



2014-05-22

Constructive vs. Destructive Anger: A Model and Three Pathways for the Expression of Anger

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Constructive vs. Destructive Anger: A Model and Three Pathways
for the Expression of Anger

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

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May 2014

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ABSTRACT

Constructive vs. Destructive Anger: A Model and Three Pathways for the Expression of Anger

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Anger is a significant human emotion, the management of which has far reaching implications for individual and relationship well-being. Yet there is a deficit in the clinical literature regarding the best ways to conceptualize and respond to anger (Saini, 2009). We offer a model of anger which therapists can use to help discriminate healing from harmful manifestations of anger, and which therapists can use in developing interventions for reshaping destructive anger toward constructive anger. We are specifically addressing anger in response to offense, or transactional anger which arises at points of friction in the interface between two people in a relational system. Persons perceiving a self-concept or attachment threat respond to the psychic or relational threat with physiological and emotional arousal. These reactions represent a biological signaling system informing our relationship experience. When offended, our *experience of offense* interacts with our *view of self in relation to other*. We propose that a person's view of self in relation to other is how one compares their own self-worth to other; it may be inflated, inadequate, or balanced. Either inflated or inadequate views of self in relation to other produce distinct manifestations of destructive anger. An inflated view of self in relation to other is seen as producing destructive-externalizing anger or anger turned outwards, and an inadequate view of self in relation to other is seen as producing destructive-internalizing anger, or anger turned inward. Both externalizing and internalizing anger are harmful to self (offended), other (perpetrator), and relationship well-being and healing. However, a balanced view of self in relation to other produces constructive anger, which is a healing and helpful indignation that promotes and even catalyzes self, other, and relationship healing and well-being. Use of the model in clinical settings is considered.

Keywords: anger, offense, healing, constructive anger, destructive anger, relationship

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deep and profound appreciation to all those who helped and supported me throughout my master's program and specifically during the writing of my thesis. First, I would like to thank Dr. Mark Butler. Mark, thank you for your extensive assistance on this paper, and also for your willingness to supervise, teach, mentor, and guide me during the MFT program. I feel fortunate to have known and worked with you, and cannot adequately express my gratitude for your concern for, belief and investment in me.

I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Ryan Seedall and Dr. Erin Holmes. Ryan, thank you for your willingness to serve on my committee and commute to our meetings. I truly value your support and guidance throughout this process, and your insightful feedback. Erin, thank you for your loving kindness and positivity; you have an exceptional ability to ease nerves in stressful situations. Also, thank you for your meticulous attention to detail in the editing of this paper.

Additionally, I would like to thank my family for their love and continuous support. Mom, thank you for your love, for your ability to see the silver lining, and for always being there for me; Mike, thank you for believing in me, and for your wise counsel; Tanner, thank you for your constant care and concern, and for always being proud of me; Monie, thank you for being my sunshine and for all your inspiring letters; Grandpa Bob, thank you for all your love and encouragement; Jon thank you for support and humor; Susan thank you for our de-stress time; and finally, Marc, thank you for coming into my life and for being a breath of fresh air during a stressful time. Many others in my amazing family have encouraged, supported, and cheered for me on this journey. I love and thank each of you.

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Introduction

Humans naturally gravitate toward social connections and intimate relationships; however, due to human differences and imperfection, offense comes to all relationships. When offense occurs and we perceive a threat, our minds and bodies naturally respond by becoming emotionally and physiologically aroused—we call this the *experience of offense*. The experience of offense is a threat to the psychological self, precipitates or triggers powerful physiological arousal (DPA), emotion, and survival responses, most naturally fight (defend, counterattack) or flight (withdraw, stonewall). The emotion typically attached to the experience of offense is anger. The type of anger we express in response to offense depends on how our experience of offense interacts with other factors to produce an emotional response. One important factor affecting this pathway to anger is how our *view of self in relation to other* interacts with our experience of offense. Our view of self in relation to other is how we compare our own self-worth to those around us—whether inflated, inadequate or balanced. In the case of interpersonal offense in relationships, *other* would be the perpetrator or individual who wrongs us. We will therefore organize and predict our response to offense, or expression of anger, using the central organizing construct, *view of self in relation to other*, to predict three pathways of anger. It is important to note that the anger we will discuss is a specific kind of anger, which is anger in response to offense. It is a *transitional* anger which arises in the interface between two people in a relational system. This anger is about smoothing and facilitating a harmonious and mutually beneficial relational system; this is not the kind of anger that is about establishing power relations or dominance, which is common in violent or abusive relationships.

We realize that some scholars believe that anger is a negative response to interpersonal injury (e.g. Hendrix, 1988; Parrott & Parrott, 1995), while others view anger as a positive response (e.g.

Davenport, 1991; Greenberg, Warwar & Malcolm, 2010). We believe that both views are correct and that anger can be a constructive or destructive influence on healing, depending on its pathway and eventual manifestation. Harmful pathways for anger which lead to the expression of destructive anger can be damaging to the self, other, and relationship. However, a helpful pathway for anger, which leads to the expression of constructive anger, can actually be a healing mechanism after offense. In the case of interpersonal offense, *constructive anger* or indignation has the potential to be 1) self-protective and self-affirming, 2) other/perpetrator corrective and 3) healing and corrective for the relationship which opens the door for reconciliation and relationship repair. *Destructive anger*, however, has the potential to be destructive for the self, other, and relationship, and closes the door to healing and relationship repair. Currently, there is a deficit in literature; we need a well-articulated model to help discriminate and discern healing versus harmful anger. A nuanced understanding and model of anger can help guide anger's management for positive rather than negative outcomes in relationship context and in couple's therapy. We will present such a model and will describe the antecedents, discriminating factors, and outcomes associated with several pathways or manifestations of anger. Use of the model in clinical settings is considered.

Review of Literature

Deficit on Conceptualization and Treatment of Anger

After a comprehensive review of literature, Saini (2009) found that there is no consensus among researchers or clinicians regarding the best ways to define, assess, and treat various dimensions of anger. Scholarly opinion varies as to whether this endemic expression of anger is a hurtful, destructive dynamic *antagonistic* to healing, or, paradoxically, a helpful, constructive personal and interpersonal dynamic *facilitative* of healing. Opinions depend largely on how its

expression are conceptualized and manifest. The Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) model of anger conceptualizes anger as a secondary emotion that is best processed in terms of the underlying primary emotion (Johnson, 2004). However, there may be more to the expression of anger that is critical to be understood and modeled. To wit, it is equally important to have a model for how anger may interact with a person's *view of self in relation to other*—a person's fundamental organizing framework for relationships (described in detail later). Until now, there has not been a clear, fully developed model of anger conceptualized or articulated through this lens.

Amid the ambiguity, however, anger continues to be treated across mental health disciplines (Olatunji & Lohr, 2004). According to Lachmund, DiGiuseppe and Fuller (2005), treating angry clients is as common as treating clients who are anxious or depressed. There have been several meta-analytic reviews on the treatment of anger (e.g. Del Vecchio & O'Leary, 2004; Beck & Fernandez, 1998; Edmondson & Conger, 1996), yet there is less literature guiding the treatment of anger than depression or anxiety (Saini, 2009), though anger is probably as common a presenting dynamic as these. Not surprisingly therefore, mental health professionals are typically less comfortable working with angry clients than those struggling with different emotional disorders (DiGiuseppe & Tafrate, 2001). This is to be expected, considering the lack of literature and understanding surrounding this phenomenon which is often conceptualized as a threatening and aggressive state of being. For example, Kassinove and Sukhodolsky (1995) found that for every ten articles there are on depression, and seven on anxiety, there is only one on anger. This supports the notion that there is a significant deficit in the research on anger (Glancy & Saini, 2005; DiGiuseppe, & Tafrate, 2001) and that further research and modeling for client intervention is necessary. Because the field is lacking a clear, conceptual framework of

anger, and that one is needed to expound on the differences between functional and dysfunctional types in order to better guide clinicians in understanding and treating anger (Olatunji & Lohr, 2004), we will propose a model of anger delineating the different pathways or expressions of functional/constructive versus dysfunction/destructive anger.

Negative Functions of Anger

Anger as Unacceptable in Religious Contexts

One view of anger as destructive arises in religious contexts, where the expression of anger is conceptualized as negative and even harmful. Our view and common experience suggest that anger is a common, if not universal, emotional response that is natural after offense or injury. Many scriptures and religious leaders also acknowledge that anger is a natural, understandable, and predictable emotion in response to offense, but go on to argue that acting on such anger is inherently destructive and overcoming the expression of anger is desirable (Proverbs 16:32, Kings James Version; Hinkley, 2007).

Deeply rooted in Judeo Christian tradition is the belief that the *natural* response of anger is morally unacceptable (Mosiah 3:7, Book of Mormon; Ephesians 4:31-32; Psalms 37:8; Colossians 3:8, Kings James Version). Moral rebuke is therefore attached to the expression of anger. Ill will and angry, hurtful, hostile, vindictive, vengeful and hateful feelings, together with attendant actions—e.g. retribution, retaliation, revenge, or seeking and taking satisfaction in the punishment and suffering of an offender—are censured, condemned, and often stifled in typical Judeo-Christian religious contexts. Therefore, religiously oriented persons may often labor to suppress the expression of anger in order to live righteously and avoid the condemnation.

Anger's Destructive Influence on Relationships

Beyond the condemnation of anger in religious teachings and texts, anger is also

condemned in academic literature. In a chapter titled, 'The Deadly Emotion of Anger,' Parrott and Parrott (1995) wrote, "It would be tough to find another emotion that has caused married couples more difficulty than anger" (p.78). McCullough, Bono, and Root (2007) argued that anger and the desire for revenge are part of human nature because they appease the demands for justice; however, while many scholars agree that the expression of anger is justified, it is nonetheless simultaneously viewed as a negative or destructive phenomena, inhibiting healing and recovery (Baskin & Enright, 2004; Lundahl, Taylor, Stevenson, & Roberts, 2008; Miller, Worthington, & McDaniel, 2008; Wade, Worthington, & Meyer, 2005). Hendrix (1988) further elaborated on the destructive nature of anger in interpersonal relationships,

Anger is destructive to a relationship, no matter what its form. When anger is expressed, the person on the receiving end of the attack feels brutalized, whether or not there has been any physical violence; the old brain does not distinguish between choice of weapons. Further, because of the stage workings of the unconscious, the person who unleashes the anger feels equally assaulted because on a deep level the old brain perceives all action as inner-directed (p.147).

Despite this conceptual assertion, empirically Gottman and Krokoff (1989) document and explain that anger is associated with lower current marital satisfaction, but not necessarily predictive of low long term marital satisfaction or divorce. Rather, four major emotional reactions: criticism, defensiveness, stonewalling and contempt are destructive to marriage and predictors of divorce (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998). Contempt is considered the most destructive reaction (Gottman et al., 1998); therefore when there is a contemptuous element or theme to anger, or if anger breeds criticism, defensiveness, or stonewalling, it will most likely have devastating effects on the relationship.

Negative Outcomes and Health Effects of Anger

Further, the expression of contemptuous or maladaptive anger specifically has been correlated with various aggressive behaviors including assault, (Maiuro, Cahn, Vitaliano, Wagner & Zegree, 1988; Novaco, 1994) violence (Kay, Wolkenfeld, & Murrill, 1988; Levey, & Howells, 1990; Unverzagt & Schill, 1989), and property damage (Deffenbacher & Stark, 1992). Player, King, Mainous, & Geesey (2007) found a correlation between anger and an increased susceptibility towards coronary heart disease, heart attacks, high blood pressure and cholesterol. Still, these findings lead careful clinicians and researchers to ask, what is the definition and specific manifestation of anger in these studies? We speculate that anger is a multifaceted phenomenon or rather that the term *anger* is used in an imprecise way that captures and confounds varied manifestations of the expression of anger in relationships. We will therefore conceptualize anger in response to offense, in the context of interpersonal relationships, and will explain the different pathways to and outcomes of constructive and destructive anger.

Positive Functions of Anger

Anger and a Signaling Emotion for Attachment Needs

Although some believe that anger has the potential to be destructive and lead to serious harm to self, other and relationships, others reason that anger may be useful and has the potential to be constructive, or lead to positive outcomes. While Johnson (2004) does not necessarily encourage anger, she uses an attachment framework to describe that any emotional response—even anger—is better than none because it signals that attachment needs to be secured. In other words, Johnson seems to be acknowledging a significant signaling function of anger, one that leads to relationship (attachment) corrective action. Bowlby (1998) also viewed this responsive anger in intimate relationships as purposeful—an attempt to reestablish a secure attachment with

an inaccessible or distant attachment figure.

Anger and Self-Care: A Call to Corrective Action

Clearly, expressing anger in response to interpersonal injury is viewed by some as proper and necessary for individual and relationship health and wellbeing. Davenport (1991), for example, further elaborates the point, “ideally, anger is a call to corrective action, a signal that an injury has been done and that something either in the outside world or within the self needs to be righted.” Significantly, too, Davenport (1991) hints at the genesis of a conceptual model when she notes that anger has a self-affirming root; it is a protest that in effect says, “*Don’t do this to me!*” (p. 140). Thus, she links the expression of anger to self-care. In this view, anger serves important and positive functions for the self, in situations of interpersonal offense.

Anger as Facilitative of the Healing Process

Enright’s (2001) process model of forgiveness and Greenberg, Warwar & Malcolm’s (2010) task-analytic process model acknowledge another benefit to self, derived from anger; both affirm the right of victims to have feelings of anger because such feelings are viewed as helping the victim identify and understand the injury. Further, “when people permit themselves to feel their resentment and acknowledge their desire to retaliate or to access their intense feelings of loss, shame, or fear, the groundwork is laid for the necessary shift in view of self and other” (Malcolm, Warwar, & Greenberg, 2005, p. 199).

Therefore, in some forgiveness literature, anger is permitted and even encouraged as a facilitative emotion in the overall healing process. While an absolution of bitterness, resentment, and a desire for revenge remains the goal in therapy, the client is given plenty of time and emotional space to process the full breadth of pain associated with the offense. In doing so, the therapist establishes the worthiness of the spectrum of the client’s emotions and reactions, as

well as the processual nature of recovery. Gottman and Krokoff (1989) found that, with some couples, anger was actually associated with increased marital satisfaction over time. Thus, in extant literature there is some supposition of a positive function of anger.

Still, even in these models, anger seems to be viewed as a *predecessor* to (“real”) healing to follow, not as a *catalyst* or even an actual *contributor* to healing. Anger is viewed as something to be *processed*, *worked through*, and *resolved*—it is to be validated and honored, and patiently permitted or temporarily indulged, but dispensed in due time, in order for healing, or healing processes such as forgiveness to occur. While anger is validated, sanctioned, and accommodated, it is still most often viewed negatively. Until this time, anger has not been conceptualized in terms of any possible potential to actually motivate, guide or catalyze healing.

Introduction to and Overview of Our Model

We believe that anger, when expressed in a constructive manner, can do just that—motivate, guide, and catalyze healing for the self, other, and relationship in situations where interpersonal injury has occurred; however, when expressed in a destructive manner, anger can lead to harmful and negative outcomes for the self, other, and relationship.

Anger in Response to Offense

As stated previously, it is important to note that we are discussing a specific type of anger which may take different pathways, but is *anger in response to offense*. It is not the kind of anger that is about establishing power relations or dominance; it is not the kind of anger that is a part of the interpersonal violence in abusive relationships. Rather, it is a *transactional anger* which arises in the interface between two people in a relational system when self-concept or attachment threats have been activated; this anger is about smoothing and facilitating a harmonious and mutually beneficial relational system for intimate relationships.

Such anger is most often attached to experiences of interpersonal injuries and betrayals, such as infidelity, violence, and/or lying—behaviors that threaten self-concept or where the fundamental attachment trust, security, integrity and fidelity of a relationship are violated. In relationships characterized by secure self-concept and attachment, partners feel safe and loved. Anger often occurs when there is a threat to self-concept or attachment, or when injury threshold is reached in interpersonal interaction. However, due to human differences and imperfection, as well as the close and constant contact, such negative interactions or offense comes to all intimate relationships. Therefore, anyone who engages in an interpersonal relationship is likely to deal with feelings of anger in response to offense, and will need a means to channel that anger into a constructive pathway, or deal with the harmful outcomes that arise from destructive expressions of anger.

Emotion as a Signal of Self Concept and, or Attachment Threat

In securely attached relationships, emotional expression and engagement offer each partner the knowledge that they are in a safe relationship with someone who loves them and cares about them (Johnson, 2004). When our sense of trust or secure attachment in an intimate relationship is lost, we express emotion or seek emotional engagement to regain our sense of secure attachment. Further, through expressed emotion, we can signal that relationship injury has occurred, and communicate to ourselves and others what our needs are (Johnson, 2004). Johnson (2004) further explains,

When the individual is threatened, either by traumatic events, the negative aspect of everyday life such as stress or illness, or by any assault on the security of the attachment bond itself, powerful affect arises and attachment needs for comfort and connection become particularly salient and compelling” (p.27).

Attachment threat activates the attachment system (Favez & Berger, 2011). This affect or emotion that arises as a result of attachment threat or trauma, may express itself in many ways including, but not limited to, bitterness, disbelief, shame, anger, avoidance, emotional numbing, and depression (Butler, Rodriguez, Roper, & Feinauer, 2010; Lusterman, 1998; Snyder, Gordon & Baucom, 2004).

Through this lens, we see that anger signals an injury or wrongdoing in a relationship and leads to action to remove the danger, either by resolving it or escaping it. When we're angry, we do something about it. We tell someone about it. We work out our differences. We reevaluate boundaries. We reconsider relationships. These actions can lead to constructive or destructive outcomes, depending on the pathway of anger we follow.

Pathways of Anger

In our conceptual model of anger which discriminates between three different pathways or expressions of transitional anger, we will further elaborate on positive and negative functions and outcomes of anger. We will develop an integrative model of anger that properly distinguishes between harmful and destructive versus healing and constructive pathways of anger in response to offense. We will organize and predict our pathway of anger based on how our *experience of offense* interacts with our central organizing construct: *view of self in relation to other*—whether inflated, inadequate or balanced. Our view of self in relation to other (see below) plays a huge determining factor in which pathway of anger we take; it is therefore the central organizing construct for our model of anger because it predicts which pathway or type of anger we are likely to express in response to an offense.

Once the pathway of anger is predicted, we will describe each type of anger—externalizing-destructive anger, internalizing-destructive anger, and constructive anger. We will

explain the effects each type of anger has on the self (offended), other (perpetrator), and their relationship. This will include a phenomenological portrait, where we will discuss primary qualities, associated feelings, characteristic behaviors, relationship effects, and objective outcomes associated with each pathway, or expression, of anger. To better grasp such conceptualizations, we will provide clinical vignettes throughout the paper of potential couples dealing with anger and describe what it would look like for that individual engaging in various expressions of anger, and the effect it has on themselves, their partner, and the relationship. These vignettes are amalgamations of the experiences of many couples, are entirely fictional, and any resemblance to real-life persons is entirely coincidental.

Because 46% of MFT's cases present infidelity as the primary problem (Glass, 2000), we will use infidelity to exemplify an offense in the clinical vignettes, and describe possible expressions of anger that may occur in response. However, it is important to note that infidelity is only one of many possible offenses to which this model could be applied. Further, although we will describe each expression of anger in the context of a marital relationship, it may be useful in many other relationship contexts.

Intrapsychic Model of Anger within a Systemic Context

Our model is primarily intrapsychic, yet it can be expanded to include the behavior of the other, and thus expanded into a systems dimension. We could speak of *anger* as being similar to *attachment protest*, in that it is a signaling mechanism in the relational system. In this instance we are considering, though, its protest against a psychic threat (offense, being wronged) more so than an attachment threat. But functionally, it is similar—signaling a relationship disruption that needs to be addressed. *Responsiveness* is what is needed from the other, the same as where there is an attachment disruption. If anger is not positively responded to, the next steps could be

despair and detachments. The parallels in terms of the nature of the emotion (protest, anger) are striking, as are some of the other elements. We need to distinguish clearly, though, that this model and view of anger is primarily an intrapsychic process, embedded into an interpersonal situation and therefore focuses on the offended's response to self-concept threats, which often stem from attachment threats. In our model, we will discuss how self-concept and attachment threats create an *experience of offense* which interacts with our *view of self in relation to other* to produce different pathways of anger.

Experience of Offense and View of Self in Relation to Other Leading to the Expression of Anger

Through an intrapsychic lens, when self-concept, and sometimes attachment, threat is signaled, we become aroused and have the *experience of offense*. We will focus on such arousal as a response to emotional injury or offense—how it can act as a signaling emotion for relationship threat, and can interact with *one's view of self in relation to other* to produce different variations or expressions of anger. We posit that in an intimate, attachment based relationship, a person's 1) experience of offense (perception and arousal) interacts with their 2) view of self in relation to other—archetypal and operational—to determine their *expression of anger* (response to offense). This process has the potential to be harmful and destructive, or healing and corrective, depending on its expression.

Experience of Offense

When we experience an offense, our psychological and physical bodies respond in a seemingly automatic way to protect us from real or perceived physical, psychological, or relationship threats. Our *experience of offense* consists of two fundamental functions which interact together and consist of 1) the *perception of a threat*, and 2) our *physiological and*

emotional arousal. Our human psyche is very sensitive and often able to identify or *perceive a threat*. When such a threat is perceived, our body responds by becoming *psychologically and emotionally* aroused. Such heightened arousal is powerful, even overwhelming, and often misunderstood, but acts as a signaling system to warn us of physical, psychological, and relational threats, much like fight or flight (for more information, see Cannon, 1932).

In this view, the experience of offense becomes an intrapersonal and interpersonal shield and protection in the same way that pain is a signaling system that shields and protects us physically. The awareness and emotional experience following offense is an essential human signaling system. Without it, both we and our relationships would be as vulnerable as the human body would be without the experience of pain.

View of Self in Relation to Other

Our experience of offense interacts with our archetypal and operational *view of self in relation to other*, to determine our expression of anger or response to offense. For a specific offense or series of offenses committed by the same perpetrator, how we view ourselves in relation to that individual has a significant effect on our expression of anger.

In short, our view of self in relation to other is how we personally think about and compare our self-worth to those around us; specifically those we interact with in interpersonal relationships, which is often our partner or spouse. Our view of self in relation to other is affected by many factors including, but not limited to, our self-esteem and self-confidence, our religious beliefs, our thoughts, our cognitions, how others treat us and the level to which we internalize or externalize those actions for our against us. We conjecture that one's view of self in relation to other is somewhat pre-established, but can vary based on who it is in relation to, and may be affected or altered by a specific event or offense.

We conceptualize view of self in relation to other on a continuum with three views that typically emerge: 1) an inflated view of self in relation to other, 2) an inadequate view of self in relation to other, and 3) a balanced view of self in relation to other. If we have an 1) inflated view of self in relation to other, we believe—or try to assert—that our self-worth is greater or more than another’s—whether innately or as a result of our verses their actions; if we have an 2) inadequate view of self in relation to other, we believe that our self-worth is less than another’s—whether innately or as a result of our versus their actions; and if we have a 3) balanced view of self in relation to other, we believe in the innate worth of humans. We understand that self-worth is not dependent upon actions and therefore believe that self-worth is innately equal for all humans, including—in the case of an offense—the offended’s worth and the perpetrator’s worth.

Expression of Anger in Response to the Experience of Offense, Flowing from View of Self

Again, we posit that in an intimate, attachment based relationship, a person’s *experience of offense* interacts with their *view of self in relation to other*, to determine their expression of anger (response to offense/pathway of anger). These interactions, depending on one’s view of self in relation to other, can result in healing and constructive or harmful and destructive, expressions of anger.

When anger is characterized by higher order, conscious and reflective cognitions—speaking metaphorically—it can be channeled so that one removes their hand from the stove and turns down the destructive heat in a relationship. We can *train* ourselves to let the experience of offense and expression of anger signal us about problems in relationships and motivate us to work them through, accessing and utilizing primary emotions in the process (constructive anger). Alternatively, when anger is primal, non-reflective and reflexive—again speaking

metaphorically—we respond to the experience of offense and initial expression of anger by kicking the stove and hammering it into tiny little pieces; such anger is a primal, automatic response which is destructive to relationships (destructive anger). Ultimately, depending on the type or pathway, anger has the potential to be healing and constructive or harmful and destructive for the self (offended), other (perpetrator), and relationship. Constructive anger, which is a sort of healing indignation, arises from a balanced view of self in relation to other, while destructive anger, which is harmful, arises when one's view of self in relation to other is distorted by either an inflated or an inadequate view of self; an inflated view of self results in externalized anger while an inadequate view of self results in internalized anger.

See Figure 1

Inflated View of Self in Relation to Other

At one extreme along the continuum of our view of self in relation to other, we see that an individual may have an *inflated view of self in relation to other*. Therefore, they believe—or are trying to assert—that their self-worth is superior to other, that they are simply better. They are or become self-absorbed, narcissistic, and extremely focused on personal aggrandizement. An individual with an inflated view of self in relation to other will pursue their own self-will, regardless of its negative effects on other, relationships, and even themselves. Because they believe, or are trying to assert, that their self-will is superior to other, they allow it to supersede other's desires, well-being, and even agency. This inflated or exaggerated view of self in relation to other is accompanied by, and results in, an inadequate or collapsed sense of other, and an indifference concerning relationships.

Inflated View of Self in Relation to Other Producing Externalized Anger

An inflated or exaggerated view of self in relation to other, combined with an inadequate or collapsed sense of other, and indifference concerning relationships, is hypothesized to produce externalized anger after the experience of offense. When another's actions hurt or offend, an individual with an inflated view of self in relation to other builds up the self (offended), attacks the other (perpetrator), and destroys the relationship. The offended allows his/her own self-will to supersede others' desires, well-being, and agency. He or she becomes enveloped in his/her own hurt and sense of injustice, and seeks justice by channeling his/her emotion into an externalized anger focused on their perpetrator, in order to seek revenge. Such anger is toxic to the self, the other and the relationship.

Harmful to self: Obsession with vengeance and self-aggrandizement. An inflated view of self in relation to other, producing externalized anger, centers in, coalesces upon, and snowballs around the acceptance of and rumination upon hostile, hurtful, hateful emotions toward other in response to offense, injury, or betrayal. The offended individual becomes consumed with feelings of hostility, enmity, spite, bitterness, revenge, vindictiveness, malevolence, antagonism, hatred, and/or arrogance. An individual with an inflated view of self in relation to other, experiencing externalized anger, focuses almost entirely on their own wellbeing and need to redress grievance by seeking revenge and punishing the perpetrator. The offended individual then externalizes their bitterness, hostility, etc; their expression of anger becomes destructive anger turned outward. The offended may lash out, counterattack, pursue retribution and return in kind. They are stubborn, obstinate, and slow to be entreated, appeased, or forgive. When another opposes their *self*-will, they use anger to threaten, intimidate, bully and coerce.

Misguided though this expression of anger may be in interpersonal relationships, for the person with an inflated view of self in relation to other, externalized anger, and perhaps attendant retributive, vengeful responses, may feel like affirmation of self, their imperative push-back against offense, violation, or transgression against their person. It may feel like externalized anger and retribution uphold their dignity as a person, their inviolability, and that it asserts a demand for respect to their person. In some subcultures (e.g. prison and gang culture are salient examples), there is a dominant ethic of *standing up for self* through fierce retributive anger and action.

Although such an expression of anger is understandable, this externalizing approach may appear irrational because of the outward portrayal of anger on the part of the victim and their need to *get even*. The dynamic of self-affirmation is contrived and crafted as aggression, leading to some form of attack on the perpetrator. Externally focused retributive anger is characterized by hostility and is focused on setting things straight or balancing the ledger through punitive responses. Unfortunately, retribution only equalizes or amplifies the injury; it doesn't truly affirm the self.

Rather than affirming the self, it promotes retribution, distance and isolation. Externalized anger, therefore, can form into a self-intoxicated, self-obsessed dynamic—concerned only with what was done to *me*. Rather than moving past the injury, the individual becomes obsessed with the injury itself, and the concordant rumination, anger, animus, retribution, and revenge. Viewed in this light, the victim is now the perpetrator, harboring vengeance, and engaging in revengeful and hurtful acts towards the original perpetrator. Anger has consumed every motive and thought; it becomes equally, or more, destructive and potentially more harmful than the original act of offense and can result in unthinkable damage of self, other,

and the relationship. While externalized anger does promote a type of self-affirmation, it is ultimately more destructive to the self and leaves the self in a place where the hope of intrapersonal healing is bleak; it is possible to be so obsessed with anger and revenge, that all hope for healing is wiped away.

Harmful to other: Shaming and alienating. Whenever there is offense in a relationship, it feels like the seemingly natural response to feel enmity and become hostile toward the perpetrator. If we do not, it feels as though we are condoning the other's behavior. To avoid this, individuals who engages in such externalized anger may instead take a hostile and, or defensive stance. An offended with an inflated view of self in relation to other aggrandizes them self while simultaneously negating their perpetrator's. Not surprisingly, externalized anger on the part of the offended is also destructive to the original perpetrator, or is other-destructive.

When we express externalized, retributive anger, our goals are to guilt and punish our perpetrator so that they can experience the same amount of—or more—pain as they caused, as though that could reaffirm the self. However, in this manner, the offended communicates to the perpetrator that because they did a terrible thing, they are a terrible person and deserve punishment. The concordant attacks on and/or alienation of the perpetrator often evoke a hard and defensive stance/response. If the perpetrator does soften, they are at risk of succumbing to feelings of deep shame (as opposed to guilt). Because of the resulting devaluation of the perpetrator, externalized anger is harmful and destructive—even incapable of being constructive or healing—for the perpetrator/other.

Harmful to relationship: Unbalanced and stuck in cycle of enmity. Based on the above information, it should not be surprising that an inflated view of self in relation to other which produces externalized anger, is also destructive to interpersonal relationships. It leaves the

relationship unbalanced. Further, destructive-externalizing anger often brings about an intrapsychic and relationship process that, instead of simply stalling and foreclosing the healing process, seems altogether to send the offended off a cliff of vengeance, leaving couples locked in hurtful, hostile, destructive cycles of enmity. Those involved in interpersonal offense may feel stuck and be left wondering what to do with such intense experiences of offense and expressions of anger.

Anger as affirmation: The biological basis and survival imperative of anger. This highlights that our view of self in relation to other, whether inflated, inadequate, or balanced, which produces destructive-externalized anger, destructive internalized anger, or constructive anger/indignation, respectively, is all anchored to the core biological imperative of self-survival, which includes protecting the psyche and our view of self in relation to other. In a relationship context, anger is all about self-protection (affirmation). And even in the pathological manifestations of anger, people are attempting to do something important on behalf of self.

However, an inflated view of self in relation to other, producing externalizing anger, is incapable of a healing process for self, other, or relationship because of its focus on continuing harm or revenge. It is a sort of reverse restitution anchored in punishment. Retributive anger has negative personal and relational outcomes—including relationship disruption, alienation, and possible disintegration. Externalized anger leaves the *self/offended* bound in a destructive cycle of anger, the *other/perpetrator* damaged, and the *relationship* more disrupted, distressed, and distorted. Thus, this anger is self-, other-, and relationship-destructive.

Clinical vignette. *Sarah and Ryan have been married 13 years and have two children. Ryan recently confessed to Sarah about an affair he had. Ryan claims to have cut off all contact*

with the woman and wants to work on his marriage with Sarah. Although Sarah seems committed to working on the relationship, her deep traumatization from the betrayal makes it incredibly difficult; the affair crushed her attachment expectations; until that point in their marriage, Sarah had believed that Ryan was a committed and an incredibly honest man. She no longer knows what to think and feels lost in a heap of hurt, fear, confusion, uncertainty, anxiety, and psychological disorientation. Those feelings, along with the disruption of her attachment safety lead to indescribable pain, suffering, torment, and fear. Ryan's affair has made Sarah question her own core view of self in relation to other, or sense of self-worth. As her self-worth came into question, she fought against it by condemning Ryan; she simply feels unable to work with him toward any sort of relationship repair or reconciliation.

Because Sarah has lost a huge sense of safety, she feels an overwhelming drive to protect herself, to find safety, and to feel secure—emotionally, psychologically, and relationally. Her self-affirming instinct and survival drive resolve into a self-defending, or externalized, anger. Since being informed of the affair Sarah has temporarily kicked Ryan out of the house, has threatened divorce and seems to use it as leverage in the relationship; whether they remain together or not, Sarah feels that Ryan owes her for his selfish and condescending betrayal. Sarah has also made contact with several past male friends, put up a profile on a new dating website, and tells Ryan that while she is still open to working on the relationship, if he doesn't treat her right, she will find a man who provides her with the respect she deserves. When Ryan tries to voice his disapproval, apologizes and pleads with Sarah to commit to working on their marriage, Sarah scoffs and tells him that dating profile is nothing in comparison to his cheating and that he should feel lucky that she doesn't just leave him altogether.

Ryan tries to take responsibility and seems regretful for his affair; he tried to explain to Sarah how her behavior and negative aspects of their relationship had played a role in leading him to make certain choices and engage in such behavior. He explained that her constant rejections of his sexual advances, increasing amount of time spent at school working on the school play—rather than home putting any effort into their marriage, and increased amount of time spent on social media, made him feel lonely and depressed. He explained that he had not felt loved or respected by Sarah for many years and that he had gotten caught up when he had finally felt important to someone. Rather than attempt to understand or validate Ryan's position, Sarah became visibly more upset. Sarah experiences Ryan's contextualizing of his affair as condoning or justifying it; she experiences this explanation as Ryan telling her that she deserved this treatment or that she does not/did not deserve better treatment. Sarah feels that Ryan is attempting to negate her feelings, and—in a self-protecting and self-affirming move—stands up for herself by externalizing her anger. She informed Ryan that maybe he was, in fact, unlovable and unworthy of respect because he was clearly lacking in integrity. Sarah had an inflated view of self and an inadequate view of Ryan; she turned her anger outward, was hostile and her actions were motivated by vindictiveness.

Understandably, Sarah had been deeply hurt; as a coping mechanism, she distanced herself from her husband, and started pursuing retribution through vengeful attacks on Ryan to get even, which was destroying their relationship further. Hence, Sarah was deeply wounded by her husband's infidelity and disloyalty and because she did not know how to come to terms with it, she instinctually responded to the self-concept and relationship threats which had been caused by her husband's affair, and engaged in behavior that was inadvertently further destructive to herself, her husband and their relationship. Although Sarah believed such behavior would make

her feel better and aid in her healing, it left her feeling angrier, more vengeful, and more isolated than ever before. Ryan eventually stopped apologizing and his resentment towards Sarah grew; as did Sarah's resentment towards Ryan. Although they have not separated, their marriage is becoming increasingly more characterized by resentment and is digressing in an unhealthy and destructive manner. The possibility of healing and reestablishing a strong marriage seems like an unlikely concept to both Sarah and Ryan at this point.

Inadequate View of Self in Relation to Other

At the opposite extreme along the continuum of view of self in relation to other, we see that an individual may have an *inadequate view of self in relation to other*. Therefore, they believe that their self-worth is inferior to other—that they are simply less than. We theorize that this pervasively diminished view of self in relation to other is typically the result of profound soul-deep abuse, trauma or injury during childhood, when self-concept is initially formed, but may also be affected by current relationships, treatment and offenses. Individuals with an inadequate view of self in relation to other often experiences personal shame, self-loathing, self-condemnation, and feelings of fear, despondency, despair, depression and, or unworthiness. Further, they tend toward and ruminate upon self-abnegating and self-denigrating thoughts and feelings, self-blaming attributions and self-rejecting behavior. Such an individual has a low level of self-confidence, self-esteem, and sense of self-worth. Further, this inadequate or diminished view of self in relation to other is accompanied by—and results in—an inflated or exaggerated view of other, and a dependency on relationships.

Inadequate View of Self in Relation to Other Producing Internalized Anger

An inadequate or collapsed view of self in relation to other, combined with an inflated or exaggerated view of other, and dependence on relationships, is hypothesized to produce

destructive-internalized anger. This type of anger is self-destructive because it devalues the self (offended) and becomes anger turned inward, as opposed to devaluing the other (perpetrator) and becoming anger turned outward. When an inadequate valuing or view of self in relation to other is present, ensuing internalized anger also negatively impacts the other and their relationship—corrective influence to the perpetrator or for the relationship, capable of producing growth in the other and the relationship, is forfeit. As well, the injured person may feel they are *condoning* the offense because they do nothing about it and are more angry at them self than their perpetrator; this is likely to lead to relationship deterioration.

Harmful to self: Denial and self-abnegation. Anger or indignation inherently arises from a self-affirming or self-valuing psychological position. It is when we believe that we—the self—have worth, that indignation arises from violation, injury, or offense to self. If we do not believe we have worth, this natural response is damped or altogether disappears. Individuals with an inadequate view of self in relation to other therefore feel they are unworthy to feel anger or misconstrue all anger as bad, and may heavily guilt themselves for experiencing or expressing anger. As earlier surmised, certain faith cultures may indoctrinate, confirm, and thereby contribute to a pathologizing of anger. When offended, these individuals may therefore be particularly vulnerable to express anger by internalizing it against themselves. The expression of internalized anger itself only seems to confirm their sense of worthlessness. When another's actions hurt or offend, an individual with an inadequate view of self in relation to other, who expresses internalized anger, blames themselves, engages in self-condemnation and experiences self-loathing, thinking, "*I must deserve this.*" Rather than becoming defensive (externalizing anger), there is part of us that has a natural tendency to internalize our experiences and engage in distorted thinking. The offended views themselves as somehow responsible and/or deserving of

the hurtful actions of the perpetrator; this is demonstrated by the tendency to turn the anger inward and engage in self-destructive thoughts. Self-destructive or self-blaming thoughts, however, may quickly evolve into continuous self-bashing, self-hatred, obsession with the offense, or harboring all blame and consequences for the action. This is often paired with other-denial—ignoring the perpetrator’s role in, and responsibility for, the offense. While expressing internalized anger, it feels as though no one is to blame except yourself (offended) and as the spiral becomes more elongated and fixed, self-destructive behavior is inevitable. Similar to externalized anger, internalizing anger is destructive in its ability to paralyze the self in a type of rumination experience that instigates harm to self.

While disruption occurs internally, the outward, interpersonal, portrayal or expression is void of anger, which forfeits corrective influence for the other, and healing for the relationship. Internalized anger may express itself as self-loathing, fear, despondency, despair, depression, and/or unworthiness, but a key element of internalized anger is that the offended denies anger towards the perpetrator. This denial of anger, however, is an invalidating process. To say one shouldn’t be angry is to invalidate self, and to say that one’s self is not worth protecting. "*If this was done to me, perhaps I am deserving of this, unworthy, and unlovable.*" Hence, rather than turning ones hurt and anger outward (externalized anger), its expression is focused inward and becomes an attack on oneself—heaping more hurt, blame, and guilt upon the self. Internalized anger centers on the acceptance and nurturance of self-abnegating and self-denigrating thoughts and feelings, self-blaming attributions and self-denying behavior. Consequently, internalizing anger is incapable of commencing a healing process for the self, other or relationship, and instead leaves all three damaged, weakened or destroyed.

In fact, an inadequate view of self in relation to other, producing anger-turned-inward (internalized anger) may be the most damaging to self because there is no self-affirmation in it. It is truly a self-abnegation and self-negation process. When you attack someone else, their own defenses kick in to protect their psyche. Yet when anger is turned inward on oneself, there is no 1) defense for the offended, 2) needed correction for the perpetrator, and 3) the relationship is seemingly void of productive or honest communication. It is similar to when the body's immune system goes awry and instead of defending the body against attacks from outside, it turns on itself.

Harmful to other: Enabling and condoning of unacceptable behavior. Internalized anger, however, is not only self-destructive (offended); it is also other-destructive (perpetrator). In consequence of not voicing disapproval or expressing any kind of visible anger, the perpetrator is denied essential corrective and constructive feedback. Such feedback would allow the perpetrator to gain the perspective of their offended partner on the situation which is outside of their internal thoughts, motives and perceptions. When no anger is externally expressed, the absence of corrective feedback communicates to the perpetrator that what they did was okay and that there is no need to seek forgiveness or offer reparations; the perpetrator is left without the motivation or necessary information needed to change or repent for their offense. Internalized anger is therefore destructive to the perpetrator in that it enables and seemingly condones their unacceptable behavior, leaving them without the needed corrective feedback for essential improvement of their interpersonal relating.

Harmful to relationship: Unbalanced and isolating. Likewise, the *self-other* relationship specifically is also denied needed healing and course correction. Thus, opportunities for healing and improvement are lost. The expression—or lack thereof—of internalized anger

therefore leaves the relationship deformed and distorted. Negative relational outcomes, including withdrawal, distancing, isolation, and alienation, occur.

Various players in the healing drama following interpersonal injury—including therapists— may wittingly or unwittingly encourage internalized anger by the way we retreat from and avoid externalized anger, and its well-known, destructive consequences. This is often done, however, without a realization of the many negative consequences of internalized anger, or even the realization that offended individuals are engaging in any form of anger whatsoever. Perhaps you have seen this result in an unsatisfactory, incomplete forgiving and healing, where life and marriage go on, but under an unsteady truce and with a certain sterility; without the renewal and vitality complete forgiving and healing can bring; without a restoration of secure attachment.

Closing. Like externalizing anger, arising from an inflated view of self in relation to other, internalizing anger, arising from an inadequate view of self in relation to other, has clearly negative outcomes. While the vengeance which characterized externalized anger is more apparent and seemingly more detrimental than the internalized despair that characterizes internalized anger, both have serious and destructive outcomes. When the expression of anger is completely internalized or appears to be lacking altogether—even to the offended individual them self—it may also be a cause for concern, a signal of depression and resignation. To be deeply injured or badly betrayed and disallow any anger is to deny the hurt, or discount it—“*It doesn’t matter. I forgive you.*” Yet how can one truly forgive another, when the mechanism or pathway is a self-negation and abnegation that is destructive to and invalidating of self. We judge that at some level the psyche will vigorously resist and wrestle with such psychically self-destructive attitude and action. Invariably, pursuing such a course that circumvents anger

altogether, feels like condoning, and/or excusing, which leads to unsatisfactory and incomplete healing, where life and relationships go on, but under an unsteady truce and with a certain sterility; without the renewal and vitality that complete healing are hoped and observed to bring, and without a restoration of secure attachment. Internalized anger therefore leaves the offended damaged, the perpetrator uncorrected/unrepentant, and the relationship deformed and distorted.

Clinical vignette. *Ashley and James have been married 16 years and have three children. Two months ago, Ashley found evidence of James' affair, which he initially denied; he has since confessed, cut off contact with the woman he had an affair with, and seems apologetic. Both Ashley and James express commitment to their marriage. Although Ashley claims to have forgiven James for his offense, continued difficulties in their relationship suggest otherwise. James acknowledged the inappropriateness of the affair, claimed to take responsibility for it, and apologized for his offense which seemed to appease Ashley. However, James later brought up several issues he had with Ashley that he felt pushed him towards an affair—her battle with depression that often confined Ashley to her room, and made James feel alone; her overall lack of cleanliness around the house which added to his stress; and the fact that their sexual relationship had suffered.*

While James acknowledged he should have not resorted to an affair, he wanted to bring up these issues so that they could work on them to improve their marriage. Ashley quietly acknowledged her inadequacies and listened to James' concerns. She accepted and internally ruminated over the role she played in James' affair. However, never once did she insist that James take responsibility for his own bad decisions and behavior. Nor did she express the sadness and pain that it caused her. She apologized for her behavior, but did not feel that she was deserving of an apology from James because she accepted his narrative in which she was

the root cause—after all, her depression was really a problem. She felt guilty when James did try to apologize and therefore suppressed his efforts. Although she appeared calm and collected given the circumstances, Ashley was in a state of despair and depression—she had internalized the anger from her husband’s affair and felt much personal shame—Ashley believed that had she not been such an inadequate person he would have never had an affair. Ashley had a collapsed view of self and an inflated sense of James. She felt unworthy of his love. To Ashley, James’ affair had proven she was unlovable.

Due to her felt sense of inadequacy, she began to withdraw further from James, alienating herself from him and their relationship. Rather than providing James with reciprocal, corrective feedback on how he could play a role in improving their relationship, Ashley dwelled on her own shortcomings. Her continued apologies and attempt to punish herself, only led to further distancing in the marriage. She had not relinquished angry feelings, but had instead redirected those feelings inward, which proved to be equally as—or more—destructive as externalizing them. Although James and Ashley have not yet divorced, their marriage feels worse and more hopeless than ever. At this point, Ashley and James both feel overwhelmed and unsure of how, or even if, they should proceed with relationship reconciliation, or if it is simply a lost cause.

Balanced View of Self in Relation to Other

In the center of the continuum of view of self in relation to other, we see that an individual may have a *balanced view of self in relation to other*. This view of self is neither egoistically self-obsessed or self-aggrandizing on the one hand, nor self-abnegating or self-rejecting on the other. Rather, they believe that their self-worth is equal to other—their perpetrator—and have a balanced humanistic appreciation of the worth of self, other, and

enduring relationships. This orientation flows from and expresses balanced self-, other-, and relationship- reverence, regard, and respect. Such an individual has a conviction of the intrinsic worth and innate goodness of self, other, and relationships. Beyond their view of self-worth, other-worth, and relationship-worth, they desire self-, other-, and relationship- well-being. Such an individual is confident, yet meek and capable of expressing love to them self and other; they tend to have a healthy self-esteem and respect for human and relationship equality.

Balanced View of Self in Relation to Other Producing Constructive Anger

A balanced view of self in relation to other is hypothesized to produce or elicit constructive anger or a helpful and healing expression of indignation in response to offense—violation, injury, betrayal, or so forth. A balanced view of self in relation to other is represented in a balanced humanistic appreciation of the innate worth of self, others and enduring relationships. Constructive anger arises from perceived injury or threat not only to self (offended), but also to the other (perpetrator), and to the relationship, combined with a carefully nurtured protective and corrective instinct toward self, other, and relationship.

A balanced view of self in relation to other yields an appreciation for and validation of the experience of all persons, including self. From this position of empathic resonance, the offended is not inclined to act in a way that is destructive to self, other, or relationship. Rather, from a Bowenian relationship orientation, all they do shows care for and affirmation of self, other, and relationship (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Butler & Harper, 2004). Hence, they employ anger—a positive constructive anger, or helpful and healing indignation—as a surgeon employs a scalpel, to excise a cancerous tumor from the relationship and support healing processes. Because an individual who has a balanced view of self in relation to other, has a conviction of the intrinsic worth and innate goodness of self, other, and relationships, he or she is therefore

capable of expressing constructive anger when self-concept, attachment threat or interpersonal injury occurs. This requires moving beyond our natural and instinctive responses and engaging in higher order thinking and being; we can use our experience of offense (arousal + view of self in relation to other) to be a positive influence in the healing after offense by choosing to take the pathway towards constructive anger. If one chooses the pathway of constructive anger, when another's actions hurt or offend, the offended lovingly and truthfully expresses their experience of hurt, invites and facilitates repentance by the perpetrator, and their own if necessary, and seeks reconciliation. As a result, the offended, the perpetrator, and the relationship all benefit and are able to strengthen and grow. While constructive anger is self-protective, personally affirming, and empowering, it is also other and relationship affirming, empowering, corrective, and thus simultaneously seeks to build up the self, the other, and the relationship.

Anger need not be relinquished for this outcome, but constructed, or re-constructed, into a corrective, healing type of anger or indignation. Constructive anger arises naturally from a balanced view of self in relation to other and a relationship which is carefully and consistently nurtured. This cultivation can be a critical work in therapy, catalyzing the potential for positive outcomes across the board. This careful cultivation is important when a person gravitates toward an expression of anger that either diminishes/devalues self in interpersonal context (internalized anger) or exaggerates/aggrandizes self in interpersonal context (externalized anger). Re-constructing anger is not surrendering, disaffirming or condoning the offense or the other/perpetrator, but allowing feelings to be focused into a corrective and affirming expression—for the individuals and the relationship. It requires a conscious decision to engage in healing through constructive anger, rather than engaging in destructive-externalized or destructive-internalized anger.

Benefit to self: Affirmative and protective. Experiencing and expressing constructive anger is both self-affirming and self-protective. When an injury occurs, the offended honestly experiences their natural feelings which may include, but are not limited to: hurt, concern, sadness, sorrow, yearning, pain, and frustration. The offended does not negate their self-worth by suppressing these negative feelings—e.g. for the sake of the other or for forgiving—nor does an inflated view of self in relation to other lead them to be consumed by a self-aggrandizing, hostile anger, animus, and rage, with associated punitive, retributive actions. Harmful wrongdoings that have transpired need not be ruminated upon by the offended to achieve peace; however, in its healthy form—constructive anger or helpful, healing indignation—anger is constructive and needs to be allowed to do its work and should not be shut down. The first step of expressing constructive anger is validating or affirming the self, *“I am a person of worth and dignity. What you did denigrated my person and worth, and it was wrong! I deserve better treatment.”* Hence, constructive anger is both (a) a declaration of self—one’s worth, dignity, and inviolability—and (b) a declaration of the violation of self, perpetrated by another. It alleviates oneself of hostility and revenge and stimulates a forgiving nature where peace is obtained and ill feelings towards other are worked through and eventually vanquished.

Benefit to other: Affirmative and corrective. While a key element of constructive anger is the affirmation of one’s own self-worth, one with a balanced view of self in relation to other, who is capable of experiencing and expressing constructive anger, also realizes the innate worth of others—even those who are perpetrators and have done harm. An element of constructive anger is therefore accepting of the notion that both parties are important and have worth; neither party is of lesser value, the experiences of each deserve validation, confirming mutual self-worth. Hence, along with self-affirmation, it is important to also engage in certain

other-affirmation. “What you did is beneath you. You are better than that and you can change. That change is needed if this relationship is going to continue.” Constructive anger therefore affirms and protects the self, while affirming the innate worth of—and offering a corrective influence and information to—the perpetrator.

Benefit to relationship: Balanced, corrective and healing. While a healthy expression of constructive anger leads to healing, because we cannot control the perpetrator, reconciliation—or rebuilding the relationship—is not always an outcome of constructive anger. Nevertheless, *relationship-affirmation* is a vital part of constructive anger; it is an affirmation of the healthy relationship and stipulation of its terms, “*What you did hurt our relationship and is unacceptable for us. Things must change if this relationship is to continue.*” Therefore, the offended may affirm the self, while promoting and supporting change in and growth of the perpetrator where the relationship continues, or advocating and encouraging change in and growth of the perpetrator where the relationship ends. If both parties can maintain or work towards a balanced view of self in relation to other, if the offended can express constructive anger, and if the perpetrator can be responsive to the feelings and feedback of the offended, relationship healing may commence. Couples that have difficulties, confront emotions, and engage in the process of constructive anger are consequently able to shape their relationship into something potentially better than it had been before the offense.

Closing. Constructive anger in the face of personal injury, therefore, represents a balanced, objective view of the relationship between the offense, self and other, and functions as a catalyst for the personal growth and relationship repair. Allowing rather than foreclosing the feeling, expression and action of constructive anger serves at least three important functions in relationships: (a) it moves the injured party to appropriate self-protective action, (b) it provides for essential corrective influence for the other and in the relationship, (c) and finally, it opens the door to both personal and relationship healing. Through an intrapsychic lens, when self-concept, and sometimes attachment, threat is signaled, allowing or experiencing, rather than foreclosing the feelings associated with constructive anger, then allowing the expression or action of constructive, rather than destructive, anger (1) marks the *recognition* of an offense, leading to a “call for corrective action;” (2) it is an *affirmation* of one’s own and others’ dignity and worth; (3) it initiates *self-protective* and (4) *relationship corrective* action; and (5) thereby it lays a *foundation* upon which benevolence and healing can be built.

It is important to note that fostering this positive affect, or constructive anger, is not a one-time intervention, but a recurring labor. Anything of worth takes time and immense amounts of effort. Recovering from an extensive range of offenses, encompassing the most heinous acts, requires substantial time and patient, persistent effort. If not appropriately controlled and worked through, constructive anger has the potential to transform into destructive anger. However, if processed in a productive manner, constructive anger allows all parties involved to return to a state of self-respect and true character. To be known as you are, and as you have lived, and still be loved, is profoundly supportive as well as strengthening to attachment (Brown, 2007). In this state of mind and being, true and tangible healing can be obtained and the

relationship of both is elevated to the original state and can possibly surpass expectation through the expression of constructive anger.

Clinical vignette: Continue with relationship. *Susan and John have been married seven years and have one child. John recently disclosed an affair to Susan. John appears extremely apologetic and regretful. Susan spent much of the week following his disclosure crying and praying; John used his time similarly and slept in the extra bedroom downstairs. It was clear that Susan was deeply hurt by John's betrayal, but she was willing to talk and listen to John. Susan was able to express her hurt and feelings of deceit, and John was able to reach back to Susan apologetically, and validate her experience. Susan made it very clear to John that she affirmed herself, "I am a good person, John—a good woman, a good wife, a good mother, a good friend; I am not perfect and there are things I need to work on and change, but I deserve to be treated with loyalty and respect, especially by my husband!"*

While Susan was able to affirm herself and express that she deserved more, she was also able to affirm John's worth, "John, I chose to marry you because you were a good man—you are a good father and someone I have loved and trusted for many years. But this—this betrayal—it's below you, you're better than this. You cannot live like this and still be with me. Even if I stayed, our relationship would be an empty shell of what it has been, and can be." In saying this, Susan affirmed John's potential and offered him an opportunity for repentance. John was receptive to Susan's concerns and also expressed his feelings and needs—including the aspects of their relationship that he felt needed improvement. John took responsibility for his bad decision to engage in an extramarital affair while maintaining his view of self-worth and collaborating in the process of relationship correction and repair. Finally, Susan was able to provide corrective feedback for the relationship, and seek reconciliation, "I cannot go on like this, I love you, but it

hurts too much. This relationship must change if it's going to continue, I need you to be fully dedicated to me and to our son, I need to feel loved, valued and appreciated, John, I need to know that I can trust you.” This is the kind of interaction and enactment that therapists can promote in each partner, after they have cultivated and revived the balanced view of self in relation to other that can produce softening and this kind of constructive anger.

In addition, Susan and John started making changes to their relationship—they began praying together, they planned weekly dates/outings together, and made a conscious effort to more openly communicate their wants and needs in, and concerns about, the relationship by scheduling fifteen minute ‘companionship inventory’ meetings each night; they further plan on attending couples’ therapy. Susan and John both realize that the process of healing and reconciliation will be long and requires individual and relationship repentance, but both are humbled and willing to work towards reconciliation.

Clinical vignette: End relationship. *Rebecca and Derek have been married twelve years and have two children. Rebecca recently discovered evidence of Derek’s engagement in an affair. Although he initially denied her accusations, Derek eventually admitted to three different affairs. While he has consented to working on the marriage, Derek has made it clear that he is not willing to give up an existing affair until his marital relationship improves. Rebecca told Derek that such a thing was impossible and unacceptable. She expressed her deep hurt, but extended compassion towards him, “Derek, you betrayed my trust. I loved you...I love you. I never thought that I could experience so much pain, especially caused by you. I realize we’ve had ups and downs and that I have not always been there for you, and I want to work on our marriage, but I know we cannot progress until you give up your affair. I know I married a good man, our children need their father back, and I need my husband back.” Rebecca was protecting*

herself by demanding the affair be terminated, but also trying to facilitate growth in her husband and in her relationship. Her subsequent dialogues and actions were rooted in love; she was able to truthfully express hurt, invite repentance, and seek reconciliation.

However, although her attempts were sincere and well meant, Derek was unresponsive to them. He became incredibly defensive and blamed his affairs on Rebecca, “If you were a good wife, none of this would ever have happened—you never clean and dinner is never ready on time. You have gained weight and let yourself go; you never even try to look nice for me, much less have sex with me. I am a man, Rebecca, and I have needs! If you’re not meeting them, I will satisfy them somewhere else until you’re able.” Rebecca took responsibility for what she felt was hers, but affirmed her innate worth to Derek, “I may not be the perfect wife Derek, I admit that, but I am a worthy person and I deserve to be treated with love and respect.”

Rebecca was engaging in constructive anger, and tried to work on the relationship with Derek for two months while his extramarital affair continued. She eventually had to make a decision to leave the relationship. While it was hard for Rebecca, who still loved her husband and believed in his deep down, innate goodness, she realized that the circumstances were unhealthy and detrimental for her own well-being, for Derek’s, and for their relationship. She understood that she was an individual of worth, and although her husband was too, she could not stay in a relationship that was consistently harmful and destructive.

See Table 1

Conclusion and Clarifications

In striving for intimate connection, the reality of human frailties and our diverse individual personalities mean that offenses will come. Our initial response to offenses or insults to our bodies or psyches varies along a continuum of anger. Based on a person’s view of self in

relation to other, either destructive or constructive anger may arise, destructive anger being either externalizing or internalizing.

In review, an individual with an inflated view of self in relation to other, usually has a collapsed sense of other(s)/perpetrator, and feels indifference towards the relationship. When another's actions hurt or offend them, they express destructive, externalizing anger. That person builds up the self, attacks the other, and is either indifferent or antagonistic toward the relationship. Feelings of hostility, enmity, bitterness, and a desire for revenge are common. Because the individual is committed to staying *one-up* to the offender following offense, healing is halted, egalitarian roles are unlikely, and the relationship further compromised.

An individual with an inadequate view of self in relation to other, usually has an inflated sense of other(s)/perpetrator, and feels dependent on relationships. When another's actions hurt or offend them, they express destructive, internalizing anger. That person blames themselves, engage in self-condemnation, and experiences self-loathing. Feelings of fear, despondency, despair, depression and unworthiness are common. Because the individual feels permanently wounded, has marginalized their own self-interests, and have not asked their partner to care for them or take the steps to repair the wounds, healing is halted, egalitarian roles are unlikely, and the relationship further compromised. Distancing and isolation are present in consequence of both an inflated or inadequate view of self in relation to other, attended by either externalized or internalized destructive anger, respectively.

An individual with a balanced view of self in relation to other sees themselves and other(s)/perpetrator as having equal, intrinsic and innate self-worth and goodness, and has a balanced humanistic appreciation of the worth of *self*, *others*, and enduring *relationships*. When another's actions hurt or offend them, they express constructive anger. Constructive anger is

anger turned to healing and is characterized by hurt, anger, love, concern, sadness, compassion and a forgiving heart. It inspires closeness, intimacy, unity, affection and peace. Following an offense, the offended is able to affirm and protect them self, affirm and be a corrective influence for the perpetrator, and be a constructive and healing influence for the relationship.

While there may be challenges associated with clarifying constructive anger and distinguishing it from destructive anger, a therapist needs to assess and know the anger she/he is working with in a client. This can best be conceptualized through one's view of self in relation to other. Each pathway of offense, based on one's view of self in relation to other, which produces a typology or pathway of anger, has clinically relevant consequences, with an inflated or inadequate view of self, producing destructive anger and leading to negative self, other, and relationship outcomes, and a balanced view of self in relation to other, producing constructive anger and leading to more positive outcomes. As relational therapists, our goal is to assist people in developing the capacities that afford the opportunity for enjoyment of healthy, fulfilling relationships. We know that the foundation for such relationships is respect for individual well-being. With the two kinds of destructive anger, you may have relationships that survive or end, but even if they do survive, we don't judge that they are likely to be healthy; there will always be hierarchy and power imbalances. Simply giving free expression to any pathway of anger may not be healthy for the individuals or relationships. In therapy, clinicians must facilitate couples as they actively and consciously work to sustain productive expressions of constructive anger.

Future Research and Clinical Considerations

As clinicians, it is very important for each of us to get in touch with the emotional psychology of constructive anger, use it purposefully in our own lives, and carefully facilitate it for our clients. We assume that human emotion is adaptive and functional, including in

relationship contexts, and therefore believe that individuals or couples with an imbalanced view of self in relation to other—either inflated or inadequate—and subsequently led to destructive expression of anger, can in fact be helped to work towards and develop constructive anger which can facilitate self-, other- and relationship- healing.

Therapists will need to be able to help clients with an inflated or inadequate view of self in relation to other to move towards that balanced position. This is a very intriguing concept, but it is beyond the immediate scope of this paper. We need clear cut mechanism to help people transition from imbalanced views of self in relation to other to a balanced view of self in relation to other.

As well, it is important to help partners learn, and choose to be responsive, to anger or protest in a healthy way, and for partners to learn how to soften their partner's expression of anger and invite or illicit them to move towards a balanced position (view of self in relation to other) and not become emotionally reactive to their partner's anger. This taps into EFT types of interventions and processes, which are all about helping couples soften towards each other and not be reactive (Johnson, 2004; Kerr & Bowen, 1988) and the importance of using enactments in therapy in facilitating the development of these patterns, skills, and virtues (Tilley & Palmer, 2013; Butler, Harper & Brimhall, 2011; Butler, Harper & Mitchell, 2011; Seedall & Butler, 2006).

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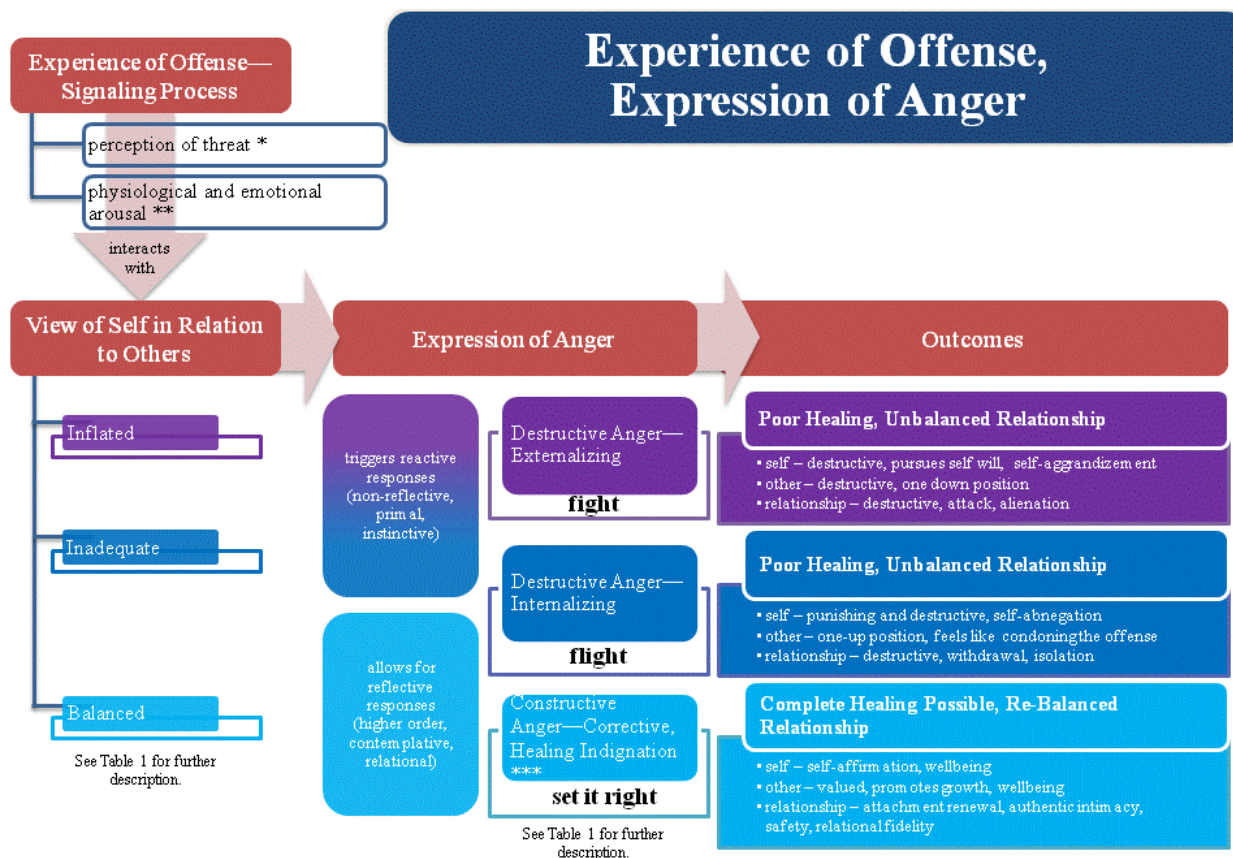
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Table 1. One's View of Self in Relation to Other and the Expression of Anger

View of Self in Relation to Other and the Expression of Anger			
Constructive anger arises from humanistic perspective on <i>self, other, and relationship</i> (balanced). Destructive anger arises at two ends of a continuum of distorted perception of <i>self in relation to other</i> (inflated or inadequate).			
	Continuum: View of <i>Self</i> in Relation to <i>Other</i>		
	Inadequate Sense of Self x Other	Balanced Sense of Self x Other	Inflated Sense of Self x Other
Sense of Self, Other, Relationship	collapsed sense of <i>self</i> , inflated sense of <i>other</i> , dependency in <i>relationship</i> <i>self</i>-abnegation	balanced humanistic appreciation of the worth of <i>self, other</i> , and enduring <i>relationship</i> <i>self</i> and <i>other</i> affirmation	inflated sense of <i>self</i> , collapsed sense of <i>other</i> , indifference concerning <i>relationship</i> <i>self</i>-aggrandizement (narcissism, egoism)
Humanistic Belief About Worth and Will	feelings of personal unworthiness <i>other</i> -will allowed to supersede <i>self</i> -desires, well-being, agency	feelings of <i>self</i> and <i>other</i> worth commitment to welfare of <i>self, other</i> , and <i>relationships</i>	feelings of other unworthiness <i>self</i> -will allowed to supersede <i>others'</i> desires, well-being, agency
	Continuum: Expression of Anger		
	Destructive Internalized Anger	Constructive Anger or Healing, Corrective Indignation	Destructive Externalized Anger
Inherent Nature	self-destructive anger turned inward	self-protective, other and relationship sustaining anger turned to healing	other-destructive anger turned outward
Characteristic Behaviors when Offended or Hurt	feels deserving of blame, punishes self takes hurt upon themselves engages in self- condemnation, self- loathing punish self, appease other, pacify relationship	sensitively and truthfully expresses the hurt invites and facilitates change work, including their own seeks reconciliation affirm, connect, and heal self, other, and relationship	builds up self, attacks other, undermines relationship threatens, intimidates, bullies, coerces lashes out, counterattacks, pursues retribution, returns in kind, slow to forgive pursue self-will, attack/hurt other and relationship
Associated Feelings	self-loathing, fear, dependency, despair,	hurt, indignation, love, concern, sadness, sorrow,	hostility, enmity, anger, spite, bitterness,

	depression, unworthiness	yearning, compassion, forgiving	vengefulness, vindictiveness, malevolence, antagonism, hatred, arrogance
Outcomes for Self, Other, Relationship	destructive to self and relationship withdrawal, distancing, isolation, alienation	self, other, and relationship are all strengthened and grow closeness, intimacy, unity, affection, contentment, peace	destructive to other, relationship, and self attack, distancing, isolation, alienation

Figure 1: Experience of Offense, Expression of Anger



* the human psyche is perceptive of and responsive to physical, psychological, and relational/attachment threats
 ** emotional arousal represents a signaling system for physical, psychological, and relational threats and activates self, other, and relationship protective and corrective responses
 *** indignation is a qualitatively distinct state, and can be a corrective influence for other (offender) and relationship, and a healing influence for self, other, and relationship; survival systems are deactivated