



Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion

Carol Tavris

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"This landmark book" (*San Francisco Chronicle*) dispels the common myths about the causes and uses of anger—for example, that expressing anger is always good for you, that suppressing anger is always unhealthy, or that women have special "anger problems" that men do not. Dr. Carol Tavis expertly examines every facet of that fascinating emotion—from genetics to stress to the rage for justice.

Fully revised and updated, *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion* now includes:

- * A new consideration of biological politics: Should testosterone or PMS excuse rotten tempers or aggressive actions?
- * The five conditions under which anger is likely to be effective—and when it's not.
- * Strategies for solving specific anger problems—chronic anger, dealing with difficult people, repeated family battles, anger after divorce or victimization, and aggressive children.

Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion Details

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From Reader Review Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion for online ebook

April says

If you want to know the real deal about anger- this book will REVEAL all! :) Very insightful- talks about the social aspects of anger, which I had never thought about. It gave me a new and bigger perspective which I love to to get.

K says

Certainly this book spoke to me as a therapist, someone who tries to help people who are dealing with strong feelings of all sorts but frequently anger. But it spoke to me on a personal level as well. I've been the unfortunate recipient of angry outbursts from people who seemed to believe that their feeling enraged justified their attacking me, and that their "need" to release their anger trumped my need for, well, basic respect and courtesy, to say the least. And over the course of my life, I've experienced things that have caused me to feel resentful, and it's been hard for me to let go of some of those feelings despite my intellectual understanding that holding on to these grudges was doing me no good.

So I picked up this book with a great deal of interest. I've enjoyed Carol Tavris's writing on other occasions (e.g., *Mistakes Were Made But Not By Me: Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, And Hurtful Acts*), and was eager to hear what she would say about anger. I wasn't disappointed.

Tavris begins by pointing out that we, as a society, have a legacy of ambivalence about anger. Having once believed in ideals of stoicism and suffering in silence, current popular thinking is that expressing anger in its full force is the only way to discharge it; otherwise, it will supposedly come out in other, more insidious forms. Beliefs abound, even among therapists, that expressing anger increases self-esteem (not true, according to research findings), that it's a necessary part of resolving conflicts (in fact, conflicts can be solved without anger), that the positive consequences of expressing anger outweigh the negative ones (actually, expressing anger often makes things worse, not better), and that venting leads to positive feelings (again, research findings beg to differ).

Tavris then describes both causes and expressions of anger across a variety of cultures, with surprising ramifications for rethinking our own views of anger. She discusses the physiology of anger, examining the conflicting evidence that anger has physical causes and the more convincing evidence that our own beliefs and interpretations of events are more relevant to whether or not we feel angry. She adeptly challenges popular theories such as "depression is anger turned inward" (something I still frequently hear from colleagues), and "Type A" individuals are more prone to heart disease (a highly simplistic and somewhat illusory correlation when one examines the research carefully).

In what may be the most relevant chapter, Tavris debunks popular views of catharsis. While some people report that they find aggressive behavior to feel tension-reducing, in fact acting aggressively frequently inflames one's anger rather than exorcising it. It also has the additional effect of provoking and upsetting the person you're in conflict with, thus exacerbating rather than mitigating whatever disagreement caused your anger.

And a big ouch moment for therapists like myself -- talking out your anger with someone else can actually make things worse, not better. Talking to others endlessly about how victimized you feel by the other person simply gives you the opportunity to rehearse and solidify your view that they're 100% wrong and you're 100% right. While talking about your anger with the goal of solving the problem can be a necessary early step, continually venting about how rotten the other person was/is simply entrenches you in your anger with them. Though it may seem counter-intuitive, well-intentioned friends and therapists who want to help someone who's suffering would do better to gradually (and kindly, of course) set limits on venting rather than offering unlimited sympathy. Similarly, Tavis brings convincing evidence that parents should set appropriate limits on excessive tantrums and sibling rivalry rather than tolerating them unconditionally based on the assumption that they represent healthy anger expression in children.

Does this mean we shouldn't express our anger at all? No, says Tavis. Sometimes it's right, and constructive, to express your anger. But first, the anger needs to be directed at the appropriate party. Second, the anger needs to be perceived as restoring justice and creating appropriate consequences. Third, the anger must either change the person who hurt you or provide you with new insights. Fourth, the recipient of your anger must be able to hear what you're saying and respond appropriately. Finally, you need to be safe from retaliation by the other person. Under those conditions, says Tavis, expressing your anger is helpful rather than harmful. Of course, it requires work and responsibility on your part to make sure that many of those conditions are met. And some of them are not in your control. Not to suggest, of course, that silent sulking and passive aggression are preferable to venting. But distracting yourself and calming down is a necessary first step before deciding whether, and how, to address your anger.

Tavis then discusses some of the stresses of modern life which have been implicated in anger -- frustration, crowds, road rage, etc. According to Tavis, the "mean drunk" is probably someone who was angry to begin with, not someone who can fairly blame alcohol for their behavior. Overall, while various stimuli can make us more susceptible to anger, self-awareness can go a long way when it comes to preventing and offsetting the consequences of these stimuli.

It seems that, notwithstanding popular gender stereotypes, both men and women are equally likely to experience and express anger in similar ways. Further, marital anger is a layered and complex condition -- often a combination of contrasting backgrounds, unrealistic expectations, petty issues taking on greater importance because they occur in a context of multiple unresolved differences, dissatisfaction with one's role in the marriage, different styles of anger expression, and many more. As I've said to many a couple, the only way to solve this is for each person to stop trying to change the other and accept responsibility for their own functioning in the relationship. While Tavis's views of spousal abuse are different from the ones I learned (I was always taught that the abuser is responsible for their abusive behavior, and the abusee is responsible for keeping themselves safe), I'm inclined to trust the validity of her statements given her general copiousness of research.

After a chapter on anger as a step toward social justice, Tavis ends by sharing suggestions for "Living with Anger and Moving Beyond It." Tavis discusses the need to employ cognitive techniques and humor to help ourselves reevaluate situations and turn our focus toward self-management and solutions rather than venting. She recognizes that some events can't be reevaluated and advises us to pick our battles and sometimes work toward acceptance rather than solving or changing things. Tavis discusses the problem of "The Difficult Person" (who doesn't have at least one in their lives?), and the importance of taking responsibility for your part of your interactions with them. She talks about divorce, and the need to move on afterward even if your ex was legitimately a jerk. She provides tips for parents of aggressive children, emphasizing the importance of consistent limit-setting and catching them being good. And she talks about when you're the victim of someone else's wrong behavior -- the need to decide to stop punishing the other person by being angry, the

need to share feelings with the goal of making sense of them rather than endless venting, taking action to help others, trying to see the other person's perspective, etc.

Long and detailed though this review was, there's a lot more in the book. An excellent book on an important topic. Five stars.

Nina Bradley says

One of the most comprehensive and illuminating books I've read on anger. This isn't self-help, but there is so much helpful information that it might as well be. I got this from the library and found myself over and over wanting to highlight passages. I resisted that urge, but I WILL be buying this book so I can mark up my own copy.

Jennifer says

Review to come.

Deepak Rawat says

It's somewhere between a psychology and self-help type, more inclined towards the first one. By being one, it gives an insight of "why" anger and that it's like any other emotion, and this changes the whole perspective of anger.

Overall I liked the book. Key take away for me was to evaluate if it's worth getting angry for which you are getting angry.

One thing which I found is that a large coverage is given to spouse/partner topics, as compared to many other anger raising topics. That's where somewhere it looks repetitive and I gave it a 4.

David Becker says

Really well-reasoned and original look at one of the basic human emotions. By thoroughly separating the feeling of anger from its expression, Tavis blows up a lot of common wisdom about the supposed danger of suppressing anger and comes up with common-sense guidelines for knowing what to do with your anger.

Uriha says

in our culture that sees Anger as means to "Act out" and to "suck it up" this book shows that there are healthy

ways to express that anger. After reading the first chapter of showing how other cultures see and feel about anger, i wondered how "civilized" we were

Aaron Polish says

Its about feminists instead of anger, in which I highly say, no good. Still reading it but on the last chapter. Don't know why she has brought up women anger if both sexes gets angry. She seems to be studing more about how ladies cannot control their anger over men. I give this book thumbs down for jumping from what the title is supposed to be called. The last chapter was about angry kids, in which I'm single, so why would I care, good luck.

Braden Canfield says

I read this while preparing a class on violence. This is an extremely well researched, comprehensive and useful book. I particularly appreciated her analysis of how the misinformation of Freud's theories and the misunderstanding of Darwin's theories affected our cultural views regarding how anger works. She also does a fine job of exploring cultural contexts.

Faizan says

Incredible! Explores anger and its expression in multiple contexts -- feminism, relationships/marriages, children, cultural expressions. A fantastic, illuminating book that debunks many of the commonly held views on anger and shows how it is not 'intrinsic' but defined by society and culture. Anybody interested in anger and agression, whether excess of or lack of, should read this.

Monica says

I have to read this book again and take notes this time. It is definitely enlightening and should be a must read to all of us. It seems that as grown-ups we have to be responsible people without having PMS or alcohol or whatever to blame for the fog that covers so conveniently our brains sometimes :)

Allison Thurman says

Library

Monica says

excellent book on the misconception of anger in society.

Sandy123 says

First I want to state that this is not a self-help book. Instead, it is a compilation and analysis of the research on anger. The book was published in 1989, but the topics and references still seem relevant. I enjoyed the beginning chapters in which research studies and findings were presented, as well as the comparisons of social norms of anger in different cultures. Overall, it was an interesting read.

♥ Ibrahim ♥ says

Such a charming book from an author who has such a charming spirit! I love her sense of humor, and also the way she writes and words things. I wish she didn't stretch things too long, but she is still fun to listen to and never boring; it is that she processes things like a woman does, and in the detail God resides. Some of her views of the Bible gave me the impression that she, like many Americans, was raised by Christian fundamentalists and reacting against that angry God, as I myself do with her. I don't believe there is a quick fix for anger issues. I just have to be reminded by myself, by the Spirit, etc. that anger will cost me a lot and the price can be stomach reflux, an increase in blood pressure, etc. I have been helped by the writings of Thich, as well as some other Buddhists, in dealing with anger and I recommend him highly.
