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Sandra Thomas

University of Tennessee-Knoxville, sthomas@utk.edu

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Men's Anger: A Phenomenological Exploration of Its Meaning in a Middle-Class Sample of American Men

Sandra P. Thomas

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

This study explored the meaning of men's anger, using the methodology of eidetic (descriptive) phenomenology. A community sample of 19 middle-class American men, ranging in age from 20 to 50 years, participated in audiotaped interviews. Two prominent themes, right versus wrong and being controlled versus having control, were contextualized by the world in which masculinity has been socially constructed and emotion is regulated accordingly. Interwoven throughout anger narratives were descriptors of the intense physical arousal felt within the body. Time was an important contextual ground for men's anger experience, with sharp contrasts drawn between anger then and now. Findings suggest that men's anger is often misunderstood. Both substantive and stylistic gender differences were noted when findings of this study were compared with previous studies of women.

Research on anger burgeoned following the discovery of linkages between mismanaged anger–hostility and serious health problems, such as hypertension, coronary atherosclerosis, and myocardial infarction (MI; Kawachi, Sparrow, Spiro, Vokonas, & Weiss, 1996; Mittleman et al., 1995; J. E. Williams et al., 2000; R. B. Williams et al., 1980). Links were found between poorly controlled anger–hostility and reduced left ventricular ejection fraction (Ironson et al., 1992) and myocardial ischemia in daily life (Gabbay et al., 1996; Gullette et al., 1997), as well as restenosis following angioplasty (Goodman, Quigley, Moran, Meilman, & Sherman, 1996). In people with coronary artery disease, anger outbursts are more likely to precede an MI than any other type of triggering factors (Mittleman et al., 1995). Poorly regulated anger is also an important element of many mental disorders, and, when coupled with impulsivity, is known to increase suicide risk (Plutchik, Van Praag, Conte, & Picard, 1989). Given research findings such as these, much attention has been given to examining anger reaction patterns and physiological

concomitants in the laboratory. It is unclear, however, whether experiments contrived to provoke anger in the laboratory have ecological validity, given their dissimilarity to everyday provocations of the workplace and home life.

In another line of investigation, standardized questionnaires have been used to assess frequency and intensity of certain anger behaviors, such as cursing or hitting. However, the deeper meanings of anger, with regard to violation of core values and beliefs, are not measurable by such instruments and cannot be explored without directly asking individuals about their experiences of anger. Understanding the deeper significance of anger may be crucial to the success of health-promoting interventions, such as anger management classes (Thomas, 2001). Therefore, this study explored the meaning of men's anger using the methodology of eidetic (descriptive) phenomenology.

The study focused exclusively on men for two reasons: (a) There is empirical evidence that men are more likely than women to exhibit the cynical type of hostility and/or intense, poorly controlled anger that has been linked to hypertension, heart disease, and premature death (Barefoot et al., 1991; Kawachi et al., 1996; Scherwitz, Perkins, Chesney, & Hughes, 1991; Siegman, 1993; R. B. Williams & Barefoot, 1988); and (b) there is a need to compare and contrast men's anger narratives with themes of anger experience that were elucidated in previous studies of women over the past decade (Thomas, 1993, 1995; Thomas, Smucker, & Droppelman, 1998), thereby contributing to the literature on gender differences in social experiences. Extant literature indicates that men and women have similar frequency of anger arousal (Averill, 1983). What may differ is their man-

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Sandra P. Thomas, College of Nursing, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1200 Volunteer Boulevard, Knoxville, Tennessee 37996-4180. E-mail: sthomas@utk.edu

ner of anger expression. Although there are some conflicting findings—perhaps attributable to the use of college versus community samples and/or to diverse measuring tools—studies generally show that men are more likely than women to vent anger in verbal and physical aggression (Spielberger, Reheiser, & Sydeman, 1995; Stoney & Engebretson, 1994). Most scholars attribute this difference not to biological sex but to gender role socialization (Brody & Hall, 1993).

Gender Role Socialization for Masculinity

In all cultures, children learn rules for emotional expression from direct instruction and from observation of influential role models. As Gergen (2001) noted, “to possess an emotion is to perform appropriately in a culturally constituted scenario” (p. 810). There is considerable evidence that traditional gender role socialization for masculinity in Western cultures discourages boys’ feelings of sadness and vulnerability but promotes aggressive acts when anger is aroused (Lytton & Romney, 1991). Masculinity ideology develops as growing boys internalize cultural norms and expectations about gender-appropriate behavior (Thompson & Pleck, 1995). The term *emotional miseducation* has been used to describe the messages given to boys about emotion management by parents, peers, and media (Murray, 1999). Studies show that fathers begin to stimulate their sons to aggressive action from ages as young as 1.5–2 years (Miller, 1991); by age 3, boys wrestle, kick, push, shove, and hit more often than girls do (Fagot, Leinbach, & Hagan, 1986). Boys who were studied by Phillips (2001) described “bonding” experiences with their fathers while viewing male action and horror movies from ages as early as 3 years. Television and movies depict idolized male actors carrying out hypermasculine aggressive acts, seldom receiving criticism or penalties for their behavior (Seppa, 1997).

Sex-segregated play reinforces early parental and media messages. Observational studies show that preschool-aged children prefer sex-segregated play. The play of boys often involves struggles for dominance in rough-and-tumble games. In their study of 3- to 6-year-olds, Martin and Fabes (2001) found a “social dosage effect,” that is, the greater the amount of time spent in play with same-sex peers, the greater the display of stereotypical gender-typed behavior. Longitudinal research by Eron, Gentry, and Schlegel (1994) showed that boys’ patterns of aggressive behavior are already crystallizing by the age of 8. According to the boy code, boys must exhibit toughness and deny fear and weakness (Pollack, 2000). Penal-

ties are administered for failure to conform: “Boy culture is notoriously cruel to boys who violate male norms” (Levant [interview], cited in DeAngelis, 2001, p. 41). When victimized by school bullies, many boys find that words will not stop taunting; physical aggression is required to earn peer respect (Murray, 1999). Throughout the elementary and high school years, boys score higher on measures of overt anger than do girls (Cox, Stabb, & Hulgus, 2000; Stapley & Haviland, 1989).

As adults, individuals could choose not to conform to gender stereotypes, but ongoing forces within the social environments of adult men may tend to keep them within the narrow masculine gender roles inculcated while growing up (Kilmartin, 2000). Research confirms the prevalence of gender stereotyping of emotions among adults (Plant, Hyde, Keltner, & Devine, 2000). It is widely believed that men consider anger acceptable, particularly when expressed in physical aggression (Courtenay, 2000). However, the empirical literature lacks first-person narratives of men’s anger experiences. Even though prominent emotion scholars, such as Lazarus (1999), have begun to recommend a narrative research approach, no previous qualitative study of men’s anger has been published.

Method

Phenomenological Design

Emotions, as we experience them, are holistic gestalts that move us to action (Sartre, 1939/1948), and, therefore, it is inappropriate to reduce them to components such as physiological alterations and motor behaviors. It is only within existential phenomenology that the experience and meanings of emotion have been given a central place in human existence (Heidegger, 1927/1962; Sartre, 1939/1948). According to Sartre (1939/1948), to understand emotion, we must understand what it is about. Therefore, a phenomenological design was chosen for this study. The aim of a phenomenological study is to provide a faithful description of the whole unified gestalt of participants’ experiences, highlighting themes that are figural (predominant or focal) as contextualized by the four existential grounds of human life (body, time, others, and world). To adequately depict the experience, both figure and ground must be described; the unit of study is the “person in the world.” The phenomenon (in this case, anger) is examined as it occurs in its natural environment rather than the artificial setting of the laboratory.

The philosophy of Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962)

provided the basis for the phenomenological methodology used in this study (see Thomas & Pollio, 2002), which involved a series of steps first outlined by Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997): (a) setting aside researcher presuppositions about the phenomenon, that is, "bracketing;" (b) in-depth dialogical interviewing of participants; (c) reading interview transcripts for a sense of the whole; (d) doing line-by-line analysis to identify meaning units and themes; and (e) developing a thematic structure of the experience that is ultimately endorsed as accurate by study participants (see Figure 1).

Participants

Because an understanding of men's anger in everyday life was sought, participants were recruited from the community rather than from clinical settings. Nineteen men, recruited through posted advertisements and community networking, met three inclusion criteria (acknowledgment that they experience the emotion of anger, willingness to be interviewed, and at least 18 years of age). Ages of the men ranged from 20 to 50 years, and there was considerable diversity in occupations (see Table 1). On the

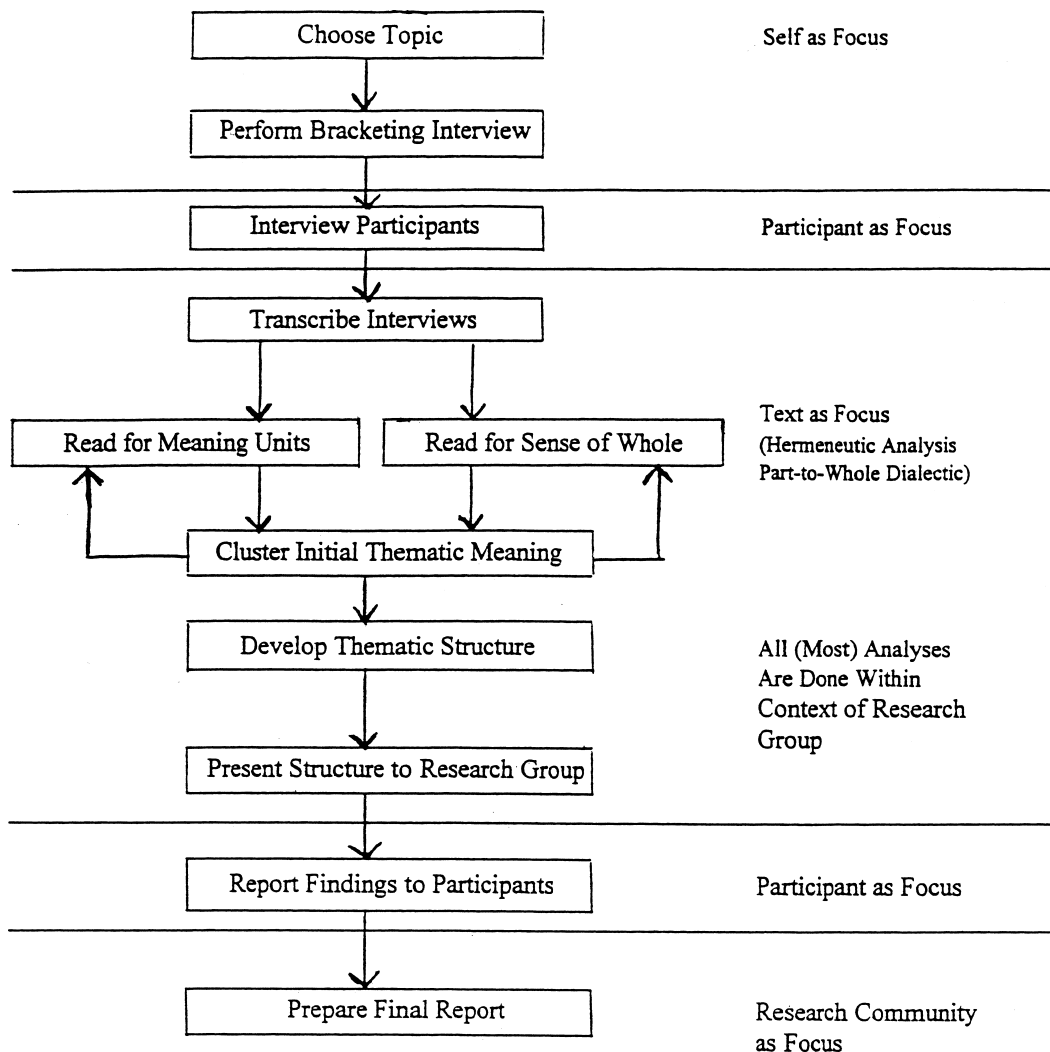


Figure 1. Procedure for conducting a phenomenological study. Reprinted from *The Phenomenology of Everyday Life*, 1997, by H. R. Pollio, T. B. Henley, and C. J. Thompson, p. 60, New York, Cambridge University Press. Copyright 1997 by Cambridge University Press. Reprinted with the permission of Cambridge University Press.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 19)

Pseudonym	Age (years)	Marital status	Race	Occupation
Arnold	36	Single	White	Teacher
Bob	55	Married	White	Minister
Charles	31	Married	White	Carpenter
David	29	Married	White	Registered nurse
Eldon	36	Married	White	Graphic artist
Frank	24	Married	White	Architect's intern
George	57	2nd marriage	White	Social worker
Harold	40	Married	Black	Counselor
Ivan	27	Single	White	Computer support technician
James	23	Single	White	Hospital ward clerk
Karl	51	Divorced	White	Recreation therapist
Luther	34	Single	White	Minister
Martin	32	Married	White	Registered nurse
Ned	46	Single	White	Medical lab professional
Oscar	32	Single	White	Alcohol-drug counselor
Paul	43	Married	White	Registered nurse
Ray	26	Married	White	Computer support technician
Stanley	52	3rd marriage	White	Engineer
Ted	48	Married	White	Technical trainer

basis of their occupations, however, study participants would be categorized as middle class, with the possible exception of 1 man who was a carpenter. Consistent with guidelines for qualitative research of this type, data collection was terminated once redundancy of the material was evident (i.e., no new themes were emerging).

Procedure

Prior to initiating interviews, the study was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board. Audiotaped interviews were conducted in private offices on a university campus or in the homes of participants. After providing informed consent, men were asked by Sandra P. Thomas or a research assistant trained in phenomenological interviewing to think of some times when they were angry and to describe those experiences as completely as possible. Interviewers were careful not to lead the participant or direct the dialogue. Further questions by the interviewers mainly encouraged participants to elaborate or clarify. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and subjected to the analytic procedure outlined in Figure 1.

Analysis

The 19 interviews produced several hundred pages of transcripts for line-by-line analysis. During data analysis, as the researcher reads and rereads descriptions of participants' experiences, he or she is "al-

ways looking for that which seems to be essential to all of them, even if present less articulately in some" (Fischer, 1989, p. 134). The term *theme* is used to refer to the patterns that repetitively occur, both within individual transcripts and across all interviews. The task is finished when a description of the fundamental essence of the phenomenon has been derived.

Findings of a phenomenological study are considered reliable "if a reader . . . can also see what the researcher saw, whether or not he agrees with it" (Giorgi, 1975, p. 93). Judgments of the validity of a phenomenological study pertain to (a) rigorous adherence to methodology and (b) plausible and illuminating results (Pollio et al., 1997). The terms *dependability* and *confirmability* are often used in qualitative research to refer to the researcher's efforts to ensure that findings and conclusions are firmly grounded in the data and supported by feedback from colleagues and/or participants. In this study, many of the transcripts were read aloud and discussed in a multidisciplinary research group that meets weekly. On average, 10–15 faculty and doctoral students attend the weekly meetings. The group members assisted me in bracketing biases–presuppositions and in considering alternative interpretations of the data. Although some qualitative researchers compute interrater agreement among colleagues, most favor non-quantitative means of reaching intersubjective agreement (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The ultimate authority regarding accuracy of interpretation is the

research participant. Therefore, a subsample of men were provided with a written summary of the study themes, and they verified that these themes were consistent with their experience of anger. Providing verbatim quotations in the research report assists readers in making their own judgments about the rigor of the analysis and the credibility of the interpretations. In this article, all words and phrases placed within quotation marks have been taken directly from the interview transcripts.

Results

Overview of Findings

Analysis revealed two prominent themes, right versus wrong and being controlled versus having control, contextualized by the existential grounds of body, time, others, and world. The world, as perceived by study participants, is one in which masculinity has been socially constructed and emotion is regulated in accordance with societal expectations for gender-appropriate behavior. Others, in this case, involved both human provocateurs and a variety of inanimate objects that failed to function properly. The following description of the phenomenon was developed.

In essence, a man's anger emanates from a perceived affront to his sense of control and/or his views of right and wrong. Judgments of right and wrong are made regarding the behavior of others as well as about his own "right" and "wrong" anger behaviors in response to others.

Although study participants viewed anger as a tool for dealing with moral wrongs against the self and/or others, they were wary of its potentially overwhelming dangerous force. Metaphors used by participants to describe their anger are illustrative: a runaway horse, fire, flood, eruption, or vortex that "totally sucks you in." One participant described anger as an infiltrator that "just gets under my skin and makes me respond," whereas another cast it as a robber—"It robs you of your joy. It constricts the ability to feel anything else. It kind of takes over, freezes up your heart." Still another depicted anger as taking away his ability to think clearly. Thus, men expressed great concern about being controlled by angry emotionality versus having and maintaining control. The themes were interrelated, such that loss of control was judged as "wrong anger." To the phenomenologist, this interrelatedness of themes is expected. Themes are not

separable in actuality; they are simply facets or aspects of the phenomenon.

Interwoven throughout men's anger narratives were descriptors of the intense physical arousal felt within the body. As shown in the powerful metaphors used by participants, anger is felt as a fiery force that attempts to take over the body. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have pointed out that metaphors are not mere flights of fancy but have a basis in bodily experience. Many of the men made a point of saying that they did not like the unpleasant bodily tension produced by anger. Carrying anger for a prolonged time produced a feeling of great heaviness in the body, a burden that the men wished to "unload." For example, long-held anger at parents was depicted by one man as a "dead stinky animal [which is] laying there." Many of the men were emphatic in stating that anger was never a good feeling for them, even if they discharged its force in decisive action: "I hit a door, put a hole in it, and I hate that I did that, 'cause it was a nice-looking door. Then I thought, 'Well, I shouldn't have done that . . . that's crazy,'" and "When I kicked that guy in the crotch, I just felt bad, it didn't give me any satisfaction."

Each figural theme of men's anger experience is more fully described and illustrated with verbatim quotations from the interviews in the following paragraphs. Finally, the contextual ground of time is examined more thoroughly because participants made clear distinctions between their anger then and now.

Theme 1: Right Versus Wrong

Anger was inextricably connected to the men's views of right and wrong. Abstract principles and standards about proper human conduct (e.g., truth, fairness, sportsmanship, and professionalism) were often invoked to explain their angry feelings. There was certitude about being right, bolstered in some cases by references to the Bible or another authoritative text. Men used terms such as "legitimate," "rational," and "justified" to describe this anger. "Justified" anger was expressed about a variety of societal issues ranging from the specific (e.g., President Clinton not doing the "right thing") to the global (e.g., politics, monopolies, environmental pollution, and misuse of the disability system). Judgments were made that other people should not be capricious, irresponsible, incompetent, or manipulative. After recounting a series of events in which supervisory personnel lied to him and asked him to cooperate with them in violations of corporate ethics, Stanley summed up his response to these events as follows: "The anger surfaces [when] people are asking me to

do things, you know, signing your life over to the devil, deep differences of opinions over ethics and moral issues in an organization.”

Lack of recognition of his sophisticated knowledge and competence evoked Ivan’s anger:

What really gets me angry is when I am trying to help a person with a [computer] problem they are having, and they don’t listen to what I am telling them or they tell me that I’m incorrect in my resolution to the problem. I know I am right. I have been doing it for 3 years now.

Another person’s incompetence was the anger-provoking issue in Harold’s narrative:

What causes me more anger [is] if a person is supposed to do something and they don’t. And they’ve had all the chances in the world to get it right, over and over again, and it’s still not right, then that finally causes me to get pretty upset.

The study participants longed to accomplish resolution of perceived wrongs against themselves or others. Anger, if “funneled and channeled properly” could be used as an instructional device to “drive a point home.” One man referred to anger as “a good way to get the juice up, to be able to do something.” “Right anger” was proportionate to the offense and successful in making its point: “You are going to work for justice and people are going to know what your point is, but you’re not going to yell at them.” The following quotations exemplify the tendency to make a judgment, based on principle, and then use the anger to rectify the wrong.

The senior pastor had transgressed a significant ethical boundary, and I had an ethical obligation to let that be known. I was trying to do the right thing by putting my anger forward. I confronted him. (Luther)

There are things that we’re supposed to get angry about, because . . . it is an emotion that, if it’s handled right, should be healthy and can accomplish something. (Harold)

They [abusers of children or animals] need something to jolt them. (Arnold)

Wrong anger involved two subthemes: overreaction and failure to act. Although some participants espoused “venting” anger to achieve “catharsis,” most decried overreaction to trivial provocations, especially when this behavior was observed by other people.

It scares them [family members] when I’m pounding on door jambs. I realize that it’s totally inappropriate and totally ridiculous. It makes me feel bad, gives me at least a temporary lower self-esteem. . . . Plus I don’t think it’s healthy. (David)

I was a Boy Scout leader. This kid and I never got along. He was not steering the canoe right. We hit the rock. And I hit him. It wasn’t the right thing to do. He was startled and hurt. (George)

Wrong anger could involve failure to act as well as overreaction. Most shameful was the failure to act according to internalized norms of masculinity. As one man expressed it, “You know, there’s an expectation that you need to respond in a certain way . . . defend yourself . . . and put somebody in their place. Because that’s part of what men do.”

Another participant mentioned the mandate “to show that you’re not scared.” A number of men doubted their own ability to fulfill societal expectations and questioned whether they were “adequate” or “normal.” Karl deplored his inability to assert himself when dealing with a confrontational coworker: “There’s a certain passivity that I can kinda fall into. I’m needing to be aggressive or holding my own and presenting an argument rather than just biting my tongue. The result is, uh, kinda feeling (pause) badly about myself.” Martin deplored his tendency to brood over anger incidents and admitted, “I don’t feel like I’m as much of a man because I can’t impact my environment the way that I want to.” He attributed his inability to display confident masculine aggression to distressing “teasing” by other boys in his formative years:

I was kind of late going through puberty and all. And you know, playing sports you’re showering with guys and things like that, so I took teasing right along that point where you’re trying to make sense of your own person, like 6th, 7th, 8th grade, and so now I still find that I have a lot of unresolved anger towards these people, and I try not to let that define who I am, but still I think it even impacts me today, brings up feelings of inadequacy.

Theme 2: Being Controlled Versus Having and Maintaining Control

The word *control* was ubiquitous in anger narratives of the study participants. The men used the word in two ways: (a) to refer to their own general sense of control of situations and events (comparable to the psychological constructs “locus of control” or “self-efficacy”) and (b) to refer more specifically to the control of their angry emotionality. Consistent with a mechanistic worldview, men became angry when they did not have the ability to control or “fix” things, whether the things were inanimate objects (computers, boats, cars) or work-related problems (demanding customers, incompetent coworkers). Men often provided lengthy, detailed narratives regarding the purchase of mechanical objects that mal-

functioned; they were angry not only about the money expended in the purchase of these objects but also about the funds they had spent for improperly performed repairs. Narratives often included details such as precise dollar amounts spent for parts.

Illogical actions of other people that were out of the men's sphere of personal control (e.g., other drivers) also provoked considerable ire, consistent with an implicit "should" that human action should be logical and reasonable. There were numerous accounts of road rage, as illustrated in these excerpts from the transcripts.

There's a car on my left that's coming up, and they're not passing, so finally I have to touch my brake. I have to stop my cruise control. My immediate reaction is just to get angry. I curse at them or whatever. I want to be able to impact the situation, but I really have no control. (Martin)

There are a lot of bad drivers out there . . . just not driving safe or actually impeding other people, cutting other people off and things like that . . . you have a lack of control . . . I holler at the windshield. (Eldon)

Study participants often expressed doubt that the emotion of anger could be brought under volitional control. Anger was depicted as an "it," a separate entity that could immobilize or compel rash actions. Being controlled by the force of angry emotion was depicted as follows.

A very pissed off feeling that kinda totally absorbed me, basically just totally immobilized me. (Eldon)

I kind of "go off" on people a lot. . . . It [the anger] makes me . . . I found that in the past when I didn't, later on it would kind of eat me up. (Oscar)

I clearly lost control and threw the cat toward the wall. (Charles)

I was living in that anger. I poured it out on her every chance I got. It's so powerful and deep seated and undeniable. (Luther)

Having control, and maintaining control, was viewed as desirable but difficult (or impossible) to achieve. The initial attempt to gain control usually involved "fixing" the machine that was malfunctioning or bringing other people into compliance through some sort of disciplinary measures: "Whenever I am angry I always want to—*right now—fix it*" (Frank, said with strong emphasis).

When this initial attempt was unsuccessful (as when a teacher could not control his defiant students or a father could not control his unruly child), withdrawal was a common tactic. The anger had to be "shut down," "leashed," or "bridled" by disengaging from the interaction and isolating oneself.

My words become more terse. . . . I say less the more angry I get. . . . Sometimes I wait awhile before I say anything. (Bob)

I try to isolate myself and calm myself down and try and get back into control. (Ivan)

It's just a matter of coming home and just trying to chill out and put it in perspective . . . to make sure that it doesn't become all-controlling like it did with my mom and my dad. (Eldon)

As Eldon's words suggest, parents were important role models for study participants. Fathers who controlled anger well were described admiringly ("My father was pretty laid back, pretty calm, never laid a hand on me in anger"), whereas those who administered harsh discipline caused the opposite reaction ("My dad was always so quick to spank us about every little thing without asking or anything, and I don't want to be that way"). Having experienced constant arguing of their parents during childhood, some men (like Eldon) were dubious that anger could ever produce good outcomes.

Then and Now

Time was an important contextual ground for the two thematic aspects of men's anger experience. Most of the men (i.e., all but 3, who were ages 23, 27, and 32) drew sharp contrasts between their anger then and now. Youthful volatility was contrasted with a more reflective and mature adult anger style. For example, one man recalled his "idiocy," while driving a Volkswagen, in becoming embroiled in a road rage incident with a cement truck 20 or 30 years ago: "I don't do those kinds of things anymore. I just let it go." Then is exemplified in other participants' narratives as follows.

When I was a kid, I probably had what might even be called a violent temper. . . . I've gone up to people and just hit them as hard as I can in the stomach. (Bob)

When I was a lot younger, it was hit things, slam your hand into the wall. (Paul)

[In] my childhood, I was really ready to fight all the time. I would get mad at everything. (Ray)

Even up until my early 20s, [when] I got into a fight with someone, I meant to kill them. I had to be stopped one way or the other or I would have just done them in. I was never able to control it. (Ned)

Typical of participant descriptions of present anger (the now) were comments like the following:

I've gotten pretty good about processing my anger before expressing it. . . . I couldn't tell you the last time that I have shouted at a peer. (Arnold)

I don't think my ideas of right or wrong have changed that much, but I think my perspective on people has changed, so that now I can see people are flawed, and I accept people's flaws more now, and see it as part of their humanness and not a personal affront. (Martin)

I haven't had to throw a punch in 30 years. Not in anger anyway. (Ned)

Most men described multiple incidents of being picked on and bullied when boys, as shown in the following interview excerpt:

When I was in 7th grade, there were these two boys that decided that I was going to be their project to pick on that year . . . it was the most miserable of my growing up years. Being an only child, I didn't know anything about how to defend myself, how to get in touch with my anger and have the courage to express it physically . . . I just took it.

Although this man did not know how to fight back, others learned to do so:

I used to be the punching bag for the rednecks. I had not done anything except be myself. . . . I finally had to end up fighting them. I hated everything about it; I didn't want to win, I just wanted it to be over with.

Some men spoke of a particular event in which they became acutely aware of their capability to kill, after which they relinquished physical fighting as a means of settling disputes. One study participant came to this terrifying realization while his hands were around another boy's neck choking him. Another participant described a frightening incident when his parents had to restrain him from harming his younger brother:

I was after him, and I was going to get him. I can remember that still, vividly. He had fear on his face, 'cause I guess he saw something, that I was really angry. My parents had to hold me back. It scared me. I thought, "WOW!" because I really felt that I couldn't control that. It was different than us getting into little spats like we used to . . . this was the real thing. Somebody could have gotten hurt. . . . I've never been like that since.

Several other participants attributed a radical change in their anger behavior to a spiritual or religious transformation: "What happened was that a higher developed sense of morality than I had had 20 years ago was taking over. That higher sense of morality involved empathy." One man with a history of childhood abuse and lifelong anger problems credited psychotherapy for his improved anger control in middle adulthood. Another spoke of "breaking that hold that anger [had] on my emotions" through forgiving old transgressions.

Discussion

Findings of this study suggest that men's anger is often misunderstood, perhaps because men have seldom been invited to share complete, richly nuanced, stories of their experience with a respectful listener. In contrast to Campbell's (1993) claim that aggression feels good to men because it confers the reward of power over others, all participants in this study described anger as a problematic uncomfortable emotion. Its dangerous destructive potential was emphasized more so than its potential to rectify wrongs. Whereas Aristotle had claimed in the *Rhetoric* that the angry person wants revenge (Aristotle, 1941, p. 1380), there was little evidence in participants' narratives of such a desire. Nor was there evidence in the present data to support Frankel's (1985) assertion that the angry person is absorbed with the necessity to attribute blame.

According to Lazarus (1999), the core relational theme for the emotion of anger is "a demeaning offense against me or mine" (p. 217), and the innate action tendency is attack on the blameworthy agent to preserve self-esteem. However, narratives of the present sample do not indicate that attack preserves or enhances self-esteem. Men who had lost control and engaged in aggressive behavior while angry were ashamed of their behavior and pointed out its irrationality and futility. Even men who appeared to believe in the value of venting generally felt worse after doing so, contrary to findings of a recent study by Bushman, Baumeister, and Phillips (2001), in which some people engaged in aggression to improve a bad mood. Participants in the present study decried the social pressure they had received to enact aggressive masculinity. In speaking of boyhood experiences, they pointed out that becoming a successful fighter did not make them feel good about themselves. Many men described decades of inner conflict regarding anger and its expression.

Phenomenological research is both theory generating and hypothesis generating. The emphasis in men's anger narratives on "fixing" things deserves further examination by researchers. The expectation that balky computers or subordinates could be quickly brought under control is an irrational one, fueling an impotent and nonproductive type of anger. I observed such a thought process in a previous study of husbands of women with postpartum depression (Meighan, Davis, Thomas, & Dippleman, 1999). Men attempted to "fix" their wives' "problem" and lamented their inability to do so. Some had lavished their wives with material goods (new house, new car) in attempts to brighten their mood. Speaking of the

depressive illness, one man said, "I couldn't hit it and make it go away . . . I couldn't scare anything off . . . or I couldn't beg it or give it money to go away" (p. 205).

This study demonstrated several commonalities between the anger experiences of men and women. Findings of the study suggest that men are often as uncomfortable and conflicted about anger as women are. Like women in a previous study (Thomas et al., 1998), men often told their anger stories with embarrassed hesitance and nervous laughter. Guilt and self-recrimination regarding anger behavior were frequently reported by men as well as women. Both men and women were cognizant of constructive uses of anger, but examples of its constructive use were outnumbered by incidents in which it had caused others pain. Individuals of both genders lacked skill in effective anger management and endorsed the widely held folk concept that anger is an independent entity that takes control of the body and compels unwanted behavior (Lakoff, 1987).

Gender differences were observed as well. Whereas women's anger was provoked mainly by lack of relationship reciprocity in their closest intimate relationships, men's anger was often provoked by strangers, faulty mechanical objects, or global societal issues in which a principle was at stake or an injustice was perceived. Thus, findings of the present study are congruent with Gilligan's (1982) conceptualization of differences in the moral reasoning of men and women. In her conceptualization, the morality of men tended to be principled and abstract, focused on obtaining justice, whereas women displayed a morality of care based on relational values. Linking my findings with Gilligan's work does not, however, imply endorsement of an essentialist perspective of gender differences.

This study provided a glimpse into a man's relationships with the tools of his work, whether those were hammers or computers. Considerable ire was generated when the tools through which work is accomplished failed to serve a man properly. Men described hitting and cursing their computers and throwing their tools. Instruments of escape from work (e.g., boats) also provoked anger when they malfunctioned. In contrast, women's anger narratives seldom, if ever, pertained to mechanical objects; their stories pertained to their powerlessness to achieve changes they desired in intimate relationships. Anger at mothers, spouses, friends, and children dominated their interviews (Thomas et al., 1998). Expression of anger was distressful to women because it broke the circle of an intimate relationship and created fear of its termination.

Curiously absent from men's interviews were stories of anger at intimate partners. Review of participants' demographic characteristics indicated that 12 of 19 were married, and at least 3 others were known to be involved in committed partnerships. However, only 2 men provided accounts of angry incidents with partners. The virtual absence of such accounts is puzzling. Because it is a basic tenet of phenomenological method that participants will talk about events that stand out in their perceptions, the researcher does not pose intrusive questions derived from personal biases or presuppositions. A logical conclusion, then, on the basis of the present set of interviews, is that men's anger in intimate partner relationships is less figural to men than anger in other contexts. It is not possible to rule out alternative explanations, however, such as anxiety about discussing marital conflict with a third party. Some contemporary masculinity scholars propose that men simply lack language to articulate their deep feelings. Levant (1995) contended that many men, in fact, have a subclinical version of alexithymia, although this contention awaits empirical testing. Still another explanation, proposed by a reviewer, is that men may take their relationships for granted. Contended the reviewer, "If you've never been without one, it becomes ground rather than figure."

Stylistic differences while narrating anger stories were noted between men in the present study and women in the study by Thomas et al. (1998). Men most commonly spoke of anger provocateurs in vague terms such as "this guy," "an acquaintance," or "another employee," whereas women almost invariably used specific proper names throughout their interviews. Further exploration of this finding by scholars of linguistics would be useful; the vague language suggests a detachment or distancing that was not noted in women's narratives. Women frequently used the word "hurt" and had difficulty separating their anger from feelings of "hurt," but very few of the men ever used the word. Consistent with Averill's (1983) research, women reported that crying was common while angry; men did not. Metaphors used by men also differed from those used by women. Whereas women often used cooking metaphors, such as "simmering," "slow boil," or "stewing," men's anger was not readily consigned to the "back burner"—it was described as a flood, fire, or vortex that swept them along with its force. Containing this fiery force was often perceived as difficult. Although metaphors used by both genders are consistent with anger metaphors deeply ingrained in American culture, a previous study by Lakoff (1987) failed to examine gender differences.

Men, to a greater extent than women, worried about their adequacy in enacting the culturally prescribed anger management style for their gender. Unlike women, the men had been forced as boys to adopt physical aggression as a defense. Although this physicality no longer served them well in adulthood, many men had no efficacious strategies to take its place. They continued to have strong bodily arousal when angry but few available mechanisms to safely discharge the physical tension. Throwing hammers and hitting computers provided little relief and left them feeling foolish afterward. Withdrawal from a scene of conflict prevented an embarrassing outburst but provided no outlet for relief of the physical tension. Men's tendency to isolate themselves after an anger incident has another drawback: There is no opportunity to receive the affirmation, empathy, and support that women often receive when they tell a confidante what happened. A number of studies document women's greater propensity to discuss their anger with a friend or relative (Riley, Treiber, & Woods, 1989; Thomas, 1989, 1997), which can yield health benefits such as lower blood pressure (Davidson, MacGregor, Stuhr, Dixon, & MacLean, 2000; Thomas, 1997), in addition to the empathy and support.

Findings of the present study lend support to the arguments of scholars who are calling on contemporary men to rethink "the male deal." As described by Samuels (2001, p. 44),

In the male deal, the little boy, at around the age of 3 or 4, strikes a bargain with the social world in which he lives. If he will turn away from soft things, feminine things, maternal things . . . then the world will reward his gender certainty by giving him all the goodies in its possession.

However, the "deal" (i.e., endorsement of the prevalent gender stereotype) has damaging as well as beneficial effects (Brooks & Silverstein, 1995), including the health-damaging effects of mismanaged anger. Rethinking the "deal" begs the question: How easy is it to change a man's gendered conception of himself?

If a man wishes to escape the demands of hegemonic masculinity, it may be particularly difficult to silence the "male chorus," which includes "all the guy's comrades and rivals, all his buddies and bosses, his male ancestors, and his male cultural heroes, his male models of masculinity, and above all, his father" (Pittman, 1990, p. 42). Courtenay (2000, p. 7) asserted, however, that gender is not static: "People construct and reconstruct [it] . . . in ongoing interaction with social and institutional structures." Some

scholars claim that traditional masculinity is presently "in crisis" (Clare, 2000), whereas others (Levant, 1995) contend that masculinity has already collapsed, freeing men from restrictive gender role constraints. However, little change is evident in gender role stereotypes held by college students (Street, Kimmel, & Kromrey, 1995), and many men remain unsure just what the new masculinity entails with regard to socially appropriate expression of emotions such as anger.

Study participants' perceptions that they developed more constructive anger with age give rise to optimism that unhealthy anger habits can be modified. Findings of this study add to a growing literature on emotional development across the life span. Comments of participants are congruent with Frijda's (1988) assertion that "emotions change when meanings change. Emotions are changed when events are viewed differently" (p. 350). Consistent with Averill's (1984) discussion of adult emotional development, men in this study reported that they acquired abilities, as they matured, to have more realistic expectations, make finer distinctions, and display less volatile responses. Some men mentioned spiritual-religious growth, whereas others emphasized increased empathy for the human failings of other people. Only recently have researchers begun to explore constructive anger (Davidson et al., 2000), after several decades of focusing almost exclusively on its negative aspects. Greater attention must be given to interventions that promote constructive anger, that is, nonconfrontational discussion of angry feelings that leads to understanding of the other person's point of view and to resolution of the problem (Davidson et al., 2000; Thomas, 1997).

Early anger management education could reduce the decades of inner conflict that was evident among these adult male study participants. Both parents and schools could promote a less aggressive cultural ideal for male anger. Many school-based emotional literacy programs have empirically demonstrated efficacy (Goleman, 1995). Mental health professionals could conduct such programs and/or serve as consultants to teachers. Teachers could be advised to seize teachable moments to introduce conflict resolution concepts. Boys who fight in the schoolyard could be taught how to modulate intense anger and resolve conflicts through dialogue.

Adult men whose anger remains intense and chronic may benefit from cognitive-behavioral therapies (Deffenbacher, 1995; Novaco, 1985). The present study revealed a number of irrational thoughts and ineffective response patterns that could be addressed with cognitive-behavioral modalities. Find-

ings of the present study also suggest the need for interventions that promote forgiveness of wrongs inflicted by others. Structured psychoeducational approaches may be more appealing to men than traditional one-on-one psychotherapies (Kilmartin, 2000). Men's groups may provide a safe climate for exploring gender stereotypes and concerns about adequacy as a man. Research is needed on the outcomes of manualized psychoeducational anger management interventions, such as those proposed by Thomas (2001). Modalities such as yoga and meditation deserve consideration by clinicians and evaluation by researchers. Combination approaches may prove to be more effective than single techniques.

Once called the "forgotten emotion" (DiGiuseppe, Tafrate, & Eckhardt, 1994) because of psychology's disproportionate attention to anxiety and depression, anger is receiving increased scrutiny. This study has contributed to the anger literature by shedding light on the meaning of anger in everyday life as men go about enacting their social roles. The study findings negated several widely held assumptions about men's anger. Like all studies, this one has limitations. Because virtually all of the men in the study were White and middle class, it cannot be presumed that the findings are generalizable to men who are situated in the life-world quite differently with regard to their social class, race, and/or ethnicity. For example, there is an urgent need to examine chronic anger, emanating from racist discrimination, in men of color. Exploration of men's anger in non-Western cultures is needed as well. Particularly important are comparisons of anger experience and behavior in collectivistic versus individualistic cultures (Tanaka-Matsumi, 1995). This study has illuminated both men's shame regarding volatile anger behavior and their potential for achievement of improved anger control. Eradication of anger is neither desirable nor feasible, but men can learn to channel it more appropriately.

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