

# How anger effects human relationships

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In terms of human relationships and psychotherapy anger is one of the more important emotions. If you see someone who is sad or depressed they are low and not prone to action or movement. In this way you could say that sadness is an immobile feeling. People who feel sad are less inclined to get up and move around.



Sadness has little movement or 'action'.

This in one way is similar to the emotion of fear or anxiety. Fear makes people more inclined to stay still or freeze. Or at least remove them self from a situation. It is another type of immobile emotion that is unlikely to lead to any strong action. Instead anxiety or fear leads more to incapacitation, collapse or withdrawal.

If however you get two people together who are angry then that is an unstable setting. It is much more likely that some form of action will take place. Something is going to change. So anger is much less of an immobile emotion and is more of a destabilising emotion. Anger in the extreme leads to violence which of course is an agitated and active state that will lead to change of some kind.

In psychotherapy and human change it is this feature of anger that makes it so important. If someone is looking at changing how they think or feel then you don't want them in an immobile state that is low or incapacitated. Instead you want them in a destabilised and agitated state then change is far more likely to happen.

For example if someone presents with depression the psychotherapist may look at what beliefs the person has about themselves and others. A common scenario is they have the life position of "I'm not OK, You're OK" (I-U+). They have a low self esteem and see others as better or more important than they are. So here is this person sitting in front of you in an immobile and low state. If it stays that way not much is going to change. However if the therapist can 'introduce' anger into the person then they are going to be more active and the personality is more destabilised. The advantage of this is that change is more likely to occur to the personality or life script. The person is moved from a stable state to an unstable state and when situations are unstable things have a tendency to alter and change, including how the person views himself and others. Psychological change is much more likely to occur when anger is introduced into the equation.



With anger there is action and instability.  
Something will change when anger is involved.

However then comes the hard part. How does one introduce the anger into the psychotherapeutic process and when it is there how is it managed so that the destabilisation leads to a positive outcome for the client?

#### Anger and human relationships

There are some relationships that are called 'hostile dependent' relationships. They have a lot of anger in them, in that both parties are angry at each other and the anger gets expressed in some way. Often they are quite loud and obviously argumentative relationships. Hence we have the hostility. Commonly one or both parties will threaten separation. Such threats can happen repeatedly over time but in reality there is no way they will separate at least for any significant period of time. Underneath all the hostility they are dependent on each other, they feel like they need each other and could not survive without each other. So whilst threatening separation there is little chance that it would actually happen

permanently. Hence we have the dependence. These relationships can be quite long term and the anger can make them volatile and dramatic. Some domestic violence relationships are of this kind.

It is the staying together that makes the hostile dependent relationship unusual. Usually when two people are repeatedly angry at each other they will part company or move away from each other. This an important psychological feature of anger, it forces people apart, physically and emotionally.

It has the opposite effect of love, affection and attraction. When those feelings occur two people will tend to seek each other out and spend time together. So they get physically closer but there is also a psychological effect. When two people fall in love they form an attachment or a bond. That is their sense of self or identity begins to 'fuse' with the other person. The boundary between them become less clear and more blurry. So not only are they physically close but they are also psychologically close.

So we have the opposite effects.

Love and attraction make people attach and get psychologically close.

Anger makes people move apart and get psychologically separate.

The problem for the hostile dependent relationship is that both people overly attach to each other. The psychological bond between the two people is too much or too strong, so for it to break down and end is just too emotionally painful. As an example remember a time in the past when you were dumped. When you had unrequited love, when you were attracted to someone and they were not to you. Remember the feelings when you realised that the relationship was ending. It hurts doesn't it?. Well exaggerate that pain 10 times and you have the feeling that overly attached person can feel at the prospect of a separation. Such people are very reluctant to end this type of relationship.



We all know how this feels.

However because they are so close they begin to feel like they are smothered and

can't breathe. They want to again get that sense of being a person with a clear boundary, to feel like an individual again. And this is what anger can give us. When two people angrily clash it is like they psychologically hit up against each other. The good part about that is that it gives both parties a sense of boundary and a sense of separateness from the other person. They again re-experience themselves as an individual. Humans need to feel this at least from time to time to remain psychologically sound.



In some relationships the two people are too close and attached.

In hostile dependence the bond is too strong so the sense of individualism is not ever really achieved through the angry clashes. So they just keep trying and the anger just continues on and can even escalate as both parties become more desperate to experience that sense of separation which they so much crave. However it does not happen, so they just repeat the same hostility over and over again. This explains why in some domestic violence situations the same pattern just repeats itself over and over again.

So one gets into a cycle of breaking up and making up or what is sometimes called the cycle of violence. Both parties feel like "I can't live with you and I can't live without you" and thus we have the hostile dependent relationship. They struggle to use the separating feature that the anger gives them but then cannot handle the separation that the anger gives them.

