Through Anger:

Proposing embodied anger release for marginalized communities as a Feminist practice of challenging and pushing out the boundaries of 'worlds' and resisting silencing practices

Research Question:

As historically capitalist, religious, and white supremacist values have inhibited and punished the access and expression of anger for marginalized communities, how can I create a physical, embodied, anti-capitalist design to facilitate a deeper understanding, reverence, and more genuine expression of anger for people from marginalized communities?

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Abstract

Factors such as race, class, and gender shape the margins of socially acceptable behavior, disproportionally restricting and burdening people with marginalized identities with a greater emotional load and required restraint (Bailey, 2018; Thomas, 2005; Taylor, 2006; Srinivasan, 2018; Silva, 2021.)

Access to anger is granted unequally, especially to those in marginalized communities, yet it remains one of the most powerful resources for creating change. Inspired by intersectional feminist thinkers, like Audre Lorde, and somatic healing practices, "Through Anger" creates a physical space for creative anger externalization through material exploration and movement. This project invites participants to consider their own rituals and release practices as a form of connecting with themselves and resisting silencing practices and grounding in community.

As Chemaly (2018) believes, "Anger is not what gets in our way, it is our way. All we need to do is own it." I propose that facilitating a connection and deeper understanding and exploration towards general anger for marginalized people through creative movement and communal building projects leads to greater connection to the transformative "Knowing Resistant Anger" that Lorde (1987) references, which serves to resist silencing practices, create channels towards liberation, and foster community.

Introduction

Drawing on my background as a Behavioral Therapist working with at-risk youth, who had difficulty regulating the often justified anger they felt and continued to be criminalized for outbursts that were seen through a racialized lens, I sought to create space and strategies for a holistic emotional regulation framework. There is a place for all emotions and to deny that would be to deny full personhood (Van der Kolk, 2018).

Due to historical systems of oppression and their resulting respectability politics in our present day, there are few instances where the display and expression of anger is accepted (Bailey, 2018). It is commonly seen as "aggressive," "destructive," counterproductive to movement building, and a sign of a person who is not in control of themselves or at times even threatening and dangerous (Grimm, 2015; Srinivasan, 2018). Naturally, people who fall at the margins of these systems of power, including women, people of color, gender non-conforming people, and poor people, are given a much more narrow range of acceptable display of anger and rage; whereas, it is acceptable and forgiven much easier for those with dominant group identities (Cooper, 2018; Grimm, 2015; Traister, 2018; Newman, 2018).

Literature Review

This literature review will briefly look at the conceptualization of anger by some theorists and philosophers throughout history, the purpose of anger as a human emotion and its significance, and finally explore design interventions and facilitating the creation of alternative futures. As in depth research on anger in the field of design is limited, this review also pulls from multiple other fields including psychology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, medicine, race, class and gender studies, and organization and management studies.

History

There has been much speculation about the root and purposes and functions of anger. We can look at it from an etymological perspective. The Old Norse origin "angr" is said to mean trouble, affliction, even pain. "Etymology encourages us to say anger is pain, comes from feeling pain and moves to inflict pain" (Thurman, 2006). Aristotle called anger the "emotion of injustice" (Bailey, 2018), which is often accompanied by physical distress and provoked by relationships of inequity (Gross, 2008). Both Aristotle and Hume's theories critique power differences and argue that the democratization of emotion over the last two decades is incomplete or meant to serve as a distracting model.

The Age of Enlightenment did much to promote logic over emotion. It was originally Descartes who popularized the idea of emotions as excess, and positioned "passions" as being in direct contrast to "reason" (Gross, 2008). Descartes and Seneca (2010) both stated the preference for apathy as it should create an environment suitable for reason. The Greek root of the word apathy, "apatheia," translates to "without passion as suffering." The implication here is that all emotions are suffered, even the pleasurable ones, and emotions are deviations from the norm of reason. The Ciceronian Stoics furthered this perspective by framing emotions as "an illness of the soul" (Gross, 2008). Seneca (2010) believed the solution was that man should not want more than social status affords, avoid situations which might threaten his position, surround himself with mild mannered company, and marry a submissive woman so as not to stir his emotions. They were not the only ones to promote apathy. Academic philosopher Speusippus defined "certain states of impassivity and rest" as virtue; while, Aristotle believed that all actions and passions can be virtuous if appropriately tailored to the circumstance (Seneca, 2010).

Francisco Hutcheson and Adam Smith tried to anchor emotions and social passions in a moral sense equally shared by all; however, Paul Ekman disproved emotional universality with his "display rules" theory inspired by observing the difference of culturally appropriate facial expressions in Asian countries.

From a biblical perspective, anger is categorized as one of the seven deadly sins which causes the breaking of ethical codes in the Jewish Bible and Christian Gospel (Thurman, 2006). However, Humanists consider anger to have the natural energy of self preservation and thus be positive. As an imperialist nation, the United States teaches anger as part of membership in its culture (Thurman, 2006).

Purpose and significance of emotions

Emotions are information (Brackett, 2019; McLaren, 2010; Bailey, 2018; Lorde, 2010). Besides the biological element, Aristotle states that anger specifically helps us to banish fear and act with confidence. It is an emotional state that prevents fear's paralysis (Thurman, 2006). Anger can point to the need for something to be restored and protect a person's vulnerability; however, an overdependence on this alone is not healing (McLaren, 2010).

Why is it important to examine anger?

There are several reasons why anger warrants examination. Access to anger points to social hierarchies (Graeber, 2007; Bailey, 2018; Lorde, 2010). Proper regulation of anger has ties to

mental well-being and quality of life (Phillips, L.H., et al, 2006); wound healing (Gouin, et al, 2008); resilience and healing from trauma (Van der Kolk, 1994); relational health (Butler, 2018); and the success and efficacy of protest movements (Archer, A. and Mills, G., 2019; Ost, D., 2004; Jasper, J.M, 2014). While, the suppression of anger can lead to amplified physical pain (Quartana, 2007), delays in the healing process and self blame (Van der Kolk, 1994; Butler, 2018), and apathy (Schleuning, 2001). Silva (2021) states that an important distinction to make is that anger aims for recognition, rather than retribution. Butler (2018) creates a distinction between harmful, destructive anger, which has a core of hostility and healthy, helpful anger which has a "self-affirming, protective" and benevolent core. Additionally, Butler (2018) argues that "when people permit themselves to feel their resentment… the groundwork is laid" because ultimately individuals should learn to "incorporate anger" in their relationships, rather than suppressing it.

Anger and Injustice

Anger is intimately tied to injustice, specifically here I'll mention racism and sexism. "Victims of oppression are often called to let go of their anger in order to facilitate better discussion to bring about the end of their oppression" (Archer, 2019), which creates an additional form of injustice called affective injustice. The burden of emotional regulation to remain calm and peaceful (and not resort to anger) falls on those actively being harmed (Bailey, 2018; Taylor, 2006); otherwise, they will be framed as aggressors like in the case of observed media coverage of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. (Grimm, 2015). Grimm (2015) continues to detail how Malcolm X was labeled a deviant, while Martin Luther King, Jr. became known as a righteous leader. In present day, we can observe the difference in fines, media coverage, and affective expectations placed on

a Black tennis player like Serena Williams as opposed to her white counterparts (Newman, 2018).

Thomas (2005) finds that the most pervasive theme of women's anger was powerlessness. Many women have written and spoken about it, especially those at the intersection of racist and sexist oppression. Audre Lorde (1987) and Cooper (2018) have written about anger as a powerful tool for liberation.

Protest

In instances of protest, anger can be spoken about as counterproductive; however, Srinivasan (2018) reframes it as a privilege "[W]e condemn anger. But in so doing we neglect, as we have always neglected, those who were never allowed to be angry, the slaves and women who have the power of neither the state nor the sword." Anger communicates a shared value system (Srinivasan, 2018), and properly utilizing and regulating it is an important part of political mobilization (Ost, 2004; Jasper, 2014).

Design outcomes

As inspiration for potential design outcomes, I used ideas of designing play and encouraging the loss of inhibition mentioned by Cas Holman (Abstract, 2019), bodystorming and prop use (Boal, 2005), game design for impactful and memorable experiences (Isbister, 2016), and ideas around creating physical shared experiences and empathy (Ciaunica, 2019). I sought playful movements, imaginative envisioning through building (Sanders, 2014), community-based practices, and

potential rituals. The significance of rituals is due to theories that they can "work through three mutually reinforcing mechanisms: cognitive capture, emotional anchoring and behavioral prescription"; and function to "provide meaning, manage anxiety, exemplify and reinforce the social order, communicate important values, enhance group solidarity... and signal commitment" among other things (Smith, 2011). Thus, I propose ritual creation and maintenance for connecting with knowing, resistant anger.

Practical Review

As there are not many services and spaces available specifically addressing anger, I looked at the broader emotional management activities and spaces that are relatively accessible. I am not a mental health professional nor am I looking to diagnose or offer professional mental health services, therefore I excluded talk therapy and anger management support groups from this analysis.

I examined five areas- two of which were flexible and can be participated in anywhere at any time, two were physically situated and needed traveling to a designated location, and the last one was situated in a physical location but had the option for people to participate virtually as well. These included online resources for somatic practices, co-counseling, Rage Rooms, "Scream the House Down," and the "Anger Management " HIIT class offered at Gymbox.

Online Resources

The first two practices, online resources and co-counseling, are flexible and can be performed anywhere. Online somatic practices included a guided yoga Youtube channel, Yoga with Adrienne; a multi part series by the Johns Hopkins Medicine Youtube channel led by a trauma and anxiety specialist; and several others by psychotherapist Peter Levine and Karen Stewart, LCSW. These videos are available to anyone with access to the internet and the exercises can be performed anywhere. They provided short, clear guided methods for connecting with your body and research- based practices for managing tension. However, taking into account the immediacy and energy of anger, it did not seem to be the right medium to foster a ritualized anger release and connection.

Co-Counseling

Co-counseling (Rockman, 1973) is a community based support practice which seeks to democratize mental health and well-being by supporting one another in facilitated emotional release and exploration. It is an intentional, guided, and much communicated and negotiated practice. It is timed and personalized to individual needs and requests; however, it requires training and can go wrong if not done well. Additionally, it has a typical time commitment of 2-3 hours, which can serve as a deterrent for people seeking lower commitment forms of emotional regulation. Furthermore, it is also contingent on the presence of another person and cannot be done alone, requiring the additional labor of logistical planning with another person and disallowing it to be utilized on a needs basis in the moment.

Rage Rooms

The next two activities, Rage rooms and "Anger Management" HIIT class, are physically situated and require a commute to a location. Rage rooms offer the service of destroying material

items in an enclosed room with a chosen musical playlist and weapons, including a baseball bat, metal pipe, or hammer. The benefit of these is the normalization of anger release alone or with friends. However, the detriment is the commercialization of access to your own anger, tie to a specific location, and the requirement of a reservation beforehand. Additionally, it is quite expensive. One rage room in Florida, USA charges \$25 for 5 minutes in the room. These fees render this option not only unsustainable as a long term anger management solution and inaccessible for most; but, also only allow for the result of anger to be destruction.

HIIT Training Class

Gymbox's "Anger Management" HIIT training class led by Sam Bradley had 3 phasesgenerating, releasing, and recovering. After the intense workout, there is a gentle 10 minute meditation session led by the instructor. It facilitates a healthy habit and safe physical release in a curated space. However, memberships to Gymbox begin at £79 a month which again renders this option inaccessible to most. Additionally, it is tied to a specific location and time and cannot be adaptable or personalized.

"Scream the House Down"

And finally, "Scream the House Down" is a large-scale interactive art installation created by Marcus Lyall in a soon- to- be demolished office block on Southwark Street. Inspired by primal scream therapy, Lyall wanted to invite people into a constructive, safe way to relieve inner tension. The longer and louder the outburst, the bigger the response from the building. People can visit in person, dial in, or submit a short film of their scream. The common themes here were lack of flexibility, privacy, and affordable practices that could be continued long term and built into a larger emotional regulation routine.

Conceptual Positioning

My work is influenced by intersectional feminists like Audre Lorde and Judith Butler who have long argued for the importance of emotions like anger in liberation movements; adversarial design or agonistic design, which proposes that in order to resolve something it must be faced; and Donella Meadows' Systems Theory and Graeber's theory of manners to contextualize access to anger as a function of and serving to maintain social hierarchies and systems, in which we encompass certain roles. Additionally, I'm interested in Sasha Costanza-Chock's writing on Design Justice and resisting reduction.

Methodology

The methods for this research included a literature review, practical review/ comparative analysis, mind map, directed storytelling with 9 participants, content analysis, data visualization and sensemaking through collage and clay materials, artifact analysis, storyboards, and four design workshops with a total of 20 participants: one in person workshop utilizing movement, role playing, and bodystorming and three virtual workshops focused on material exploration, co-design, and collaborative creation.

I began with a literature review of the various perspectives related to the topic of anger, examining it through a historical lens, radical and capitalist and white supremacist lens, religious, institutional and finally a personal lens. Then, I created a mind map with the various themes in order to see ties and intersections. Afterwards, I began a practical overview of the services and spaces that are currently available for examining and releasing anger. These ranged from the more formalized anger management therapies and support groups to the more freeform, creative "Scream Therapy", Wreck Room or Rage Room, The Living Theater (and Open Theater), co-counseling, guided resources online on somatic healing practices and Yoga, a HIIT class centered on anger release called "Anger Management," adult playpens, and contact sports. I narrowed these down to those that are easily accessible, replicable at home, and most practically able to be incorporated into a consistent solo or partnered anger exploration and release practice.

Following that I began with the primary research. I engaged 8 participants from my target demographic, 18-35 yr old adults from marginalized backgrounds, in directed storytelling to understand their experience with their own anger including triggers, their emotional journey, and what if anything they wish was different.

Exploration

Directed Storytelling

I engaged 9 people from my target demographic, adults 18-35 years old with one or multiple marginalized identities, in directed storytelling and semi-structured interviews. They were asked:

- 1. What typically tends to make you angry?
- 2. Can you tell me about a recent time that you felt angry, and what was that journey like for you? What happens?
- 3. Is there anything else you'd like to add or wish I had asked about?

After transcribing the interviews, there were a wide range of thoughts and experiences with anger. The following three were prominent in most conversations: control (either not having it or being subjected to someone else's control), the desire for some form of release (hitting something, shouting), and the physical manifestations of the angry feeling in the body (paralysis, sweating, heat, panic, restlessness.) Other themes that emerged as triggers were feeling dismissed or taken advantage of, boundaries being crossed, and disrespect (either towards self or others). In managing anger, ruminating and rationalizing were common along with seeking distractions, verbal ventilation, and the need for privacy. Multiple people mentioned feeling unable to express anger, either in general or in certain contexts (with parents, classmates, boss).

I've categorized these into the following, in which there will likely be overlaps:

- Verbal ventilation (to friends, family, other)
- Using Distractions (social media, television, performing other unrelated tasks)
- **Isolating self to manage** (typically in home or privacy of room, listen to music, can also overlap with cognitive processing and distraction seeking)
- **Cognitive processing** (ruminate, re-think situation, try to forgive and understand other person's perspective, think about what could have been done differently)

- **Channeling** (going for runs, using punching bag, completing household tasks aggressively, putting feeling into creative endeavors)
- Active aggression (tantrum- type behavior; screaming, breaking things, making threats, "snapping" at other)
- **Passive aggression** (passive commentions and behaviors)

Movement Workshop

Next, I led a "Moving Through Anger" workshop with six participants, 5 women of color and 1 Black man, to role play and bodystorm their own choreography of anger and lead one another in it. To start, they filled out a short questionnaire that asked them to reflect on their own experiences with anger in order to ground individual understanding before engaging in the group conversation and activity. Specifically, they were asked:

- 1. What does your anger look and feel like? (Describe or draw)
- 2. How do you typically show anger? If there were no consequences, how would you like to express it?
- 3. Anger often comes with physical tension and sensations in the body. What helps you release anger from your body?
- 4. What do you usually need when you're angry? What is helpful?
- 5. How would you help a friend who was feeling really angry?

The questionnaires included a body outline for participants to indicate and visually depict their experience of anger in the body. The group was divided into two teams and given props to create a short choreography for anger release to teach to the other team. The aim was to explore embodied, physical methods of individual and group anger release using a playful approach. In

addition, at the time I was exploring a potential video series design outcome inspired by the tantruming movements and behaviors of children, and conducted this workshop with the intention of potentially utilizing the physical outcomes in the creation of a guided adult tantrum.

Analysis + Themes

Out of the six participants, five participants completed the questionnaire and these were transcribed and analyzed for themes. All 5 participants described anger as heat or fire and % indicated experiencing symptoms in their chest, head, and eyes. % participants mentioned some version of ideally wanting to "let my voice out," "scream," "shout... tantrum," or "talk back." Crying was commonly mentioned as a form of releasing anger from the body for % participants. In reflecting on what is helpful or needed for their own anger, % people wanted validation from another person and % wanted to be left alone. For their friends experiencing anger, % people mentioned providing some form of emotion support (consoling, listening, "giving them time to voice the things in their head").

In the choreography, movements seemed to build up to a climax for both teams. These included shaking the arms in front of the body with building force and then again facing a partner, squeezing a pillow, tossing a pillow aggressively back and forth with a partner, screaming into the pillow, and ultimately slamming the pillow down in the middle of the circle that had been created and against the wall. The feedback from this workshop was that it felt good to release tension in this way, however, many felt that they do not have the space to do this sort of release at home and also cannot make too much noise. One person said they could imagine it as a park installation; however, they raised concerns about receiving unwanted attention from strangers

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and potentially making other park visitors (parents and children) feel unsafe or uncomfortable. This again highlighted the issue of a lack of accessible resources and spaces for safe anger externalization.

Generation

Virtual Workshops

So far, the findings have highlighted the diversity in emotional regulation techniques and needs, making it difficult to create one fixed design outcome. In addition, the limitations of space, sound levels, and desire for privacy in anger externalization led me to choose to lead the next series of three workshops as virtual workshops. This method allowed for both private and collective practices and explorations of anger release. A total of 13 participants in 3 separate workshops were asked to turn off their cameras and microphones and be self-directed with exploring the possibilities of anger release in their rooms with the materials that they already possess.

Participants used materials such as pillows, paper, cardboard, old t-shirts, art supplies, a lock and key, ball, journal, stuffed animal, metal rods, and a flower to rip, throw, scream, punch, and stomp. Then, they were asked to report on their experiences and led in a crazy 8 brainstorming activity to generate anger release designs. Finally, they regrouped to discuss their ideas and create one joint design. The three group designs were as follows: a material exploration workshop series with metal and clay, where "turbulent energy" does not go to waste and can be used to create something positive; an outdoor fairground with different anger release structures to

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appeal to everyone, followed by a rest area to recuperate; and finally, a giant cauldron fueled by "community" and "liberation" that people can use to alchemize the sources of their anger, which included "guilt," "capitalism," and "voicelessness."

Sensemaking

To better understand the outcomes of these workshops, I engaged in the sensemaking practices of collage and clay artifact materializations of people's imagined anger release strategies, placing them all in the same hypothetical world to find patterns and themes.

Analysis and Themes

During the course of the virtual workshops, multiple people expressed confusion and uncertainty about how to engage in the practice of anger release in a self-directed manner. They continued to seek guidance on what they were expected to "do." Some expressed "feeling stupid" and a degree of anxiety that the camera or microphone had been accidentally left on and they could be seen. Some still engaged in ruminating practices. However, the majority of people rejoined the group with deep insights on their experiences and reflected back to us why they felt it was particularly difficult or confusing or easy or enjoyable to connect with their anger. They also connected over shared hesitation and inability to engage in the practice confidently.

Although these were three distinctly different group designs, they shared certain elements. All designs had an element of adaptability to the individual, the desire to utilize and transform anger's energy into something constructive, and a collaborative community element. However, the most interesting and fruitful outcomes from these workshops were the conversations and deeper questioning participants engaged in with one another in the group design process. In the

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moments that I stepped away as a facilitator (turned my camera and microphone off) to allow participants to lead their own creative process, there was a noticeable sense of community. I sought to build on and expand this element through a final live workshop during the UAL London College of Communication Design School exhibition.

Refinement

Live Workshop: Anger Space

The "Anger Space" was created as a live workshop and exploration space for interested participants to engage with the feeling of anger safely and use its energy to build something in a community. The event consisted of three parts: move, brainstorm, and build. In the first part, participants were instructed to choose props (pillows, foam structures, and blankets) and guided to a movement area to connect with and explore anger in their own bodies. The room, which had all blinds drawn shut, was set up to include multiple divided sections for levels of desired privacy and a larger area for group engagement. Participants chose the music to set the tone for their experience and engaged in the activity for 10 minutes. Following that, they were grouped and asked to take materials to brainstorm as many anger release creations as possible as a group. And finally, they built one design together using clay, named it, and presented it to the remainder of the participants and myself with an explanation and its placard. Then, participants were given a self-reflection card with the prompt, "From the Anger Space, I take with me..." to fill out and take with them. The back of the card had a QR code linking to a webpage, which contains educational resources on anger, an unstructured anger toolkit creation guide, and a community page with the outcomes from the virtual workshops and participants' shared experiences.

Analysis and outcomes

The atmosphere for this workshop was more informal and relaxed, as it was part of a larger event; thus, participants seemed to be at ease and collaborated on creative, anger release clay artifacts. These included a physical structure to punch and scream into, "break dance or break down", a videogame, sex, and physical artifacts for consensual self harm and bondage. I observed less hesitation about the self-directed movement section and more of a lean into the community aspect for engaging in physical anger release practices as opposed to previously observed desires for privacy.

Website: Resources, Toolkit, Community

The website and resources felt important to include and disseminate because my goal was to aid in building long term anger exploration and release habits. The workshops, while important as a catalyst, cannot stand alone if participants do not have a way to continue engaging with the topic afterwards. The aim of the workshop is to provide a space to explore and further understand your own anger with the guidance and support of others, engage in collective discussion and envisioning, and tune into localized, collective anger with a tangible real creation resulting from it. Ultimately the goal is to normalize the experience and externalized expression of anger and create a physical space for it in the world, perhaps gaining a deeper sense of the importance and use of the feeling in our lives as a "compass" and "clarifying emotion" as Soraya Chemaly (2018) offers. The hope is that this space grows and evolves with the needs of the community and creates momentum for connection, conversations, and change.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Factors such as race, class, and gender shape the margins of socially acceptable behavior, disproportionally restricting and burdening people with marginalized identities with a greater emotional load and required restraint. I propose that facilitating a connection, deeper understanding, and exploration of general anger for marginalized people leads to greater connection to the transformative "Knowing Resistant Anger" that Lorde (1987) references, which serves to resist silencing practices, create channels towards liberation, and foster community. An important aspect of this might be in utilizing the power of rituals and community building practices. As observed, there is a lack of accessible spaces and resources for marginalized communities to connect with their anger, thus creating a need for further research and lobbying for the creation and maintenance of these spaces.

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