

Anger revisited: The misunderstood emotion

Some believe anger is a secondary emotion which only surfaces in response to another feeling as when someone is frightened or startled and then responds with anger in protective mode. Others posit the primary presence of anger as an emotion.

Ask someone if they are angry and many times they will say, who me? No I'm not angry; despite outward signals letting others know that the individual is in a heightened state of agitation. At times people will not admit they are angry believing that to do so is somehow an admission of failure or an inability to behave in an acceptable manner.

In general terms anger is an emotion that many are unwilling to acknowledge or express because in our society anger is perceived as a negative emotion. Actually it is not anger that is negative rather the way people choose to express the anger, often in inappropriate, destructive ways leading to a host of problems and consequences. There are individuals whose emotional barometer goes from "zero to sixty" in just seconds. A public awareness of many such explosive episodes in the past decade or so contributed to a relatively new mental health diagnosis called intermittent explosive disorder

The other extreme is when people do not express or acknowledge their anger, and instead internalize it. Anger is a potent emotion with energy attached and failure to express anger can fuel internal processes leading to increased stress, depression or physical concerns, including ulcers as the energy redirects inward and debilitates the body.

Anger is beneficial for humans as it serves as an increased energy source both alerting and arming the individual who may need to protect themselves or loved ones.

Anger management specialists propose that we become aware of our physiological warning signs that we are getting angry; these signals can include increased heart rate, clenching of fists, muscle twitches, etc. By becoming aware at the beginning stages of anger we are able to identify and address it while it is in a more manageable form.

In our society feelings are not embraced and we are not taught to honor and recognize our various emotions as part of the human experience. In general terms men are taught to be competitive even aggressive and anger is not an unusual occurrence, while women as young girls often get the covert message that to be angry is not lady like.

In a well rounded emotionally balanced society men would be able to embrace sadness and cry when it is appropriate to do so and women would be able to be angry without negative connotations. The range of human feelings are like an artist's paint set filled with all colors. Being able to recognize and embrace all the various feelings leads to a more complete, fulfilling life experience just as a painting filled with many colors.