

The dance of anger by harriet lerner essays examples

[Experience](#), [Anger](#)



Introduction

In *The Dance of Anger: A Woman's Guide to Changing the Patterns of Intimate Relationships*, Harriet Lerner aims to raise awareness about the tendencies of women to suppress their anger. While it is important for people to learn to deal with or control their anger, this is entirely different from suppressing. Lerner argued that suppressing anger, which is a common behavior among women, is a way of denying it. Consequently, when women suppress or deny their anger, the problem never gets resolved and only becomes a source of resentment and stress. Through the book, Lerner aims to help women understand sources of anger and use this emotion to yield positive outcomes and change. The *Dance of Anger* will be discussed chapter by chapter with the objective of analyzing discussions and determining the pros and cons of each chapter in relation to the topic of women and anger.

The Challenge of Anger

In this chapter, Lerner has successfully managed to redefine anger. Lerner argued that anger is not merely an emotion but a signal that people must pay attention to. Moreover, anger is not something that people should merely feel but address because it is a sign that there are some things that we need to deal with. Anger, for instance, could mean that there is something we need that is not being addressed. It could also be a warning that we are doing something we are not comfortable with. Without a level of awareness that allows people to realize the root cause of their anger, it becomes difficult to deal with anger effectively, and according to Lerner, women commonly fall victims to this because of their proclivity to

suppressing their emotions including anger. For this reason, Lerner implores women to focus on increasing their awareness about anger. This strength of this chapter lays in Lerner's definition of anger. Lerner has successfully redefined anger in a way that would help women look at it differently - not only an emotion but as an issue that needs attention (Thomas, 31).

Moreover, Lerner has described how women can use the book for the particular purpose she discussed. Lerner has also adequately discussed stereotypes about women, which contribute to their tendency to suppress their feelings. Lerner also questions these stereotypes. What Lerner failed to mention, however, is that despite these stereotypes, some of traits or characterization described can also be said about men. It is highly important to discuss stereotypes equally so as not to become biased. Herein lays the issue in this particular chapter.

Old Moves, New Moves, and Countermoves

In Chapter 2, Lerner discussed the impact of stereotypes in the way that women deal with anger. It could be a result of various reasons by stereotypes have relegated women into a category, which consequently prevents them from dealing with their emotions, specifically anger. Lerner mentions de-selfing, which essentially is a phenomenon that explains why women, especially married women, are not in-tune with the 'self'. In some women's efforts to live up to stereotypes - being the weaker sex, for instance - they forget to think about their own needs. Consequently, women also fail to get in touch with their feelings or emotions, including anger. Eventually, it becomes routine. Lerner, however, argued that women can

change their position, gain upper hand, so to speak, by actively seeking to change things and acting on it. Women may ignore their feelings or emotions in favor of others but they can change if they start doing things differently. Lerner's suggestion is the strength of this chapter. Lerner not only encourages readers to seek change but challenges women to do it. Moreover, Lerner encourages and challenges women by empowering them - telling women that they are capable of dishing out countermoves. Women need not be stuck in their 'old moves', which is to submit to men or other people in their lives. If women start seeing things differently, then they can learn countermoves, which is empowering and would allow them to address their anger in a productive manner. Probably the weakness of Chapter 2 is that Lerner's discussion is exclusive to women in relationship with men. Lerner could have considered that women can also play stereotypes in their relationships with other people.

Circular Dances in Couples

In Chapter 3, Lerner gives readers a reason to consider change the way they deal with anger. Lerner argued that sometimes, letting anger come between two people lead to arguments. Often, arguments happen repeatedly because people cannot handle their anger well. This creates a vicious cycle where two people, particularly men and women in relationships, constantly argue and get angry about the same things that it becomes exhausting. People's inability to deal with problems is the primary reason why they never resolve them. Women, in particular, do not help their significant others deal with their problems because they fail to manage their anger as well. Lerner

argued that communication and compromise can solve this problem. If women, for instance, learn to talk about their feelings more, communicate their needs, and compromise with their partners, then a woman can contribute to the resolution of the problem. Lerner sharing Sandra and Larry's situation is the best part of Chapter Three because the author not only gives advice but also uses real-life examples to help readers understand why following her advice - communicate and compromise - is important. Perhaps the weakness of this chapter is that because Lerner's book is intended for women, the author fails to address men's responsibilities to similarly communicate and compromise.

Anger at Our Impossible Mothers

In Chapter 4, Lerner emphasizes the influence of family, particularly mothers, in the way that women behave. Lerner used Maggie's case to describe the effect of parenting or child-rearing in the personality of children, even in the way that people dealt with anger (Lerner, 47). Lerner also surmised that sometimes the things that cause people to get angry are those that can be traced to people's experiences with their parents. In Maggie's case, her anger can always be traced to her resentments towards her own mother. In the end, Maggie and her mother dealt with their issue by talking about it. In these cases, Lerner argued that it is important for people to open up and to deal with their issues with their parents as a way to similarly deal with their anger issues. Children and parents should actively renegotiate their situation, while the former should learn to become independent and therefore, unaffected by their issues with their parents. The strength of

Chapter Four is in Lerner's analysis of parents' influence on their children. It is important that people acknowledge this because understanding the influence of parents can also help individuals understand why they behave the way they do. Moreover, Lerner encourages readers to come into their own by learning to become independent and to achieve or grasp a sense of selfhood. As for the cons, this chapter does not need critiquing because it has addressed an important issue adequately through Lerner's analysis of Maggie's issues with her own mother.

Using Anger as a Guide

Even in Chapter 4, Lerner has established that anger is a double-edged sword. It can be the reason for an individual's failings and weaknesses but people can also use it in a way that would benefit them. Lerner explores this further in Chapter 5. According to Lerner, women go through an internal battle. Women struggle with their anger but also with their tendency to suppress it. It is conflicting such that women cannot communicate what they want because they choose not to. In the process, women lose their sense of 'self'. As described by Lerner, the concept of 'I' disappears and hence, blurs women's self-image or selfhood. Furthermore, the need to suppress develops fear among women. When suppressing anger becomes a habit, women eventually learn to fear expressing their emotions so they would rather not express their anger out of fear that it would not meet expectations from them. Again, Lerner has managed to establish anger and women's behavior as a gendered thing. Stereotypes affect the way that women deal with anger, and this removes opportunities for them to fulfill selfhood. In this

chapter, Lerner continues to empower female readers by encouraging them to take a firm stand. When talking about their anger, women was communicate how they genuinely feel without letting expectations or opinions of others get in the way. Lerner also used various examples to drive her points in the chapter and emphasizes the power that is in anger, specifically in facilitating personal growth.

Up and Down the Generations

In Chapter 6, Lerner also continues to discuss the impact of family on the behavior and way of life of people. Behavior and traits span generations, according to Lerner. Parents not only affect the way that children behave but also other people in the family from older or younger generations. Lerner then discusses Katy's relationship with her aging father. Katy and her father are at different stages in their lives and the internal conflict that Katy's father goes through affects her significantly. Lerner used Katy's situation to argue that anger can help us understand ourselves. Katy has expressed her anger towards her father but what Lerner suggests is that Katy has not fully realized why she is angry and that her anger can also be directed towards herself because of her own shortcomings. Katy is also angry because she is uncertain about things in her life. According to Lerner, if women try to study the source of their anger, then it would help them understand themselves better. Acknowledging unclarity is also important for people to realize that they need to look inward so they can make sense of things. In this chapter, Lerner has successfully managed to relate anger with certainty, such that women can use the former to achieve certainty. The strength of this chapter

is that Lerner has similarly managed to redefine anger as an important tool for self-improvement. Nevertheless, Lerner has failed to establish the importance and the link between legacy and clarity because the discussion solely focused on Katy's situation and not practical examples that would be relatable to all readers.

Who's Responsible for What

Chapter 7 highlights the importance of taking responsibility for one's actions and emotions. Lerner called this tricky because it is difficult to determine who should be responsible for people's anger. If we are angry, who should we blame? We can blame other people and we can blame ourselves, and most times, we are right in blaming ourselves and other people.

Nevertheless, Lerner argued that to deal with anger effectively, and therefore, handle relationships better, women need to take responsibility for their actions and behavior. Aside from this, women should also learn that they are not responsible for other people's thoughts, actions, and behaviors, and vice versa. What Lerner suggested is that women should pay attention to their own feelings or emotions instead of worrying about other people's feelings or emotions or expecting other people to do so. Chapter 7 is perhaps the strongest chapter in the book. Addressing the question "Who is responsible?" is agreeably the most difficult question to answer. It is important that people acknowledge their faults or shortcomings and within this context, then people should let other people know about them, but Lerner emphasized that it is not the best way to go about this problem. Lerner then gives a solid advice that women will find useful, which is that

they must focus on their own feelings and emotions, not other people's, and that they should not expect other people to do the same for them. In this way, women can focus on what they need and what they should communicate instead of worrying about what other people would do or say. Lerner has managed to be informative, encouraging, and empowering yet again. Perhaps the only weakness of this chapter is that Lerner used several examples and situations to drive the point, which was unnecessary because the first examples were adequate enough to support the author's arguments.

Thinking in Threes

Lerner steps back to discuss the impact of family relationships again on people's behavior in Chapter 8. This time, Lerner focuses on the way that people's issues with some people seep into their relationship with others. Lerner described this phenomenon as the 'triangle' because issues between an individual and two other people affect them all within the 'triangle'. The pros and strengths of Chapter 8 lay in the Lerner's discussion of various examples to support her arguments. Not only did Lerner relate the concept of the triangle to family issues but also issues in the workplace, which are equally relevant. Furthermore, Lerner discussed various scenarios and viewed issues from the perspectives of different people in the triangle. In this case, Lerner raised the importance of being aware. Women should be aware not only of how they feel but also how their feelings or emotions about or towards other people similarly affect how they see others. When this happens, women can control their emotions and would avoid misplacing their anger. Lerner returns to the examples the author described earlier to

determine who their relationships affect their relationship with other people. A closer look at relationships would help women deal with these issues.

Tasks for the Daring and Courageous

In Chapter 9, Lerner takes a proactive approach by describing different tasks or activities that people, particularly women can do to take the first step to dealing with anger effectively. Taking the first step necessitates courage and bravery. Lerner understands that 'taking the first step' is difficult but Lerner has thoroughly described the ways that women can go about it, such as making observations and becoming aware. Lerner has emphasized that people should learn to understand or get to know themselves. In doing so, women would know how they approach or respond to anger. Therefore, the proactive nature of Chapter 9 is the chapter's strength. Lerner also consistently empowers women by offering them options or ways to step forward and manage their anger in a way that would allow them to become themselves. In this way, women can quash stereotypes not by asserting their gender but asserting themselves. For these reasons, this chapter does not call for a criticism. Lerner's suggestions contribute to problem solving on the part of women and in the way that would deal with their intimate relationships at home and at work.

Conclusion

Lerner's The Dance of Anger is an interesting take on anger issues and their impact on intimate relationships. Lerner has managed to redefine anger as a signal that needs women's attention as a tool that women can use to understand themselves, assert themselves, communicate and compromise

effectively, and to make positive changes in their lives. Using real-life examples, Lerner has also introduced ways that women can adopt in order to transform their anger into something positive and productive.

Works Cited

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