

Work in Progress

Revisioning Women's Anger: The Personal and the Global

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Abstract

The authors propose that a distinction can be made between anger and aggression. Anger can be understood within a relational context as an emotion which arises when something is wrong or hurts. This emotion can provide the motivation to change the interaction within the relationship and thus can lead to a better connection. Likewise, in the larger social and global arena anger can provide the impetus for concerted action to change destructive conditions. Several examples are given.

This paper was presented at a Stone Center Colloquium on March 7, 1990. Jean Baker Miller spoke first, and Janet Surrey followed. Their remarks are reproduced here in that order.

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What is anger?

Tonight Janet and I would like to explore the possibility that anger can take on a different quality in the hands of women — or when women take on full participation in the conduct of all the world's affairs and when women's experience enters fully into the construction of our culture's framework of thinking and feeling. In the literature, great confusion has existed about anger, especially in psychoanalytic and psychodynamic writing, but also in psychological material. Anger is often linked with aggression, and aggression has been defined in a variety of ways. We prefer to separate anger from aggression. We would say that anger is an emotion. Aggression refers to action with the intent to be destructive to others or to control others through force, which may or may not follow from anger (Miller, 1983). For example, someone may coolly produce, buy, sell, or use guns or even nuclear weapons on the order of someone else who may or may not be angry. Today, several leading psychological researchers on anger make this distinction, for example, James Averill (1982) at the University of Massachusetts and Charles Spielberger in Florida (1983).

The confusion between aggression and anger has arisen because the latter has been strongly associated with aggression in our culture. Instead, if we thought of anger first off as a part of relationships, we would have a very different view of it. The reason we have not understood anger as part of relationships probably lies in the fact that relationships have been relegated more to the domain of women than of men. Despite all of the development of the psychological fields, we have not recognized the full value of relationships — even though they are, of course, the source of all human development. We would like to propose some ideas about how we may create a new vision of anger if we were to see it within the context of relationships, that is, within a context in which connections between

people are given their full and primary value.

First, we would perceive anger as a necessary part of the movement of relationships. I want to stress the movement because when we talk about relationships that is what we really are talking about. The essential feature of good, that is, growth-fostering, relationships is that they are in motion. There has to be a flow. If relationships are static, they are usually bad for the people in them, not fostering growth.

Another way to put this is to say that emotional development for children and adults occurs basically in the context of relationships where there is a possibility for us to be moved by another person or persons, and for us to affect them. The relationship changes along the way. It moves with us. We are moved by many emotions, and certainly anger is one of them.

Anger occurs when anyone feels unable to express her/his experience or feels not heard, at least to some degree, or feels unable to hear the other person(s). S/he then begins to feel that something is wrong. Something hurts. That is what I believe anger is — an emotion which arises when something is wrong or something hurts and needs changing. Of course, if one person obviously mistreats or violates another, this too means that something hurts or is wrong and leads to anger. If, as a result of the expression of anger, the flow of action in the relationship alters in a way that allows each person to include her/his important experience, the anger often can dissipate quite readily. Here, as Teresa Bernardez (1988) has suggested, anger seems to be an emotion we possess which inevitably prompts us to act against wrong treatment or violation of us, against injustice.

We can think of many examples of anger occurring in this direct and straightforward way. Suppose, for example, a ten-month-old child begins to feel tired or hungry and tries to convey this to her parents. They are preoccupied with something else and don't respond immediately. The child then becomes angry because something is wrong and demonstrates this with crying or thrashing about. She has now more forcefully notified her parents that something hurts, and they now try to attend to it. In doing so, they respond to both the initial physical need and to the psychological situation, the child's need to feel she has an impact, that she can reach the people in her relationships and that they can hear and respond to her. This, of course, represents a relatively uncomplicated example.

Because anger arises when something is wrong or hurts, it usually occurs along with other emotions, with a mixture of feelings. These are usually painful

feelings such as hurt, disappointment, humiliation, and others. Most of the time we experience a combination of feelings with mixtures of meanings, not one simple feeling devoid of content. Some writers, for example, Paula Caplan (1989) have written about anger as a secondary emotion, meaning that it follows after we are first made to feel one or more other painful feelings.

Complications

Next we have to consider what happens when a relationship cannot allow the appropriate expression of anger, that is, when a child or adult cannot express anger, or the others in the relationship cannot respond in a way that will bring about a change in what is happening. Here, people begin to move into all of the complications which occur when the relationship does not provide well for the expression and reception of anger. These patterns can vary with different cultures, classes, and ethnic groups. In general, however, for men in this culture and certainly in several others, a prominent substitute for anger is aggressive behavior, either physical or verbal or both. I believe that this kind of behavior is an attempt to circumvent the experience of anger as part of the flow of relationships. Anger is a vulnerable feeling. An angry person usually also feels hurt and in pain and opens this up for and to others. By contrast, aggressive behavior is an attempt to prevail by force and to end the flow of the interaction. It is very different from real engagement with difficult feelings.

Of course, there are other forms that men's anger can take, for example, withdrawal, but overall, I believe boys and men have been encouraged, indeed overstimulated, from early childhood to engage in aggressive action as a way of avoiding the real, interpersonal experience of anger, and of many other emotions, too (Miller, 1983).

Some people have developed a strategy of appearing to express anger in a way which is intimidating to other people. However, this aggressive display usually does not represent an expression of anger about what really matters or what really hurts, but often reflects a learned behavior, a set of accusations and attacks. This behavior is frequently a strategy for control or power over others, often used by those in dominant positions. While this pattern can occur in women, it is more common in men.

Women, for our part, tend to develop many of the various forms of indirect expressions of anger. These can include a range of psychological and physical symptoms or complaints, as described recently by Teresa Bernardez (1988) and Irene Stiver

(1988), complaints which are not about the really important sources of pain.

For some or many men in this society, overt displays of aggressive behavior can feel as if they gain the aggressor a much more powerful and invulnerable position than would allowing others, or themselves, to know the disappointment, hurt, or sadness which has occurred. For women this can be the case too. However, to be openly angry has been so taboo that women are more likely to resort to the indirect forms. Thus, in both cases, for men and for women, anger and its meaning can be lost. I believe the reason we find anger so difficult is that it concerns our feelings of not being able to represent our experience, to be heard, engaged with, and responded to — and all of this means to be *valued* in the important relationships in our lives. That pain can feel almost unbearable. It can seem easier and as if we are less vulnerable if we keep up the nonrelational forms of anger in either repetitive, aggressive forms or more disguised forms.

Anger as a resource

If we could create a climate in which we could bring forward and value growth-fostering relationships, rather than aggression, as the primary, necessary, and most valuable ability of human beings, I believe we could begin to transform the nature of anger. I think we could see it as a resource in relationship rather than a danger. For anger to be a resource, we need a context of relationships in which we are safe to express anger and, most importantly, the real reasons for it. We need relationships in which we are safe to hear the other person's anger without experiencing it as an attempt to attack or diminish us. Anger, seen in this way, notifies the people in the relationship that something is wrong and needs attention, and moves people to find a way to make something different come about. Anger, then, can become the energizing initiator for transforming the relationship to something better.

If people believed that anger could function in the service of moving a relationship toward a better connection, it would make a huge difference. This is especially true for women, who tend to be afraid that anger will create a disconnection or end a relationship. In order for women to believe in another possibility, we would need to construct a cultural context which defines anger as a resource to improve connection. This would necessitate major change, but we can make a start by talking to each other about this possibility in some of our personal relationships and even in some organizations and institutions. We cannot begin to express anger in this way except in relationships based

in mutuality or, more accurately, based in the search for mutuality. In relationships in which one person has more power or is aiming for more power or for nonmutuality, it usually is not safe for the less powerful person to express anger.

Next in changing our cultural context, we would all have to practice a great deal to learn how to express anger just as anger, without all the distortions we've developed about it. All of us, I believe, are very backward on this score. Probably even more difficult, we would have to develop ways to hear and receive anger directed to us, to understand that it is a message that something is wrong or hurts and that a change is needed. We all need to learn to respond better to anger. Experience can teach us that the process of expressing and responding well to anger enhances connection, adding focus, clarity, and energy for empowerment of our relationships. As we proceed, it is important to have a perspective of patience, recognizing that most of us are just beginning to take faltering steps along this path.

We must emphasize that the expression of anger in this way is very different from just "sounding off" or "ventilating." Carol Travis' book provides a valuable critique of expressing anger for its own sake (1982). The essential difference is that we are talking about anger in the context of relationships and anger as one of many feelings which can move the relationship to something better. The goal of the expression of anger should be that the people in the relationship become better connected rather than less connected. The aim is not the expression of anger per se, but the recognition of the value of anger as a step in working together in relationship to clarify the source of the pain and to do something about it — to right what is wrong.

I don't mean by any of this to water down the power of this emotion. I suspect, too, that this all may sound idealistic or unreal, but I believe that impression may be an indication of our cultural conditioning or brainwashing. People believe anger is linked with aggression and destruction because that is the tradition fostered in this culture by those in positions of power. They have influenced all of our thinking. This is so in any society; those in power determine our experience to a large extent and, thus, exert a major influence on the creation of our very feelings. They, then, provide the labels for these feelings.

I want to stress here two points: 1) Once any group in society establishes itself as dominant, it would have to utilize aggression as a disproportionate part of its way of acting in order to maintain its

dominance. 2) Simultaneously, it cannot develop fully the cultural forms which threaten its dominance. Relationships among people are the key forms which potentially threaten dominance. They are absolutely essential for human life and development, and relationships formed in mutuality and based in empathy and responsiveness are inevitably incompatible with a system of dominance. In such a system, anger, a powerful emotion with the potential to right wrongs and to play a valuable role in changing hurtful relationships, would likely be suppressed and distorted. Our culture has yet to appreciate the value of relationships, and as a result they cannot yet flourish fully and well for all of us. Our society has often treated the need for relationship almost like a necessary evil, one which women have been encouraged to fill.

To summarize thus far, despite the fact that the psychological fields have long said that everyone develops only within relationships, we are suggesting that professional thinking has yet to grant full weight to the primary value of growth-fostering relationships and to the processes which create these relationships. This situation probably reflects the fact that our culture, in general, cannot fully recognize their value, and it has put the work of making and building relationships into women's domain. The usual way of thinking in this culture has not fully encompassed anger in the context of relationships, but linked it with aggression. Changing the usual thinking, we can begin to "re-envision" anger as a valuable part of relationships. Doing so is particularly important because it can be a powerful force for movement within relationships and for movement to better relationships. Seen in this way, and separated from the connotations of aggression, anger would be encompassed by many women with much greater ease. This ability would go a long way, not only toward enhancing women's mental health, but toward building our full place in society, toward diminishing aggression and violence, and toward making the world a better, safer place. Janet will now elaborate some of these points.

Anger in a relational context

During the time I was preparing this presentation, the story of the Carol Stuart murder was unfolding.¹ Therapy hours with clients were filled with responses, conscious and unconscious, to this murder. It evoked deep anger, fear and compassion, and stimulated personal memories and associations related to these feelings. One client began to talk about an incident that confused her. While she and

her boyfriend were watching TV, she began to feel unsafe and angry. Suddenly she stood up and said, "We have to end this relationship." Although she did not end the relationship, she was puzzled about what this reaction represented. I asked her if this had anything to do with the Stuart case, and she remembered that they had been watching a TV news story on that case. This vignette is not described here to begin a discussion of the client's loose boundaries or her borderline psychopathology or the externalization of her fear and anger. I took her response very seriously, and in the therapy hour we worked on how it did and did not resonate with her feelings in this particular relationship as well as in relationships with other men in her life currently or historically. We talked further about what the communications and consequences of this murder and others like it were for all women, what these meant to my client, and the cumulative impact this violence had had on her life decisions. To discuss the connection between the personal and the collective level of experience, it is necessary to work from an enlarged clinical paradigm, beyond the isolated individualistic self.

I would like to consider tonight how our shared anger and vulnerability (around which we are profoundly, empathically connected) can be a resource for positive action, instead of becoming suppressed, stuck, distorted, unfocused, or exaggerated — and, ultimately, isolating and disempowering.

Further, I hope to initiate discussion about the *importance of enlarging our clinical frameworks and paradigms to encompass an appreciation of the larger relational dynamics which shape all our experience.* Jean has presented a reconstruction of women's anger as a resource for change. She has described the potential value of anger in creating forward movement in relationships under certain conditions — when these relationships are rooted in the search for mutuality, that is, relationships moving in the direction of mutual empathy and empowerment. Alternatively, anger generated in the dominant person in hierarchical, "power-over" relationships can stop the interplay and flow of feelings. It can rupture the connection and may be used as a coercive threat or lead to violent or destructive action. As Miller (1983), Stiver (1988), and others have described elsewhere, anger in the subordinate member in such emotionally disconnected, hierarchical relationships becomes suppressed, disguised; or it may turn into somatic complaints, general emotional instability or irritability, or free-floating, unfocused rage directed outward or against the self. Under mutual relational conditions,

anger can function to indicate that "something is wrong" in the relationship. Frequently, this is a sign of nonmutuality and arises out of the desire for healthy connections. Anger can lead to a shared focus of attention on what is wrong; a "looking together" which validates and legitimates the experience, often diffuses the immediate emotional reaction, moves the experience into greater clarity, sharpens perception, and deepens understanding.

This suggestion assumes that both or all persons can be expressive of and receptive to anger as it arises in the relationship. It is this interplay and exchange between people that moves anger into a framework of shared understanding. (This may not happen immediately, but may occur over a period of time.) By maintaining connection or dialogue — often around very difficult emotions — the anger can keep moving in a constructive direction. Real responsiveness in relationship does not always mean agreement, but may well lead to conflict or a stated unwillingness to accept a hurtful, destructive outburst. Under relational conditions where connection and movement are maintained, anger can generate a sustained energy available for action and change. The movement of relationship can help people move through immediate angry feelings to come to handle a difficult situation effectively.

An alternative model, based in a "separate self" paradigm, was described by a male colleague in a discussion of anger as a "positive emotion." He described anger as arising when "something gets in the way of what you want." He said that the positive value of anger is that it provides energy to mount an "attack" or "strategy" to get what you want. The problem in this analysis is evident when the "something" that gets in your way happens to be another person. From a relational perspective, anger can be seen as a resource for action and change in relationships, rather than for self-interest alone. Such a relational model has direct application to empowerment models of therapy.

For example, a client of mine had been raped by a patient in her work as a psychiatric nurse. She has moved through a long period of terror, shame, and isolation into a shared, connected experience of fear, vulnerability, and anger. In addition to her psychotherapy, this evolution has involved her work in a group with other rape victims. She has joined with other women to speak out publicly about her experience in lectures and testimonies before legislative committees. She also has undertaken efforts to have a discussion of this subject included in the nursing education curriculum.

Her experience has become a resource for relational empowerment for herself and others. She has come to appreciate that her experience was not an isolated event, but rather one shared directly and indirectly with other women. She believes that her original shame and silence about the horror of the rape and how it had been handled by other professionals kept her feeling alone, depressed, and stuck in her angry feelings. In Stone Center language, she has moved from a position of "condemned isolation" to authenticity and empowerment in connection. Judy Jordan, in her work on shame, has beautifully described the movement out of shame as a powerful, liberating energy (1989).

Such an empowerment model highlights the value of anger moving in relationship to constructive and creative action. Lyman (1979) has described anger as an essential political emotion. Teresa Bernardez (1988) and Carter Heyward (1984) have described anger as a sign of or a response to injustice, which implies a vision of and desire for a better, just, or mutual relationship. Action toward creating or holding such a vision or desire supplies the important energy for justice-making and peace-making activities. As Beverly Harrison writes, "Such is the power of anger in the work of love" (1985). This is true on the personal and global levels in the work toward creation of a safe, just, life-affirming, and relationship-affirming world.

The organization called MADD, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, offers a vivid example. Energized by the tragedy of their personal pain, these women have joined together in action. Linked in an understanding of the roots of the loss and violence in their lives, they have extended beyond their immediate anger at the individuals responsible for the death of their children and have moved into educational, political, and legislative action.

The acronym, MADD, sounds especially relevant here. It represents the mothers' shared anger — but also hints at the possibility of anger leading to feelings of insanity under conditions where anger isolates and separates and when constructive arenas for action are not possible. When people can share anger and build connections that allow ongoing movement and interplay around feelings of great intensity, the power of such experience can lead to deeply passionate and constructive, long-term action.

It is essential to remember that our discussion of anger is based on a particular definition of anger as an emotion arising inevitably in development, which can, under conditions of mutuality, move the relationship toward greater connection. In women, much anger as

we know it today can become seriously distorted by relational disconnections and unresolved internal and external conflict. In contrast to the Eskimos' many words for snow, we subsume too many different experiences, emotions, and behaviors in the word "anger." We should work on a good phenomenological typology. As Jean has said, aggression, hostility, hatred, and destructive, violent behaviors are not necessary outcomes of anger, but rather result from an avoidance of vulnerable emotions, intrapsychically and relationally.

As noted earlier, we usually experience anger as part of a complex mixture of feelings, and we should not study it as an inherently differentiated emotion. Anger is often connected with feelings of fear, vulnerability, loss, and great caring. Frequently, women cry when angry because of this mixture of emotions. Women's anger has often been misunderstood, trivialized, invalidated, exaggerated, or pathologized as "strident," "bitchy," or "narcissistic." Such judgments become internalized and complicate the healthy movement of anger. Bernardez, (1988), Lerner, (1985, 1986) Greenspan, (1983) and Miller (1983) have described the "feminine" ideal in our culture which excludes anger as a legitimate feminine emotion.

Maternal anger

The "maternal ideal," the "good mother" construction of this culture excludes the possibility of healthy anger from mothers. We believe this reflects a deep cultural belief that anger and nurturance cannot coexist (Miller, 1983). Dinnerstein (1976) and Miller have discussed the origins of this terror of maternal anger. Dinnerstein suggests this fear is fundamental to the child's narcissism and sense of powerlessness in light of the caretaker's apparent omnipotence. Miller suggests it is a culturally-based gender arrangement. Since women are the assigned carriers of the responsibility for care, empathy, and maintaining connection, they represent the only refuge from a dangerous, hostile world. I agree with Jean that this deep cultural split is not fundamental to development, and both men and women need to work to integrate nurturance and healthy anger. For women, this must involve new and more realistic constructions of mother as empathic *and* angry. Angela McBride (1973) and Adrienne Rich (1976) have both written as mothers about the deeply paradoxical experiences of love and tenderness coexisting with anger, and of the rage of unprocessed, disconnected frustration, exhaustion, and felt insufficiency.

The current uncovering of sexual abuse in families often becomes focused on the mothers' lack of protection and healthy anger. Beyond the dangerous problem of "mother-blaming" in psychological formulations, I think there exists a deep collective call by daughters to mothers for protection — reflecting the need to recreate and re-envision their mothers as capable of responding with appropriate anger, clear-sighted, and courageous, responsive action — all as part of maternal love. We must consider further *under what relational and political conditions* this is possible for mothers.

Such a reconstruction of "mother love" has a long history in women's peace, antiwar, and antinuclear activism. In her work on feminism and nonviolence, Pam McAllister (1982) considers the significance of integrating love and anger:

Together these seemingly contradictory impulses (to rage against yet to refuse to destroy) combine to create a strength worthy of revolution. To focus on rage alone will exhaust our strength, force us to concede allegiance to the path of violence and destruction. On the other hand, compassion without rage stifles our good energy. Without rage we settle for slow change, ask for something mediocre like "equality." It is with our rage that we find the courage to risk resistance and it is with our intimate connection to the life force which pulses through our own veins that we insist there is another way to be. By combining our rage with compassion, we live the revolution every day. (1982, p. iv)

Mothers' anger has mobilized women to political activity, when the women have been able to create a relational context which validates this anger and provides an arena for action. I think of a poem written by a Cambodian mother to her daughter entitled, "Revolutionary Lullaby" (we don't usually hear these two words together) or a letter by a Nicaraguan mother explaining to her daughter her commitment to the revolution as part of her commitment to her daughter:

My greatest wish is that one day you become a true woman with pure feelings and a great love for humanity. And that you know how to defend justice whenever it is being violated and that you defend it against whomever and whatever. (Anonymous)

I think about Argentina's Madres de Plaza de Mayos — the mothers of the disappeared — for whom the emotional response to the disappearance of their children was translated into organized, extremely courageous political protest, a refusal to be silent or silenced about the atrocity of their government's activity. Such transformation of deeply personal emotions means moving out of isolation into profound connection. The movement of emotion in such a context becomes the source of validation, depth of understanding, and action. Personal experience generates the ongoing resource for action and cannot be split off from "political activity." In this way, the personal and political are inextricably connected.

Anger as a resource for personal and global change

We need to create empowering relational contexts in therapy and beyond to validate and "recontextualize" women's experience by linking the personal and the global (Conn, 1990). I use the word *global* to emphasize the degree of our existential and empathic connection as "earth creatures" and our mutual economic, political, and ecological planetary security. The emergence of a global psychology challenges old paradigms of separate, bounded, self-seeking power, control, and dominance and builds on new visions of a relational, interdependent, and ecological self. Psychotherapy practiced from this global perspective seeks to uncover the connections between personal pain and global crises — to empower individuals to act with awareness of the larger world, to "act locally and think globally."²

We need to consider the limitations of old paradigms which focus singularly on the intrapsychic world of the individual or, at best, the individual family system to understand psychopathology. For example, if a woman's anger is viewed only from the perspective of her own family history and the interactions within her own marriage, she may well seem "too angry" or "over-reacting." She does need to understand how her anger and fear as a woman are being continually evoked and then unrepresented in many of her life activities and experiences because of women's position in society. Frequently, this anger becomes focused on one individual — often it is her husband, and sometimes her mother or her children. A client of mine recently told me that she did not want to come to hear this talk since she tries not to focus on her anger as a woman because it seems to lead only to anger and conflict within her marriage.

This decade has witnessed an event of extraordinary significance: the uncovering,

remembering, and naming of the reality of childhood sexual abuse, violence, and incest — and their psychological impact on women's lives. Such an event, according to Judith Herman (1989), has evolved in large part from the women's movement and the sharing and validating of experience between women, frequently between women therapists and women clients. That this is a global phenomenon became clear to me when a psychiatrist in Amsterdam said to me last year, "We're about five or six years behind you in the States in uncovering and dealing with the prevalence of incest and early sexual abuse."

I believe we are in the midst of a deeply personal and collective process in which women are uncovering women's memories of abuse, along with the accompanying pain, terror, and anger through the building of connection among women. This is why survivors' groups have been so significant in helping individuals move out of shame and isolation. This collective *re-membering* calls for personal and political levels of understanding and arenas for action. Women clients are on the front lines of this revolution; they are doing work that is changing the consciousness of us all — both men and women. That their experience represents a severe point on the continuum of "normal" experience needs to be represented in our thinking and clinical work. We must work deeply and in a respectful way with the anger being unleashed so that both validates individual experience *and* seeks the underlying collective and historical experience of women in patriarchal systems. Such systemic and historical understanding moves beyond blaming individual men (or women) — although, clearly, individuals are responsible for their behavior — and makes the larger connections that can point to new arenas for action on legal, legislative, political, as well as on personal levels. These connections must reflect our understanding of the structural and systemic violence that impacts all of us in different ways, i.e., sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, nationalism, and the violation and abuse of the planet. This must become an integral part of our understanding of the larger context of child sexual abuse.

The naming of sexual abuse and violation committed by psychotherapists is part of this revolution. In Boston we have witnessed the formation of TELL, Therapist Exploration Link Line, a support network for women who have been abused by psychotherapists. TELL provides a context for personal sharing and recovery. According to this model which views action as an essential part of recovery, the meetings include presentations of educational information about legal action and

discussions of possibilities for legislative advocacy work.

We can all begin to relate to the larger context of such abuse by mental health professionals and to look carefully at the modal power and gender relations at the root of all patriarchal systems or power-over, hierarchical relationships. We need to explore the implications of such a power analysis for the therapy relationship. As we do so, we may be called "too political," or "not clinical," "underpathologizing," or "overidentified with the victims" — all comments that we have heard. It seems to me that a deep emotional response is appropriate and necessary for clinicians working with women survivors. A young psychiatric resident recently reported that she was told she should not work with a particular client because she was "too emotionally affected" by the horror of this woman's experience.

As clinicians, we are part of this revolution in consciousness. How can we deal effectively with our own experience and emotional responses as we work with clients who have been physically and sexually abused? One day last week I reviewed my day's experience. Several hours of therapy, supervision, and a case conference all focused primarily on the experience and impact of childhood physical and sexual abuse. I suspect many of us are experiencing a tremendous amount of anger and sadness as we take part in this work. There is potential for depression, unfocused anger, or for placing the weight of the anger on particular individual perpetrators. One woman psychologist recently told a colleague that she was becoming too angry, upset, and burnt out by her work. She stated that she knew she didn't want to see the depth and prevalence of the problem and what this really meant about our world. She pointed to the birth of her daughter as a possible reason she felt this so much more intensely.

I think we clinicians need to create relational conditions *for ourselves*, contexts that can help our anger become a resource for personal and political change — that can lead to our empowerment and not to isolation, burnout, clinical detachment, ineffective, angry outbursts, hostility, and emotional numbing or leaving our work. Jean and I suggest that such a context would include opportunities for in-depth personal sharing, relational interchange toward focusing and sustaining attention, clarity and understanding, and liberation of energy for action. We further need to create larger arenas for action toward social change.

As therapists, we have been empowered by our clients' courage to see, speak out, and break the

silence, and we too can struggle together to become deeply responsive, empathic, and empowered clinicians. In doing so, we can move toward a mutual empowerment model which is fundamental to therapeutic and healing relationships (Surrey, 1987).

I hope we can continue to address these questions tonight and in subsequent colloquia. I look forward to hearing about your experiences working with and thinking about these issues.

Footnotes:

¹ Carol Stuart was murdered in Boston in 1989. She was seven months pregnant at the time. Although the police and press all focused on a young black man, her husband now is suspected to be the murderer.

² I'd like to acknowledge here the contributions of my global psychotherapy group, Sarah Conn, Miriam Greenspan, Mary Watkins, Ann Yeomans, who have begun meeting and working together to develop these themes.

Discussion Summary

A discussion is held after each colloquium presentation. Selected portions of the discussion are summarized here. At this session Drs. Judith Jordan, Alexandra Kaplan, and Irene Stiver joined Jean Baker Miller and Janet Surrey in leading the discussion.

Question: How can anger be expressed relationally in a relationship in which there is an imbalance of power, e.g., in a man-woman relationship in which the woman is economically dependent on her husband?

Jordan: It's very hard. As Jean said, if one person is dominant, you can easily have coercion. You can have the subordinate person trying to express a grievance and the other person using power to silence that expression.

Surrey: If both people in a man-woman relationship are really trying to work toward mutuality, it may be possible. For example, in couples work we sometimes see that men and women are on a different developmental path. If the man uses anger in a coercive way, he may have to change the way he uses it or even cut it out for a while, and the woman may have to learn to bring it in. So there may be a double standard on the road to mutuality.

Kaplan: Perhaps to say something similar in slightly different terms, for men a basic factor may be their assumed privilege which becomes confounded with anger. What we may think of as anger as an emotion can be for men, in some contexts, the expression of a sense of entitlement — or their reaction

if this entitlement is not granted. I think there can't be the relational use of anger in a situation of power imbalance — at least, it takes enormous work to overcome that factor.

Stiver: Some women in such marriages come to therapy with depression. They often find it easier to work on their sadness first. Of course, the sadness is tied to not feeling free to express anger, or to put it more fully, to acknowledge the degree of disappointment or hurt in the relationship. Once they can touch the sadness, they often find more clarity and more ability to begin to move the relationship to something better.

I want to say, too, that anger — and all emotions — are not considered to be legitimate communication. You're supposed to just communicate some kind of objective content. The emotion is seen as getting in the way of communication, rather than as expressing a meaning about the communication. Anger is not just something that says something hurts or is wrong; it says this is so important to me. Any emotion says that.

We all see this in the work arena too, where we're supposed to leave feelings out of communication as if the feelings were not a communication.

Question: How is this view of the separation between anger and aggression informing your own therapy?

Miller: I believe it makes a very big difference in the basic way I view anger. The traditional view of seeing anger linked with an instinct called *aggression* has acted to keep us with an underlying sense of anger as dangerous, always questioning and worrying about anger in our clients and in ourselves. It makes a very big difference to see it as a reaction, often very justified, to something that is wrong, rather than the expression of an aggressive instinct, that is, linked with a need to destroy.

Surrey: I would emphasize the importance of the interchange around anger. So often no one has engaged with a person about the anger. People have been left feeling all alone with the anger.

This approach has really helped me to keep my courage up and stay engaged with clients in their anger — including sometimes to express my anger back when something is hurting me. It's helped me to stay in the relationship, to really confront and stay engaged with the feelings.

Question: How can we raise our sons and daughters so they can be more comfortable with anger and we can be too?

Surrey: I think that what we were just saying about therapy is also true with children — staying engaged, actively responding and inquiring about what's wrong and about all of the feelings involved. Even if we can't always do this so well, we can look toward trying to really stay open, stay in the process, in the dialogue over time about these issues.

Question: It seems that you are using aggression to be almost synonymous with violence. What about the use of aggression in the sense of assertion? Also, what do you think of the idea of someone being passive-aggressive?

Miller: Some people still agree with the traditional Freudian idea that all constructive action comes out of an aggressive instinct by way of psychological mechanisms such as neutralization, transformation, and the like. Others believe that there exists something very different which can be called something like assertion. Gerald Stechler, for example, believes that babies exhibit these two different forms of behavior from early in life. Assertion is something like taking action in the world, a kind of forward movement. The other, which I believe he calls aggression, is a result of frustration, of being impeded. This kind of discussion has been going on in the field for a long time, and it continues. In most cases, however, I think anger is still linked with aggression.

In response to the second part of your question, I think that being passive-aggressive is one of the many ways that people can develop to deal with anger when they have not had the possibilities of dealing with anger directly and well in the relationships they've had.

Surrey: Just to add a word about assertion — the concept of self-assertion arises from a "separate self" paradigm and does not place the action in a relational context in which the intersubjective meanings and consequences are considered. I think it is more descriptive to call this action in a relational context or action in relationship.

Question: Why do adult women often have so much trouble expressing anger to their mothers? Do you think they feel that it will be seen as betraying their mothers' love?

Miller: Yes, that can be one major factor. I think many of us come to feel that where there is anger, there is a loss of love. This belief can exist for women both as recipients and expressers of anger. We need to learn to place anger as part of relationships, as part of love and, ultimately, of building better connection. I think we all have a long way to go in learning this.

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