

Anger Gives You a Creative Boost

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Scientific American:

We all know anger is bad... right? Generally, it's unpleasant to feel and it often leads to undesirable outcomes. After all, when was the last time you lost your temper with your boss and was pleased with the outcome?

However, perhaps you can also think of times when anger wasn't so bad. Perhaps, in some contexts, feeling angry was actually beneficial. This counterintuitive idea was pursued by researchers Matthijs Baas, Carsten De Dreu, and Bernard Nijstad in a series of studies recently published in *The Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*. They found that angry people were more likely to be creative – though this advantage didn't last for long, as the taxing nature of anger eventually leveled out creativity. This study joins several recent lines of research exploring the relative upside to anger – the ways in which anger is not only less harmful than typically assumed, but may even be helpful (though perhaps in small doses).

In an initial study, the researchers found that feeling angry was indeed associated with brainstorming in a more unstructured manner, consistent with “creative” problem solving. In a second study, the researchers first elicited anger from the study participants (or sadness, or a non-emotional state) and then asked them to engage in a brainstorming session in which they generated ideas to preserve and improve the environment. In the beginning of this task, angry participants generated more ideas (by volume) and generated more original ideas (those thought of by less than 1 percent or less of the other participants), compared to the other sad or non-emotional participants. However, this benefit was only present in the beginning of the task, and eventually, the angry participants generated only as many ideas as the other participants.

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