

## Anger management: “How do you transform a raging Lion into a purring Cat?”



Anger is a natural, healthy emotion that can drive us forward and help us to overcome adversity. I would also imagine that it has played an important role in our evolution as a species, in terms of being able to overcome various challenges and obstacles. However, unfortunately for some people, it either becomes akin to a raging Lion waiting to pounce or a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Usually this manifests itself in two distinct ways, we either externalise the angry/raging Lion, which in worse case scenarios means road rage, domestic violence and aggressive outbursts. The second way is that we internalise the anger, so we end up being either too passive and approval seeking (like a sheep), whilst simultaneously being very self critical and preying on any self-perceived fault (like a wolf).

Thus how can we find the middle ground? So as not to be either too aggressive like a raging omnipotent Lion or too passive like an impotent Sheep. I have tried to capture this dilemma in the title of this paper, *'How do you transform a raging Lion into a purring Cat?'*

Thinking about this dilemma from a psychoanalytical perspective we could say how do we transform affect (raging Lion) into feelings (Cat) that can be thought about and then named. The reason for this distinction is two fold. Firstly, **'affect'** according to Eric Shouse 2005 is a *'non-conscious experience of intensity and cannot be realised in language'*, put simply it's raw and belongs to the earliest of our experiences. Whereas a **'feeling'** can be labelled and be thought about. As a result, when somebody loses control and becomes aggressive, we might understand them as being overwhelmed by affect, which means they are unable to use language or their mind to understand how they feel. Alternatively the other extreme are individuals who are totally devoid of any anger which then means they can be both very self critical and too passive.

The goal in both scenarios is to channel and harness our unprocessed affect, transform it into an angry feeling, which can then be thought about, named and expressed or used in a competent way. A good illustration of this could be how one goes about trying to resolve problems or disappointments. Do you opt to channel your anger to help you move forward or do you let anger keep you stuck in a destructive pattern. Put simply can you use it to fight for your self?

So how do we transform **'affect'** into **'feelings'**? Generally speaking that's where personal therapy or the psychological gym provides some help and insight. We need to understand the root of this affect. Speaking from a psychoanalytical perspective this means trying to understand and make sense of a person's life experiences, from infancy to adulthood. Including all the many, varied experiences which would have had an impact on them and contributed to how they think, feel and deal with anger. For a lot of people it's only once they start reflecting on and analysing themselves, that they start to become aware of past events or relationships which made them angry, but at the time they were totally oblivious of. Thus, in some ways we might understand personal therapy as providing a container where the raw affect can be transformed and integrated. This does not mean ridding ourselves of anger but rather that we can be angry like a purring Cat instead of a raging Lion!