

# Science Explains Why "Getting Mad" is a Good Thing For Us

Observations Which Seem to Prove That Anger Helps Everybody to Learn, Work and Succeed, and That Old Maxims About Keeping Your Angry Passions Down Are Erroneous

YOUR child's habit of "getting mad" is not, as many people have supposed, a detestable fault that should be stamped out at any cost. It is, on the contrary, a most essential quality, without which he can never be of much value to himself and society.

Never try to destroy your child's temper, for that is one of his most valuable mental possessions. This is the deliberate conclusion of science after a careful investigation. The latest views on this subject are contained in a book entitled "The Psychology and Pedagogy of Anger," by Roy Franklin Richardson, Professor of Education, University of Maine (published by Warwick & York, Baltimore).

In this book Professor Richardson summarizes his own views upon anger, his reports gathered from a large number of students, and the views of many other psychologists and scientists.

These observations show that anger was the first step in civilization, for when an individual first got thoroughly "mad" with another and took a large share of the means of subsistence he became a leader of mankind. Without anger against some injustice there has never been a concerted movement for human progress.

Anger increases power and efficiency of the individual in mind and body. In all attacks of anger there are three stages: (1) The fore-period of resentment and diminished self-respect; (2) the period of violent excitement; (3) the period of reaction, which may be brief and pass off frequently with a pleasant feeling or may be indefinitely prolonged. It is the prolonged, not violent reaction, that leads to the greatest human achievements.

The poet Byron wonderfully comprehended the potentialities of the lingering after-period of anger, now explained by science, when he wrote:

"There never yet was human power That could evade, if unforgiven, The patient search and vigil long Of him that treasures up wrong."

The observations of the psychologists are confirmed by the discoveries of physical scientists, who have found that anger causes the ductless and other glands to pour certain substances into the circulation which enormously increase the strength and resistance of the body. Thus, soldiers are enabled by fighting anger to perform acts which appear superhuman, as Dr. G. W. Crile has shown in his remarkable study of fighting men in the late war.

Professor Richardson's observations are almost entirely concerned with showing the value of anger in ordinary civilized life.

"With its running mate—fear—anger has played an important role in religion," says the professor. "The curse prayer of backward religion is motivated by resentment. A deity with an irascible temper like that of the ancient Hebrews suggests the role of righteous indignation in the discipline of the soul."

"Plato held that anger is at the foundation of the organization of the State. Professor Ribot has suggested that it is at the basis of justice."

Henri Bergson, the great living French philosopher, has written: "No society can reach civilization unless throughout its members there exists the nervous organization which supports the sentiment of anger and hostility against criminals, and this physical organization is the foundation of what we call our moral code."

President Stanley Hall, William James and Professor Dewey suggest that much of the best work of the world and the great deeds of valor have been done by anger.

President Hall says: "A large part of education is to teach men to be angry aright—it should be the aim of pedagogy to show how the powers of the soul should be utilized—man has powers of resentment which should be harnessed and allowed to do good and profitable work. We should keep alive our emotions and allow them to do our labor."

Many psychologists find that anger is most valuable and necessary as the means of strengthening the will to action. Upon this President Hall says: "At some point in the course of evolution anger comes in as a stimulant to aggressive will action. Some favored individual first attained the power of getting mad, violently attacked his fellows, and so attained sustenance in the struggle for food."

Professor Richardson expresses the idea that anger is very valuable to a child thus:

"Ethics has at times advocated the elimination of anger as if it were a noxious product. From a pedagogical view it should be cultivated and excited aright. The familiar moral exhortations, 'Let not the sun go down on your wrath,' 'Love your enemies and do good to those that hate you,' and others like them, are in accord with some satisfactory individual reactions to anger; but their universal application would not always serve the purpose of ethics."

"A good, healthy resentment is, at times, a good thing and should be kept alive. The emotion, if it works, must not die out too satisfactorily at the cost of real effort. There should be a working residuum for the time when it is needed."

Anger is said to be necessary for a school teacher. Professor Coolidge says: "No teacher can maintain discipline unless his scholars feel that in some manner he will resent a breach of it."

A fit of anger often clears the mind and allows it to perform all its functions with new energy.

A student, resentful of a criticism on the value of his work, reports that his resentment stimulated him to increased, determined action and intensified endeavor for several months in order to show the offender he was wrong. Many other subjects made similar reports to Professor Richardson. One reported that because the parents of a young girl did not consider him bright enough to marry her, he went to college and became a very successful student, always under the influence of the resentment.

For these and many other reasons the author concludes that a "too soft pedagogy," which heals over too soon the injury to self-feelings, is a mistake. The teacher should get angry and provoke the pupil to an irascible response in order to stimulate him to an intensified endeavor for a lengthy period. Attention and association processes are intensified by anger. But it must be remembered that anger in the exciting stage and at a situation too remote from the problem interferes with mental work.

It was learned that skillful telegraph operators worked best when angry, but the inexperienced operator was less efficient. Michael Angelo is said to have produced his grandest sculpture when in a state of irascible temper. The mass of mankind are sluggish and need a hearty resentment as a stimulant. There is no tonic like anger to a strong nature capable of bearing it.

The boy who has not the capacity for anger should be deliberately taught it by some means, according to this scientific investigator. Many a good intellect has gone to waste because it lacked the powers of resentment necessary for the most efficient work. Goethe said:

"With most of us the requisite intensity of passion is not forthcoming without an element of resentment."

It cannot, of course, be asserted that all anger is useful, for the emotion is often a wild outburst of brutality. In order that anger may be valuable to society it must react on a mind that is clever enough to employ it usefully and intelligently. The anger of an idiot or immoral person is not valuable.

Most of the students describing how they felt when angered revealed the very curious fact that the after effects were often pleasant.

"I found myself," one reported, "saying cutting remarks as if speaking directly to X, and I planned a course of behavior toward him that I considered would humiliate him. I finally ended by imagining myself kicking him down the street, telling him I wanted no more to do with him. The imagery of this act was pleasant. I felt victorious. X was imagined as penitent."

The imagery of the pugnacious attack in some form is quite a common characteristic of the mental reaction to anger. It occurs after a period of restraint when there seems nothing else to be done; imagination and fancy appear at such a crisis and assume the role of a substitute for hostile tendencies which the subject has controlled.

Another student subject, G, describing his reaction to anger, said:

"My first impulse was to kick X. The restraint was accompanied by motor images of kicking him, followed by the image of his being hurt in the face."

Student G, describing his anger, said: "I felt as if I wanted to bite or hit something."

B reported a case where he had been humiliated by some boys along the street. The tendency to anger at the time was controlled, but as he passed on the emotion arose with greater intensity.

"I imagined myself beating one of the boys," he said. "I gave him several good punches; he had no show at all. 'I came out victor and was enjoying it all.'"

It is a common observation that an angry man usually swears or uses some kind of violent language. Some persons have the idea that this swearing is a wilful depravity that only a low type of man would indulge in, but these scientists show that it is natural—almost a necessity—to use violent language in anger.

"Swearing, grumbling, invective, quarrelling, interjectional obloquy, etc., are very common signs of anger. The results would very strongly suggest that anger—

The Assassination of Charlotte Corday by Marat Illustrates Two of the Wonderful Results of Anger. (1) It Gave a Gentle Woman Power to Kill; and (2) It Aroused Popular Feeling That Ended France's Reign of Terror. The Throats of the Mob Shown Here Were Only a Passing Outburst That Was Followed by Deep-seated Popular Resentment Against Marat's Associates. From Painting by J. J. Weerts.



Anger Is the One Passion That Causes the Same Facial Expression in All Races and Stages of Civilization.

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rarely, if ever—occurs without its vocal expression in some manner; if not by direct vocalization, then by inner speech or vocomotor imagery.

"Introspection of slight emotions or anger lasting momentarily shows that their most marked sensation is one of tightening of the throat muscles."

"Defamatory language" or mild swearing is common with all the persons studied while in the privacy of their own rooms when the restraint is off.

"The expression of the vocal cords is one of the most successful vents."

In order to obtain further information concerning the effect of swearing in relieving an angry person's feelings, the professor instructed one of his subjects, identified as B, to abandon himself to loud and vigorous profanity and invective on the next occasion when he became angry.

The student followed these instructions carefully. Afterward he reported that when he first became angry the feeling was an unpleasant one, but as he broke into a loud and prolonged outburst of swearing the anger soon passed into a rather pleasurable excitement.

When an angry person refrains from giving expression to his emotion, either from motives of decency or the absence of the offender, the thinking of cutting remarks may be substituted for the actual

A Fit of Rage in a Gorilla Produces Nearly the Same Expression as in Man, Showing the Early Evolutionary Existence of This Emotion.

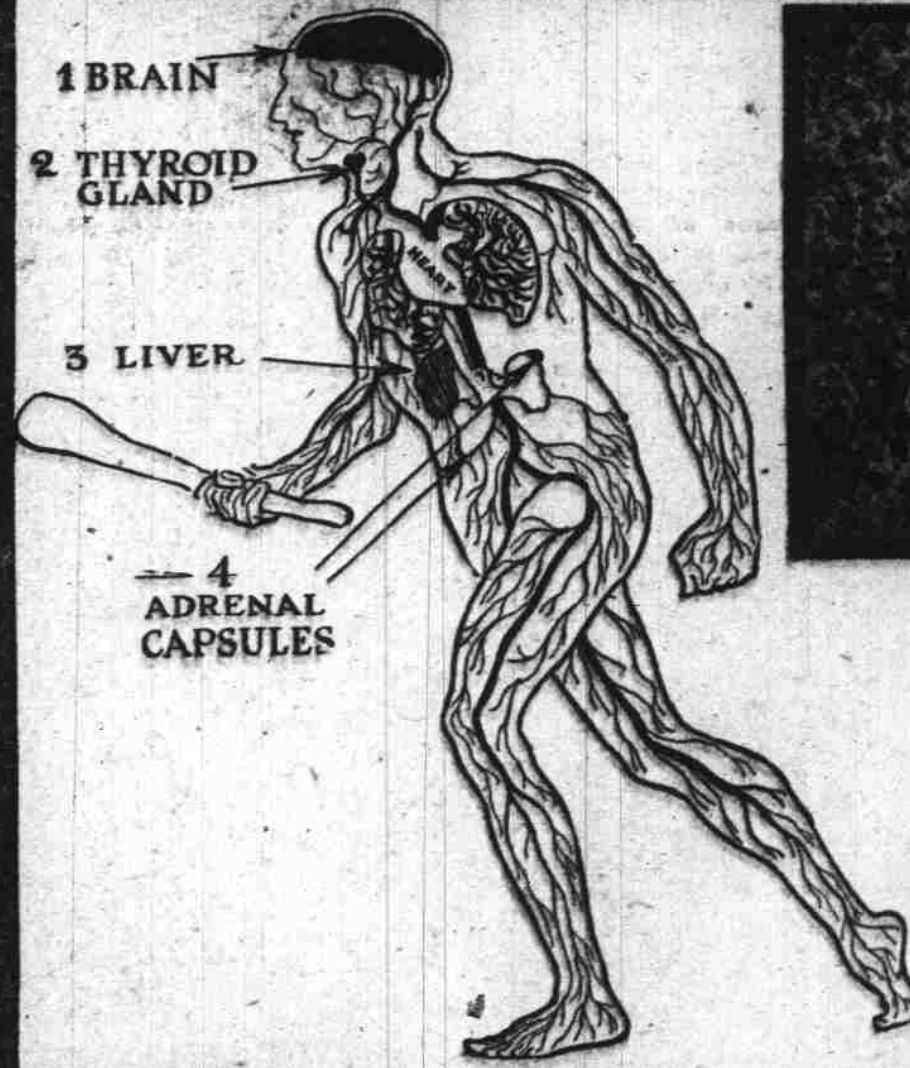


Diagram Showing the Chain of Glands and Organs Which According to Dr. G. W. Crile, Four Energizing Substances Into the Fighting Man's Blood When He Is Roused by Anger.

verbal attack. The subject is aware that what he says to himself he would like to say to the offender.

The angry man thinks just what he expects to say and wants to say, how he will say it, the inflection of the voice, the emphasis of words and dramatic attitude. He may imagine the effect of the attack on his opponent, the latter may talk back. The imagined verbal combat is usually a one-sided affair and ends in victory for the subject. Drastic remarks and the most cutting sarcasm were planned at times by the persons studied.

One person admitted that he could not at first think of a suitable cutting reply to an offender. His anger kept on breaking out again, until finally he thought of a satisfactory retort, and then he felt pleased and happy.

There are but few cases that show no pleasantness in some degree in the reactive stage of anger. "The pleasantness," the professors say, "ranges from mild relief to active delight. Periods of restraint during anger are periods of unpleasantness. Periods of lessened restraint are accompanied by relief or pleasantness."

Anger disappears suddenly and turns to pleasantness if the subject gains the object of the emotion. For instance:

"Subject A stated that he got on the wrong street car. The conductor refused to allow him to get off at his corner of the street. A felt angry—not because he was hindered from getting off, but because of the insulting attitude and remark of the

(On the Left) A Microphotograph of Normal Brain Cells; (On the Right) The Changes Produced by Anger Upon Similar Cells.

conductor, who said, in a hostile manner: 'Why did you not pay attention to what I said; this car does not stop; you will have to go on.' A, then became angry and stopped with no further words."

"A observes: 'As I stepped off I had a distinct feeling of unpleasantness. I felt I had been victorious. I was no longer angry. Sensations were still present in chest, arm and leg muscles, but these were now pleasant. Upon recalling the incident, I had not the least resentment against the conductor. On the whole, I now felt glad the incident had occurred.'

"Pleasantness is felt on the observation of the offender's failure or humiliation. Student C, becoming angry at X, who was manipulating some laboratory apparatus, says: 'I let him proceed, rather hoping he would spoil his results. When I noted he was failing and observed his discomposure, I felt pleased. That satisfied my anger at once.'

Here are some conclusions, based on the reports of students, concerning their emotions: "Anger has an important influence upon mental life and behavior long after the emotion itself has disappeared. Other emotions may immediately follow anger, such as pity, regret, sorrow, joy, shame, remorse, love and fear."

"Feelings of unpleasant irritation follow anger when social or other conditions prevent adequate expression."

"A successfully terminated fit of anger leaves the subject in a state of confidence toward himself."

Professor Richardson finds that the momentum acquired during anger by determined emotional outburst may help to strengthen the will and allow old habits to be more quickly broken down and new ones formed. Anger at oneself is most effective in producing this result.

Some persons derive much satisfaction in picking the sores of their unhealed resentments—little acts of revenge and humiliation are suddenly hit upon. Even hate may have its pleasure.

One highly intelligent subject became angry with his grocer and went to another store.

"I then bought several things I did not need," he said. "I felt I was retaliating and enjoyed it."

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