

Don't Let Steam Blind You

Anonymous Student

Department of English, Anoka-Ramsey Community College

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Professor Chris McCarthy

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There's a common belief out there that anger is a negative emotion filled with hatred or jealousy, which I empathize with because it can be a large mix of those feelings that downplays your worth. But, there's also another side to anger that's often overlooked, and it's the fact that it's an addictive, pleasurable emotion to feel. Nick Wignall on YouTube (2024), a board-certified clinical psychologist who previously worked as a psychotherapist state that, "In other words, when you are hypercritical of other people, this produces some anger that actually boosts your self-esteem temporarily in the very short-term. [...] it temporarily suppresses the low self-esteem, it makes us feel better, its rewarding, it feels good, so we keep doing things that lead to it, like self-criticism." Wignall deals with patients who suffer from anger management issues and finds that this is one way of how anger feels pleasurable. It creates a feedback loop, where someone first make themselves feel anger through any method such as being a harsh critic and/or being a judgmental individual, which by default assumes that they're above the person that's being criticized. Therefore, it feels good to be angry as their self-esteem has been temporarily boosted in the moment.

On top of that, it goes hand in hand with self-criticism. As someone who can be self-critical, I understand that it makes me feel as if I'm the smart one in the room by recognizing my flaws before, assumingly, anyone else can say them. Wignall (2024) says that, "But here's the thing about consuming a lot of news [news junkie mentioned prior]. It usually makes you really angry. Because what you're doing, you're basically doing some version of 'look at all those idiots out there' [...] what you're implying is 'but I'm so smart/right', and that feels good [...] it superficially makes you feel like you're doing something." He discusses another way of how anger feels pleasurable, and it's how it makes you feel like making a change or difference. In reality though, your emotion is creating a tight hold over you. I see this all the time, particularly

on the internet where there's millions of videos that can make some people feel riled up and write comments that can spur even more emotions, but nothing is actually being done towards the issue. While anger is not a negative but instead pleasurable emotion, it's a dangerous addictive feeling to hold onto, being no different from an addiction to a chemical substance because it superficially creates an idea of change, empowering the sense of control.

On the other hand, how did anger become associated with negativity? Often, people are taught that it's okay to be sad, tired, scared, but it's not okay to be angry. Anger sticks out like a sore thumb on the list of assumedly negative emotions, as it does carry a strong stigma. Rehanna Kauser (2023), a psychologist who studied psychology and counselling psychology, on Phinity Therapy write that, "This is not because it's [anger] a negative emotion, it's because it's how we may have learned to perceive it, due to witnessing uncontrolled anger and not being taught how to regulate it. There is also the issue that when we feel angry, it often doesn't feel good. It can make us feel out of control, because it can consume us, which means that we react to it, rather than take control of it." She explains how we perceived anger growing up impacted how we view anger now. Many people have issues regulating anger, because it's hard to say, "I'm okay" to a feeling that sparked because something made you feel defensive. So, to feel like they're controlling their anger, people react towards it, most likely turning it into a form of aggression. It's important to note that aggression and anger aren't the same thing, as aggression is a behavior that may be caused by feelings of anger. Aggression (physically or verbally) quickly escalates situations and changes people around the aggressor into fight-or-flight instantaneously, even if it's just towards an inanimate object. It creates a negative experience about anger, which is unfortunate as it just comes from lack of knowing how to control the reaction. I have seen people break a variety of things from TVs to walls and they're all aggressive acts that make me feel

unsafe, and the first thought that comes into my mind is that, “they’re angry and risky to be around”. Then other times, I have seen people be upset, but they manage to regulate their anger instead of reacting to it, and it makes me think, “they’re angry, but it’s okay to be around them”. Anger is like a scary beast, but that’s only cause it’s made to seem like so. It’s not as scary as many would make it out to be, because it can be regulated appropriately if the emotion wasn’t avoided a lot of the time.

Consequently, people may seek out venting to help regulate their anger. Sigmund Freud, a famous Austrian psychologist who founded psychoanalysis used the idea of catharsis on his patients, where they let unexpressed feelings out. It was part of the foundation of his psychoanalytic theory and gained rise in popularity; however, science has since then proved that the idea was not achieving what it’s supposed to. Venting is a widely used way to relieve a person from “negative feelings”, as short-term, it does make them feel better. This can be compared to how one can criticize someone and feel better after that because it feels pleasurable. Venting typically keeps the anger fueled since rumination and aggression creates more angry feelings. In Psychology Partners Group (2023), whom are a group of psychotherapists and clinical psychologists, they describe that, “When you vent, you’re essentially magnifying your problems, and you’re making them seem bigger than they are. This can cause you to dwell on your issues, and you may find yourself feeling more anxious and overwhelmed as a result.” They make a point of why venting is a double-edged sword in expressing your emotions, especially to anger. While venting, keep in mind that there’s likely only one side to the story that’s known and that problem is now being magnified, potentially causing some close-mindedness to the situation. When a problem is made bigger than what it should have been, it can add more to the load than what it previously had, adding fuel to the fire. I have personal experience with venting, because I

realized that I'm making myself in the story/situation seem like the victim who got wronged the most, making it biased towards my perspective. My memory is going to remember the strongest of emotions and that's why it'll keep the flames going when it should've died out. It's great to express how you feel to those you are close with to build a sense of connection and empathy, but venting can only do so much and in due time go against you. Anger should be managed with other methods at hand to keep the energy poured towards matters that isn't going to keep someone feeling angry longer than necessary.

Nevertheless, if venting often doesn't help, then shouldn't ignoring anger be a solution? It's quite the opposite of a solution, because ignoring or avoiding anger is an option people do when they don't want to confront strong emotions. By pretending it's not there, they aren't allowing themselves to accept that's how they feel in attempt to control it, but as a reminder, emotions aren't controllable. They happen and it's normal to feel it as they pass. In American Psychology Association (2023), a large professional organization of psychologists, they state that, "Unexpressed anger can create other problems. It can lead to pathological expressions of anger, such as passive-aggressive behavior [...] People who are constantly putting others down, criticizing everything, and making cynical comments haven't learned how to constructively express their anger." By being unable to express anger appropriately, many negative behaviors take its stead. Passive-aggressive behavior reveal itself through small actions leaking in many aspects in our daily lives. If prolonged, this functions similarly to holding a grudge and therefore keeps anger lingering through continuous criticism and cynicism. It's why it's important to not let anger bottle up, as tempting as it is to say, "it doesn't matter", it leads to much worse consequences.

Furthermore, there's a popular thought that feeling angry is someone's true version, or their real "no-filter" self, as it gives way to being critical and cynical. Yet, when a person is angry, their rational judgments are delayed, making their opinions or actions be more impulsive and heated than they'd usually be. Kendra Cherry (2024), a psychosocial rehabilitation specialist and psychology educator, on Verywellmind mentions that, "When you get angry, the amygdala [fundamental role in fear/anger] and prefrontal cortex [judgment/reasoning/self-regulation] are in conflict. Your amygdala is screaming that there's a threat and you need to respond RIGHT NOW, while the prefrontal cortex urges you to calm down and think things through. The problem is that the amygdala has a bit of a head start." Your emotions alert the brain that there's a sense of danger and attacks first before your judgment due to the prefrontal cortex being, "among the most recent evolutionary additions to our brains" (Cherry, 2024). Anger forms when you feel that something wronged, so your survival and protection becomes the highest priority. Hence, an individual's "no-filter" self is their mental state constantly being ready to fight back for their survival, because something in them feels threatened. To allow yourself time for the prefrontal cortex to catch up with the amygdala, reasoned judgments can come along and deal with anger appropriately instead of letting it go wild, believing it's aiding your convictions, and foster anger more.

To add on, having time to reflect on what made you mad is an important step of the process. Oftentimes, people may say that "XYZ made me mad today", when really it was their actions that made them mad. This difference is what makes a notable change to your mind. In Mental Health Academy (2023), an online learning provider for mental health professionals, they state that, "We can choose whether or not we let someone else's behavior make us happy, sad, or something else, but we often think and talk about it as if anger is caused directly by others. With

the undiscerning listener, an angry person thus gets to use anger as an excuse for unacceptable behavior.” When anger is put towards the individual instead of the action, hatred can form for the individual when communication could’ve been the solution. An uninvolved listener may not know who you’re talking about when you say, “XYZ made me mad”, assuming that, “XYZ must be bad, then”, pushing the actions of that individual to their being. While someone’s actions can be what defines them, there are scenarios where looking through the situation and trying to be understanding of why someone did what they did helps ease anger. If possible, communicating to the person about their action can let them be aware that what they did made you angry or upset. These solutions help regulate anger over being critical and having a grudge against a person, because going on that route is, in a way, you choosing to be angry. The differentiation from “XYZ made me angry” to “what XYZ did made me angry” not only helps anger but improves interpersonal relationships as well since hidden grudges can ultimately ruin your mindset.

In the end, anger can release a great amount of behaviors and actions, both positive and negative, and even though emotions aren’t controllable, what actions you choose are. It’s a perplex emotion where it can be a pleasurable thing to feel, and the negative stigma it suffers from doesn’t help its label as “bad” when there’s a lot to this single emotion. Avoiding anger, alongside venting, oddly enough creates more anger, which can lead to false ideas of what anger is because we’re all still trying to figure out our own emotions. We may even define it as how we are because it messes up our mindset when anger is prolonged, since we can become apathetic to the people around us. If there’s only one lesson I can take, it’s the fact that letting yourself cool down in a heated moment feels more better and free than continuing to be angry. It’s not easy to do that, though, because from my experience my ego doesn’t want me to let go of anger, but I have to remember that I am not anger, and I shouldn’t let it control me. Nothing will change the

fiery red nature of anger, but I think that's the simple beauty of it. It's a powerful emotion that once regulated, can be used for a greater development of our perspective on the world and amongst ourselves.

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