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ANGER IS BOTH A LEARNED AND LEARNABLE EMOTION

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ABSTRACT.

Anger is an emotion sorely in need of an improved public profile. Its association with overt violent aggression has masked its original purpose, namely, to be a **useful and motivating force to engineer our survival**. An emotion designed to serve us well in the face of injustice and threat has become the means by which injustice is perpetuated by the strong and powerful, against the weak and vulnerable.

The expression of anger is often **misguided, dysfunctional and misplaced** with terrible consequences for society, including road rage. Yet there is **increasing evidence** that the suppression of anger is associated with negative health-related conditions including heart disease, cancer, mental illness, substance abuse and eating disorders.

Evidence suggests that anger has a three-stage structure of socialised **reactivity**, biological **anger generation** and environmentally acquired **action** and expression. As a result of this six-year research study, **ten key principles of anger expression** have emerged, suggesting that anger can be learned in both informal and formal institutional education by both children and adults.

These principles were incorporated into a pilot program aimed to **educate rather than eliminate** anger expression, in a **health promotion program** involving 25 self-selected Canberra women. This program formed part of a wider study of acquired anger management experiences through questionnaires and in-depth interviews.

Results from the study are presented as a **core of learned and learnable knowledge** about anger, as **modules of information**. These modules can be adapted and modified for any learning forum, including schools, adult education, career-related education and inservice training. Suggestions for the packaging of these component parts are provided, together with guidelines for reaching target groups.

This thesis contends that each individual has the right to know and utilise this information and can use anger to achieve beneficial outcomes for themselves. If anger expression is inappropriate and dysfunctional, so will be its effects. If anger expression is appropriate and functional, then it can have a **positive and beneficial outcome**.

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