: "I hear that you don't agree. You are entitled to your opinion, but for now you must follow this rule."

When a child's healthy rebellious anger is not

responded to appropriately, the need to separate and individuate remains incomplete. Such individuals grow up with a great need to argue and initiate verbal fights; they often take polarized positions and insist on win-lose outcomes. In grown-ups, this type of anger becomes racket anger.

Racket Anger

Racket anger is chronic and serves as a cover-up for vulnerability (English, 1971). Beneath this type of anger are disowned fear, incomplete developmental needs, grief, and potency. Confronting racket anger with anger will not work because the other will escalate his or her "I'm OK, You're not-OK" position and the discounted "I'm not-OK, You're OK" fear. Reassuring statements will usually deescalate the situation. After rapport has been reestablished, uncovering the pain, fear, and developmental need can bring about healing and contact. Expressing fear while receiving support can also facilitate the expression of appropriate biological, natural anger when boundaries are invaded or there is a threat of abandonment.

Treating racket rebellious anger requires a reply to hidden messages using mirroring responses (Hendrix, 1990) or empathetic therapeutic responses (Clark, 1991): "You seem to have a completely different point of view on this than I do," or "I hear how strongly you feel about this." In groups, allowing the hassling and pointing out the underlying feelings and needs sometimes helps. Redecision therapy (Goulding & Goulding, 1979) involves confronting the parent, who never listens, and deciding that "my beliefs count even if you don't agree with me."

Pig Parent Anger

Pig Parent anger (Steiner, 1974) is punitive and destructive at the least, and homicidal and suicidal at worst. It is developed in the Child by the child to protect himself or herself from adverse external abuse from outside Pig parents. It operates from a "get-rid-of" mentality, an "I'm OK, You're not-OK" position, and it hides an "I'm not-OK, You're not-OK" despair. Verbally, it says things like, "You'll never amount to anything," "You are a whore," "You're just like your father," and "I hope you

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