

Angry womxn*

*all creatures welcome



Let's start with a song text:

“Do you ever feel angry? Are you paralyzed by your anger?”

Do you feel yourself with butterflies in your stomach a lot?

Do you get headaches? Are you really frustrated?

Do you ever get to the point where you're gonna blow up, and you're afraid that if you blow up, you're going to blow away all your friends and all your co-workers?

Chances are, all of this behavior is a symptom of the fact that you're not expressing your anger.

We can assertively express our anger if we handle our anger assertively.

**We complain and complain and complain,
'I'm angry.' So what do we do?**

**'Am I really sorry? Did I really do something bad?
Why am I apologizing? I don't think I'm always
wrong, do you?'"**

**Lyrics: Evolution Control Committee
„I want a cookie“**

→ Listen to the entire song here:
[https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=fMQFqulPhLs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fMQFqulPhLs)

Who I am

- Web front-end developer, 15+ years
- Debian Developer (emeritus) - privacy packaging team
- Currently working with Nairobi based MAMA Network (reproductive health in sub-saharan Africa)
- Mediator
- Illustrator (“How the Internet Really Works”)

→ My website
<https://curlybracket.net>

Why talk about anger?

Anger is a strong feeling.

Like every feeling, it should not be ignored.

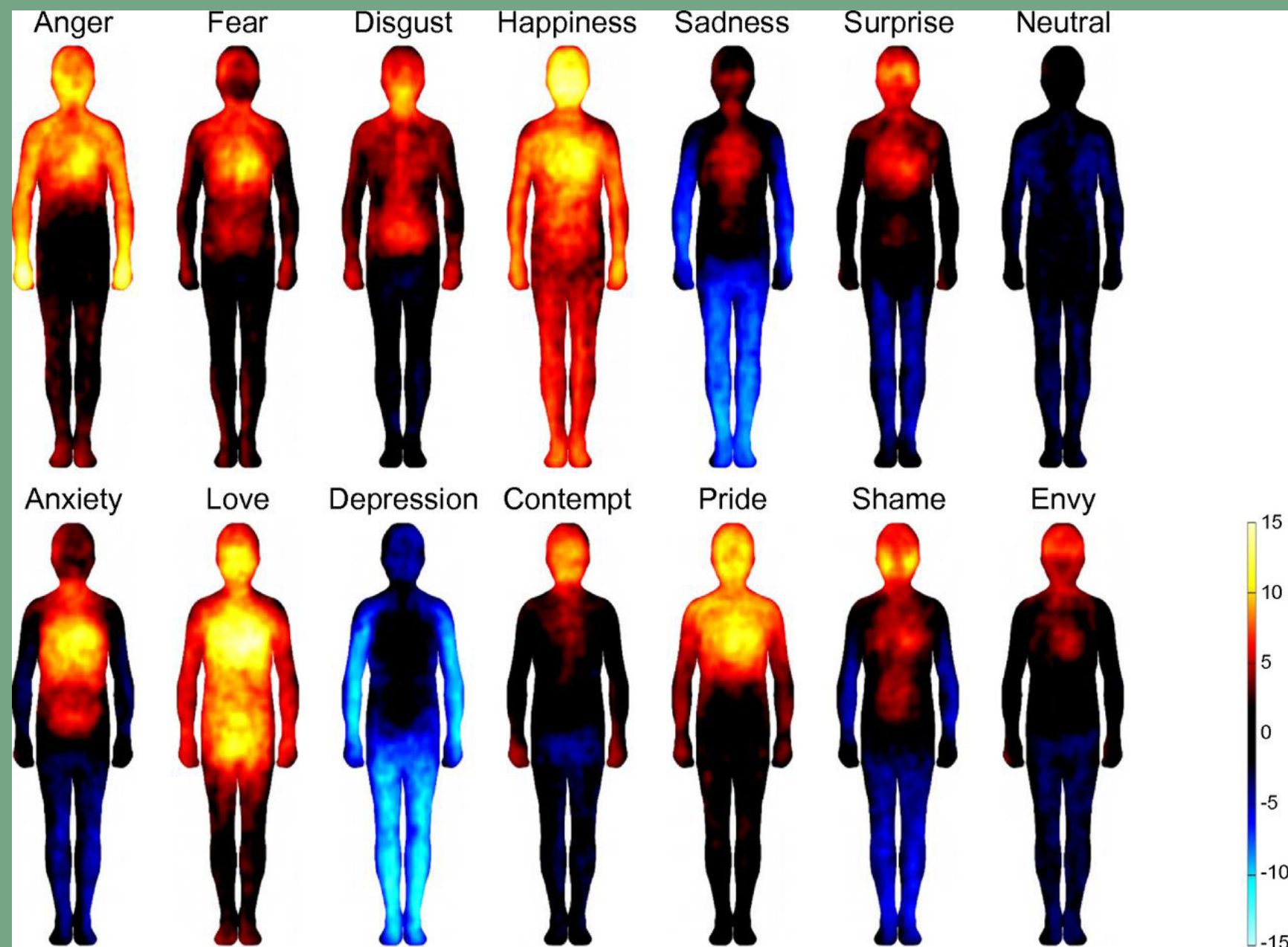
Feeling anger is different from aggression and rage
- acting out anger by being aggressive and verbally
or physically violent.

It's normal and it is often somewhat appropriate to
be angry.

However, specifically womxn* learn to suppress an-
ger and to consider it as an inappropriate feeling.

What is anger?

An emotional state, a feeling in the body: heat, clenching teeth or fists, racing heart, tension.



→ image source: Bodily Maps of Emotions, Lauri Nummenmaa, Enrico Glerean, Riitta Hari, and Jari K. Hietanen, 2014 <https://www.pnas.org/content/111/2/646>

We have many reasons to be angry, for example:

- Being dismissed
- Being treated unfairly
- Being discriminated against
- Having our boundaries violated
- Needing to work with different rules and expectations than men. (At work we have social interactions: privileges and social structures of wider society carry over to the workplace.
- Being paid less than a man in the same position.
- Being seen as a sexual object or sexually harassed in the street or in the workplace.
- Carrying the mental load
- and so on...

→ The idea of social interactions in the workplace comes from Kim Lai Trinh's talk about code reviews (in French): <https://paris-web.fr/2019/conferences/autocritique-de-la-revue-de-code-bienveillante.php>

→ Comic about the mental load <https://english.emmaclit.com/2017/05/20/you-shouldve-asked/>

People more prone to discrimination may experience anger more often.

But anger is also unhealthy, increases blood pressure and eats a lot of energy.

Anger is a super power

Thesis: Anger gives us the amount of energy we need to change a situation.*

But how can we deal with it well?

*** Beware: we are still talking about feeling anger, not about aggression or rage.**

What happens when we express feelings of anger?

When we express that we feel anger, we are often met with one of the following reactions:

- Tone policing
- Gaslighting

Tone policing

Specifically when womxn* express anger:

- People tell them that they are being “aggressive”, “explosive”, or “violent”.
- Try to dismiss their disagreement or concerns: “If you had said it more nicely, I would maybe listen to you”.
- Invalidate anger through stereotypes, for example the “Angry black woman” stereotype

→ Comic explaining tone policing <https://www.robot-hugs.com/2016/01/tone-policing/>

→ Read more about „angry black woman“ stereotype https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angry_black_woman

Gaslighting

- minimizing: “you’re exaggerating”, “you don’t give me/us the benefit of doubt”, “it’s not that bad”, “you’re too pessimistic”
- denial: „this is not true“, “you’re crazy“, “you are the only one who believes this but everyone else thinks differently“
- victim blame or perpetrator/victim reversal: “I’m blameless“, “this is all your fault“

→ Read more and also why this happens <https://www.rewriting-the-rules.com/conflict-break-up/gaslighting-and-consent/>

Cultural perceptions



→ Cartoon by Judy Horacek
<https://horacek.com.au/>

Anger in organizations and workplaces

Oftentimes in toxic environments, actual systemic or structural issues are being individualized or not addressed:

→ On individualizing systemic problems and how this leads an entire generation to burn-out <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/annehelenpetersen/millennials-burnout-generation-debt-work>

- “She is just overreacting because she is overly sensitive.”
- “He is just frustrated because he recently broke up with his partner.”
- “They just have a burnout because they have no good work space.”
- “We are not a racist/sexist organization, simply historically roles high up in the organization have been occupied by white men.”
- “It’s not our fault that there is a hierarchy in our group, we didn’t want to be the bosses, we are simply working more than everyone else.”

→ Read more about gaslighting in organizations and workplaces <https://www.rewriting-the-rules.com/conflict-break-up/gaslighting-and-consent/>

→ Sarcastic guide to derailing conversations <http://www.derailingfordummies.com/>

Why do we stay stuck in broken systems?

People who have less privilege or rank, people who have been socialized to “please others” and to “be perfect” have often not learnt to trust their own feelings.

If we do not recognize and defend our own value, we are prone to stay stuck in broken systems, or unbearable and unjust situations.

→ Comic explaining privilege <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/the-wireless/373065/the-pencils-word-on-a-plate>

→ Rank explained <http://www.knockalla.net/rank-how-power-and-privilege-affect-our-relationships/>

→ On “Please others”, “be perfect” (Taibi Kahler’s drivers) and cooperation in free software projects <https://www.enricozini.org/blog/2020/debian/doing-things-together/>

→ Qualities that keep you stuck in sick systems <http://www.issendai.com/psychology/sick-systems-qualities-that-keep-you-stuck.html>

Thoughts or questions

before we do some exercises together?

This is a workshop format. The idea is to split up to breakout rooms and discuss with each other. The groups will be tiny, 2 or 3 people.

The discussion itself will only happen in the breakout room, none of it will be shared publicly.

Share with others only what you feel comfortable sharing.

If you are uncomfortable, feel free to say so or to leave the breakout room early.

Exercise 1: How does your anger manifest?

- Think about a situation when you felt angry. How did you react? Did your anger burst out? Did you become aggressive or violent? Did you suppress your anger? Did you have replacement feelings such as anxiety or a panic attack? Did you leave?
- Are you able or not to connect to your gut feelings, feel their intensity, and name them before you get really angry?
- Are there other, potentially stronger, feelings that your anger might be covering?

10 minutes:

Each person may talk for 5 minutes and then listen to the other person for 5 minutes.

→ Intensity of feelings <https://loveuncommon.com/2019/09/20/taking-your-emotional-temperature/>

→ Anger iceberg <http://www.clai-renewton.co.za/my-articles/making-sense-of-anger.html>

Welcome back!

I hope it was insightful!

Does anyone want to share something?

For the next exercise, the discussion will happen in the break out room, as before. You'll be asked to take notes, that you can, or not, share afterwards.

Exercise 2: How can we express disagreement and anger in a way that it can be heard?

Think about one or two situations when you felt angry in the workplace or in other circumstances. When dealing with your anger and the object of your anger, which strategies (before, during or after getting angry) have proven to be successful in the past? Please take notes!

15 minutes:

You might want to do this exercise as an exchange, a conversation.

Welcome back!

If you like, would you share some of your successful strategies with everyone?

Conclusively...

What would you do differently today or in the future compared to how you have dealt with your anger in the past?

Which other strategies to deal with anger could be appropriate and successful specifically in a work or organizational environment?

Would you like to discuss or say anything else about this topic here and now?

Recommendations

Individually:

- Learn to recognize your feelings. Familiarize.
- Work on your self confidence, trust your feelings.
- Work on expressing your boundaries. If needed, learn sentences by heart so they become more natural to be expressed.
- Self-compassion meditation, specifically “Soften, soothe, allow” and “Compassionate friend”
- Physical exercises to help relieve stress
- Work with the inner child
- Learn non-violent communication or similar

Couples/Families:

- Peace treaty (Thich Nhat Han)

→ Self-compassion meditation in English: <https://self-compassion.org/category/exercises/> or <https://chrisgermer.com/meditations/>. In German: <https://achtsamkeitundselbstmitgefuehl.de/downloads/> (Umgang mit schwierigen Gefühlen, Wohlfühlort mit Besuch eines wohlmeinenden Gefährten)

→ Physical exercises <https://capacitar.org/capacitar-emergency-kit/>

→ Peace Treaty <https://honeylocustsangha.weebly.com/peace-treaty-a-practice-for-dealing-with-anger.html>

→ Hell yeah, self care <https://rewriting-the-rules.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/HellYeah-SelfCare.pdf>

Individually:

- Get out of the situation, get some distance
- Write things down, order your thoughts
- Communicate “this makes me angry”
- Work on yourself to understand that you matter

Collectively:

- Accept that conflicts come up whenever people come together.
- Ask for help, eg involve a mediator.
- Talk in a group, for example using the “Gespinsterunde” model (Radical Therapy)
- Acknowledge that people sometimes disagree
- If the anger is an utterance of a systemic issue, a successful strategy is to feel solidarity, feel that the anger is shared.

→Gespinsterunde (round of paranoid fantasies) and Grollrunde (anger round): https://fort-frauen.de/images/Texte/Radical_Therapy_Artikel_in_englisch.pdf

→ The points on this page were shared by participants of the workshop

Thank you for your participation!

Feedback:
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