

Asian American Anger:

It's a Thing!

#dvchallenge

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Asian American Anger – It's A Thing! #dvchallenge
Pacific Heart Books, San Francisco, CA

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Table of Contents

About the #dvchallenge	1
The Fast and the Furious: Asian American Men and Anger	3
Anger – the Good, the Bad and the Beautiful	31
Sidebar – A Closer Look at Anger	35
The Social Network is an IndigNation	39
Views of Mt. Fury – Bonus Poems about Anger	47
The Door	47
Insisted Living.....	48
Did you see what just happened?	49
Anger never goes abroad alone	50
The Path.....	51
Which one is it?	52
Anger slams the door.....	53
We are set in motion.....	54
R/Evolution	56
Roses and Thorns	57
subprime tsunamis	60
Where are you from?	62
About the Author	65
Acknowledgments.....	66

About the #dvchallenge

The internet is the angernet. Research has shown that anger spreads more quickly than joy online. Anger can divide, but it can also raise awareness, but only if it comes paired with compassion and wisdom. There's plenty to be angry about, and plenty of targets for our attention. I hope to increase awareness of misogyny, domestic violence, and the issues of Asian American women and men with this book, and with the #dvchallenge, raise funds to combat domestic violence and heal its effects in the Asian American community. Go to <http://bit.ly/APIIDV> and find an organization in your area that deals with domestic violence, and make a one-time or recurring donation. Get, and stay, involved. Together, we can help improve the lives of women and children around the world. Proceeds from the sale of these books will go to Narika (www.narika.org) and Maitri (www.maitri.org), focused on domestic violence in the South Asian community of the Bay Area, and to Asian American arts and cultural organizations.

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The Fast and the Furious: Asian American Men and Anger

*From remarks to the Asian American Psychiatrists’
Committee of the Northern California Psychiatric Society
August 7, 2014*

Relationship is both self-definition and community creation. Anger is a reaction of fear and survival, arising from crises in relatedness. Through consciousness of anger, its sources and effects, we can better hold the reins of spirit that move us through the world, improve the conditions for our connection with one another and move towards deeper and more healing relationships, imbued with compassion, wisdom and love.

We’re only here talking about Asian American male anger because of the latest, most publicized horrific incident perpetrated by a young part-Asian man. Masculine relationship rage led Elliot Rodger¹ to murder 6 people, including two women, and wound 13 others on May 23, 2014. In a 140-page manifesto, he vented his anger against the ‘unattainable’ women he perceived as rejecting him and denying him sex and intimacy. He described wanting to torture and starve women in concentration camps, gleefully putting them all to death in a sadistic revenge fantasy. He called his murderous rampage a “Day of Retribution” for his sexual disappointments. Gender studies scholars and violence

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014_Isla_Vista_killings

researchers² point to “sexual entitlement”, some men’s belief that they are entitled to women’s sexuality, as a prominent factor in violence against women³, and certainly, frustrated sexual entitlement was at the heart of Rodger’s hatred of women, who were the objects of both his desire and blame, the two coming shoulder-to-shoulder, lockstep, cheek-to-threatening-jowl, in his unbreakable narrative of victimhood that turned him into a victimizer. To want what one can’t have is the very definition of suffering; out of that suffering came frustration, anger and hostility, and out of hostility, tragic violence. As Rebecca Solnit puts it in *Men Explain Things To Me*, with men like Rodger, “the fury and desire come in a package, all twisted together into something that always threatens to turn *eros* into *thanatos*, love into death, sometimes literally.” (p. 27)

He also expressed racist hatred of “ugly” Asian and African American men who, inexplicably to him, could get female attention. He stabbed three Asian Americans to death, his two Asian American roommates and their visiting friend, before going on his shooting spree. Rodger was narrowly focused on wealth and status as markers of success. His Facebook page reportedly featured him in pictures at tony red-carpet events with his filmmaker father, and posing in expensive cars. He bought lottery tickets in the desperate hope that extravagant wealth would allow him to attract a white, blonde woman. As I and other commenters noted⁴, his delusional fixations on whiteness and wealth, his racism and misogyny, his internalized racism against his biracial identity, all reflected Western and even global values that are prominently displayed in media and culture. If not actively resisted, these

² <http://bit.ly/1ys70Z9> (The Lancet)

³ <http://www.partners4prevention.org/about-prevention/research/men-and-violence-study>

⁴ <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-pacific-heart/201405/trauma-victim-narratives-and-the-way-out>

superficial, primitive values have led and will lead to victimization in one form or another. Most notably, these values and his mindset led him to view women as sexual objects who maliciously scorned him, and not as human beings with their own feelings, needs and wants, who he might learn to approach and connect with in a more mutual, appropriate way. While it's unclear if he was even capable of rising to that possibility, it's also unclear to me whether different therapeutic approaches could have broken this possibility through to him.

But Rodger was not just a victimizer, we learned: he was also a victim. He was bullied from a young age, and apparently traumatized by his parents' divorce. The New York Times reported⁵

“Mr. Rodger was, from a young age, emotionally disturbed, particularly since the divorce of his parents when he was in first grade, family friends said. Patrick Connors, 23, a former classmate at Crespi Carmelite High School, a Catholic school for boys in Los Angeles, said Mr. Rodger had left school before graduation. He said that Mr. Rodger was treated by his classmates as an oddball and that students mocked him and played jokes on him; once when Mr. Rodger fell asleep in his seat, classmates taped his head to his desk, he said. ‘We said right from the get-go that that kid was going to lose it someday and just freak out,’ he said. ‘Everyone made fun of him and stuff.’”

He appears to have had cognitive and social deficits that seemed to have made it impossible for him to understand and improve his interactions with others. He

⁵ http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/25/us/california-drive-by-shooting.html?_r=0

was reportedly unable to form and keep friendships, much less relationships. He was in some form of therapy since he was 8 years old, but had discontinued treatment and medications before the incident. Wikipedia also says he was not given a formal diagnosis, but there has been speculation about autism spectrum, social phobia, and certainly narcissistic, antisocial and paranoid personality disorders and traits.

A month after the Isla Vista killings, Keshav Bhide⁶, a 23-year old South Asian American student at the University of Washington, was arrested after threatening a misogynistic rampage of his own, citing Elliot Rodger as an inspiration. He similarly reported feeling rejected for being shorter and having an “ugly face.” While Rodger at least outwardly thought he was handsome and thus sexually entitled, and Bhide felt he was ugly, we can see they were both overly obsessed with looks, both their own and the women to whom they felt attracted. In both cases, an emotionally disturbed young Asian American man was caught up in feelings of marginalization and frustrated sexual entitlement and desire, and concocted his revenge. Luckily, Bhide was stopped before he could actually physically harm anyone, but not before he allegedly made significant threats.

Now, of course, men aren’t the only gender to experience anger and frustration. And this particular brand of “outcaste rage” can cut across gender lines. I personally have heard several women in recent years sympathize with the killers in such crimes; the anger of the frustrated outcaste mirrored their own. However, as Solnit observes, though “violence doesn’t have a race, a class, a religion, or a nationality...it does have a gender.” (p. 21) Male. So our exploration of male rage, and of Asian American male anger, has to be informed, deconstructed and reimagined in

⁶ <http://reappropriate.co/?p=5985>

the context of its most ugly potential: its capacity to cause psychological and physical harm to others, particularly women. We must understand anger and violence as both an attempt to assert power, a marker of unresolved conflict and even trauma, and as an indicator of the problems of power itself. Dealing with anger is part of the challenge of being human. Exploring these issues in an Asian American context will illuminate those challenges.

First, we must familiarize ourselves with the situation. In the U.S., there is a *reported* rape every 6.2 minutes, and many more unreported. One in five women will be raped in her lifetime. At least a thousand women a year in the U.S. are murdered by their male partners and ex-partners, accounting for about 10% of all homicides and 70% of all intimate partner homicides in 2007⁷ – a figure that’s jaw-droppingly high, but apparently a decline in numbers from previous years.⁸ Girls and women experience intimate partner violence at a rate 4-5 times higher than that of men⁹ – and I suspect that a lot of the intimate partner violence against men is committed by their male partners. Nicholas Kristof, Pulitzer prize-winning journalist, writes “women worldwide ages 15 through 44 are more likely to die or be maimed because of male violence than because of cancer, malaria, war and traffic accidents combined.” Men commit 90% of the murders in the U.S. 77% of the victims of murder are men¹⁰ – men have plenty to fear from other men. But the intimate, necessary and world-defining relationship between men and women calls for particular and close attention: it is one where women are far too often under threat, under siege, in danger and oppressed. If we, as men and women, are in concert and conflict, from the level of our chromosomes to

⁷ <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/fvv.pdf>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/199702.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://1.usa.gov/11cHF7L>

our psyches, male violence against women is the chief marker of our dysfunction, our crazed, alarming intensity, and our failure. Eradicating such violence must be a goal of all members of a civilized society. The causes of gender violence, in anger, the wish to control women, in apathy, aversion, hatred and misogyny, and in the conditions that give rise to them, must be understood, grappled with, and ultimately, brought under control. A change in the relationship between men and women necessarily presages a more sane, peaceful world.

These are all statistics from the broader population. What about Asian and Asian American men and women?

In a survey of 16,000 Asian American women and men in the mid-1990s, 12.8% of the women said they experienced physical assault by an intimate partner, and 3.8% disclosed rape or attempted rape, a little more than half the abuse rates for whites (21.3%), and about a quarter the overall reported rates for rape¹¹ (17.6%). The Centers for Disease Control report a 6.8% rate of rapes/attempted rapes for Asian and Pacific Islander women. Some critics point to underreporting in Asian cultures, and it's not clear what percentage of these incidents were by Asian men. Other surveys reported dramatically higher rates of abuse, anywhere from 41-61%. Studies conducted within communities with presumably culturally sensitive methodology report significantly high rates of verbal and physical abuse among all Asian ethnicities, according to the Asian and Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence's 2009 report.¹²

- 61.1% of Japanese American women in a Los Angeles sample reported experiencing

¹¹ <https://www.rainn.org/get-information/statistics/sexual-assault-victims>

¹² <http://www.apiidv.org/files/Facts.Stats-APIIDV-2009.pdf>

abusive treatment; there was no significant difference between generations;

- 18% of a survey of Korean American men reported physically abusing their wives in the preceding year; 33% of “male dominated” relationships reported physical violence within the year, while only 12% of “egalitarian” households had such reports; 39% of “High stress husbands” were abusive, while only one of 66 “low stress husbands” were abusive (though most Korean American men with high-stress weren’t abusive);
- 18.1% of a random sample of Chinese men and women reported experiencing physical abuse from their partner;
- 21-40% of South Asian women reported experiencing domestic violence;
- 31% of 200 Vietnamese American men reported committing partner violence in the preceding year; 30% of another sample of 30 Vietnamese American women reported experiencing partner violence in the preceding year;
- 47% of Cambodian women reported knowing a woman who had been shoved, hit, kicked or slapped by her partner;
- 8-28% of Asian American women of various ethnicities in one study witnessed domestic violence and abuse in their families-of-origin. 69% reported being hit regularly as children.

Male partner physical abuse is only the red-hot tip of the iceberg, so to speak. Women face many other forms of threat and intimidation in relationship. Abusive

situations in South Asian households, for example, may include the abuse of the parents, brothers and even sisters of the husband – because “no one wants to be on the bottom”. For example, a marriage is arranged between a woman in India and an Indian American man. Her family goes into debt to offer a substantial (and illegal) dowry, thinking they are improving her prospects. When she gets to the U.S., she finds that she’s been deceived: the man is poor, doesn’t work or is on disability, and has drug or alcohol issues. The abuse starts from him and his extended family – and she is soon trapped by financial and immigration issues on top of worries about the child they’ve had. Sometimes, the man’s family even intimidates her by threatening violence to her family in India. Or, in another example, a Muslim American woman is forced to marry a cousin or uncle from South Asia for immigration purposes. After immigrating, he becomes abusive. She’s compelled to stay in the relationship, both to prevent further abuse and to maintain family “face” and connections. Or an Indian American man marries a woman in India in a lavish ceremony paid for by the woman’s family; perhaps he’s been forced to marry by his parents. When he returns to America, he has a change of heart and refuses to help her immigrate. Her prospects are then limited because of her marital status. There are reportedly tens of thousands of abandoned brides in India, some with children and most in poverty. Girl children face violence even in the womb, with sex-selection and female feticide prevalent in many Asian countries. These examples point to significant precipitating and perpetuating causes of gender violence: men’s power over women, and willingness to use abuse to maintain it.

Women are also sometimes violent in relationship;¹³ but most of this violence seems to be in retaliation for

¹³ <http://www.manavi.org/documents/OccasionalPaper1.pdf>

abuse received from their partners, or in response to power and control issues in the relationship. There are scenarios of interplaying psychological and physical abuse rebounding from partner to partner, but it's important to underscore that men are the cause of the overwhelming majority of the injuries and deaths. When women fight back, they are often not only at a physical, but a psychological, cultural and legal disadvantage. The latter are certainly correctable, and must be part of a non-violence strategy.

As we would expect, the consequences of abuse are physical and psychic, including posttraumatic stress symptoms and disorder, depression, and anxiety, as well as issues with trust, control of emotions, self-esteem and intimacy. Experiencing childhood sexual abuse in particular increases the risk for personality disorders and traits, including borderline, histrionic, dependent, obsessive-compulsive, paranoid, narcissistic and antisocial.¹⁴

At least in a spiritual and moral, and if we think carefully, a psychological sense, we can say that abuse damages the perpetrator as well. Regrets and attempts at reconciliation may ensue, which can either lead to further mistreatment, or the possibility of change. Is the abuser manipulative and sociopathic, or is he himself stuck and suffering – or both? The uncertainty leads to intense emotions that roil the minds of both partners: sadness, fear, anger and contempt, guilt, anxiety and mistrust, hope and disappointment, in cyclical patterns that call for some kind of more certain relief.

The abuse of women is widespread, and cuts across race, culture, class and ethnic lines, and amounts to a systemic and global pattern of gender oppression. Across

¹⁴ Pereda, et al. Personality Disorders in Child Sexual Abuse Victims. *Actas Esp Psiquiatr* 2011 39(2):131-9, accessible online

the world, men commit violence against women to assert their power and domination over women, in an attempt to control their own relational environments and “be in charge”. Ironically, violence and anger are usually thought of as signs of being “out of control”. So we have a world that is “out of control” in dramatic, dangerous, and deadly ways. Primarily, it seems, because of men’s emotions. Our first response may be to blame men, and to cast a dark eye on masculinity-at-large. Certainly, holding men accountable is vital. But I think the situation is more complicated and dynamic than that. We must look deeper. Men’s anger is related to power and disempowerment, security and insecurity, expectation and disappointment, woundedness and struggle for wholeness. And of course, hatred and mistrust are recurrent themes in all abusive relationships. If we want to eliminate gender violence, we have to understand men.

We began with the extreme example of Elliot Rodger. He is not representative of all men, but he was so alarming to women because he was all too recognizable. Many had seen his type before. The #yesallwomen hashtag that arose after the Isla Vista killings spread worldwide, with over 1.5 million tweets and 1.2 billion impressions, according to Wikipedia. Women around the world on social media and in my personal experience were quick to connect the murders to all the ways they had been abused, harassed, discriminated against, violated and mistreated by men. It was a meaningful moment of online solidarity against misogyny. While I think the issues raised can only be resolved fully in actual solidarity and relationship, the online blitz no doubt instigated many important conversations, which we are continuing today. Isla Vista, like the Jyoti Singh rape/murder in India and the Steubenville, Ohio rape case, became touchstones in a rising chorus of consciousness about women’s issues,

which I think will reshape much of our cultural landscape in the years to come.

I find myself returning to the words of Leslie Manigat, former President of Haiti: "Violence strips naked the body of a society, the better to place the stethoscope and hear the life beneath the skin." What life do we hear now beneath the skin of our society, even Asian American society, and what is our remedy?

What I hear in Rodger are the "long emotions" of a victim: resentment, hostility, bitterness, ill will, envy, jealousy, neuroses. Underneath them all, hidden but perhaps most pervasive – was shame at his perceived shortcomings, status and identity. I also hear, in the background, a society obsessed with wealth, whiteness, maleness, status, power and competition, and still short on community, belonging and relationship. Rodger's emotions, his mental illness(es), his biological predispositions, his environmental influences all cascaded into a "one-size-fits-all" victim narrative. He was a have-not in a society of haves. He collected injustices. He blamed women for unfairly persecuting and isolating him, and revenge was the only way to come out on top. His imbalance was stoked, in the end, to the murderous fury of a pyrrhic "victory".

What we also see, somewhat more frighteningly, if we are honest with ourselves, is a mirror of our own feelings of victimization and exclusion, and even our own anger.

Anger is, at its core, a fight-or-flight emotion from the survival brain. As I pointed out in my article "Anger: The Good, The Bad and The Beautiful"¹⁵, published in 2006, anger is typically triggered when you or your loved ones are threatened directly; your core needs and desires are frustrated and thus emotionally, survival is at stake; or

¹⁵<http://bit.ly/angerpdf>

your principles are in danger. All of these are hot buttons for the limbic circuits that can hijack our emotions and prepare us to take defensive action. Rodger, in part, seems to have been reacting to this kind of threat. Exclusion from the attention of women coupled with his own shame threatened his “survival” on an emotional level, and became *agents provocateur* for his revenge narrative.

Asian Americans very easily find themselves under threat as well. While we might call Rodger’s anger “self-centered” and say Asian American cultural anger responds to bigger threats, the latter still holds tensions that must be reckoned with on a personal level. We might find cultural anger more “justifiable”, but it is tied to identity struggles that impact relations between all individuals.

We could cite a long and undeniable history of racism and violence against Asian Americans in the U.S., from the earliest Chinese immigrants through Japanese American internment to the continuing hate crimes against South Asians post 9-11. We recently passed the 32nd anniversary of the murder of Vincent Chin in Detroit, a seminal moment in Asian American history. There are still those who deny this was a hate crime,¹⁶ including one of the murderers – yet the fact remains that Chin’s murderers got off essentially scot-free. A Chinese American man’s life was worth only three years of probation and a \$3720 fine that was never even paid.

The list goes on. Balbir Singh Sodhi,¹⁷ murdered days after 9-11 in Mesa, Arizona. Fong Lee,¹⁸ a 19-year old Hmong American man who was brutally shot multiple times in the back while he was on the ground, by a

¹⁶ <http://aaldef.org/blog/ronald-ebens-the-man-who-killed-vincent-chin-apologizes-30-years-later.html>

¹⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder_of_Balbir_Singh_Sodhi

¹⁸ <http://resistracism.wordpress.com/2010/09/30/fong-lee/>

Minneapolis police officer in 2006. Cau Bich Thi Tran¹⁹, a 25-year old Vietnamese American mother of two shot by a San Jose policeman in 2003 three seconds after he entered her house responding to her own 911 call, claiming he mistook her vegetable peeler for a weapon. Sunando Sen,²⁰ an Indian immigrant pushed to his death on a New York City subway track in 2012 by a woman who stated she was retaliating for 9-11. The six people killed and four injured by a white supremacist in the Oak Creek, Wisconsin Sikh Temple massacre in 2012.²¹

In 2012, at least 4.1% of hate crimes reported to the FBI²² were against Asians and Pacific Islanders, but critics counter there is significant underreporting. 54% of Asian American teens reported being bullied in a recent survey,²³ far above the rates of whites and other minorities. When we raise our voices in anger about violence and harassment targeting our communities, we are not “crying wolf”. The “isolated incidents” are not isolated – they are part of a pattern of hatred directed against all minority groups. There is a serious and significant danger to which we remain alert and sensitive. Asian Americans are victims of bias that renders them “outsiders” and “others” to be discriminated against, harassed and even killed.

Trauma can also be transmitted intergenerationally. There is evidence²⁴ that experiences of parents and ancestors leave their marks on gene expression and thus can predispose children to anger and other difficult

¹⁹ <http://www.asianweek.com/2003/11/21/truth-be-told-wrongful-death-lawsuit-filed-on-behalf-of-cau-bich-tran/>

²⁰ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/08/muslim-groups-rally-subway-pushing-death_n_2435611.html

²¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wisconsin_Sikh_temple_shooting

²² <http://1.usa.gov/1ENgxM0>

²³ <http://newamericamedia.org/2014/03/more-than-half-asian-american-teens-are-bullied-in-school.php>

²⁴ <http://discovermagazine.com/2013/may/13-grandmas-experiences-leave-epigenetic-mark-on-your-genes>

emotions and alter their response to stress. Men (and women) also absorb the stories of their families' and forebears' struggles, here and abroad. In Korea and in Korean Americans, for example, there is a word for this – *han* – a collective feeling of oppression and cultural suffering that becomes woven into personal identity. As Asian Americans, we often think in terms of group identity and affiliation – so I think there is an Asian American *han*, which vies with cultural amnesia and dissociation from the totality of the Asian American experience to define the Asian American soul. Some of us can't forget; others try to flee into the supposed safety of the river of forgetfulness, and so perpetuate the problem.

This is all occurring at the same time that some Asian American groups are experiencing financial prosperity and success. We are stereotyped as the “Model Minority”, which ignores the great diversity between groups and also the complicated stories within groups and individuals (see Jenn Fang's²⁵ and Marie Myung-Ok Lee's²⁶ analyses at Reappropriate.com and Salon.com, respectively). Asians are seen as quiet, docile, submissive, and silent “worker drones” who do their job without complaint, and for their service are held up as ideals by even our “own” Amy Chua (in her recent book “The Triple Package”²⁷), causing a backlash of resentment and hostility, as well as internal and external conflict as Asian Americans struggle to find and assert their own identities. Anger arises in the context of discrimination, violence, racism, misunderstanding and even dismissal of our perspectives, potentials, histories and individualities.

Where financial success does not occur, as in many parts of the Asian American experience, the complications

²⁵ http://reappropriate.co/?attachment_id=6478

²⁶ <http://bit.ly/1ysaAm7>

²⁷ <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-pacific-heart/201402/underscoring-amy-chua>

of poverty and disenfranchisement – violence, mental and physical health problems, and so forth – cause deep and interlocking problems, and plenty of food for anger.

Success might in itself be soothing – but it is incomplete and therefore, is not. Financial success, even when it occurs, cannot compete with relational or moral victory, and does not translate into freedom from suffering. The “successful” Asian American man can feel excluded, unrelated and demoralized everywhere from the big screen to the boardroom to the bedroom. When not excluded, he and his cultures are openly mocked, stereotyped, appropriated and insulted²⁸, an ignorance-fueled hazing by some in the white majority. Despite this, he is viewed as having no “right” to be angry. All speak to a sense of emasculation and disempowerment, isolation and injustice, silencing,²⁹ marginalization and victimization.

While it feels at times (for some of us) that the landscape is changing quickly, we cannot feel distant to racial and cultural inequities. As human beings, no matter our socioeconomic status, we remain sensitive to the suffering of not only our groups but all groups. The instant we become insensitive to others’ suffering is the instant we become party to the perpetuation of that suffering. You may have heard this slogan: “If you’re not angry, you’re not paying attention.” We can’t help but pay attention, so anger is one of our understandable reactions. We get to this feeling honestly.

But in the end, the righteous anger of the socially conscious may be an aspirational anger, available only to those relatively unburdened by more proximal issues, such as family conflicts.

²⁸ <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-pacific-heart/201311/yes-katy-perry-s-performance-was-racist-here-s-why>

²⁹ <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-pacific-heart/201406/susan-cain-s-quiet-is-asian-american-silence-golden>

To paraphrase Tolstoy, happy families are all of a piece; unhappy ones tell myriad dark tales. Yet there are themes common to the genesis of the frustrated, angry Asian American man. All of us are victims, first, of our own families and their limitations. Children are always on the front line of their family's issues from the time of birth. Amy Chua, for example, infamously promoted the "Tiger Mom" parenting strategy, but she angered Asian American men and women who were harmed by harsh, critical parents. Dr. Su Yeong Kim showed³⁰ that harsh and tiger parenting led to higher rates of depression, lower self-esteem, and poorer performance in school in Chinese American children. The ranks of the angry and suffering often come saddled with issues created by their family situations.

The children of immigrants are often frustrated by a large generation and cultural gap with their parents. They can feel torn between worlds. Expectations – for success at school and work, for obedience – can run high, leaving them in a double bind of both loving their parents and being angry or disappointed with them, of trying to please parents and also trying to assert themselves. Male children especially may be prized at home and put on a pedestal, yet feel alienated or socially stunted in the outside world, feeling that their family situation didn't prepare them to relate to the broader American scene and women in particular. Emotional growth may be devalued, and they are sometimes alienated from parents who don't understand the pressures they experience due to race or class.

Sexuality can be repressed at home, and uncertain outside. Until recently, Asian males were categorically seen as less masculine, less powerful, and thus less desirable to women, leading to self-esteem issues and understandable anger. Anecdotally, Asian American males

³⁰ <http://slate.me/1D6b6Gr>

have longer periods of being single than either white males or Asian American women – leaving room for frustration and anger directed at Asian American women and whites. And of course, the man who feels undesirable or disempowered might take out his frustrations on the nearest available person with lower status – his wife, girlfriend or women more generally. Men might seek power and control in their relationship when unable to attain them outside the home. Patriarchy, more than culture, explains misogyny – and Asian families can be patriarchal, privileging men and boys and allowing them to feel entitled towards women, or especially disappointed when spurned. Anger at controlling or smothering mothers may lead to confusion and anger about identity and relationships. Anger at fathers complicates the assertion and development of masculinity. Asian Americans may feel silenced by their own families, who value “face” over dealing with conflicts or mental illness.

Nerd, gaming and pop culture, including a subset of male Asian Americans, is often particularly misogynistic, as Arthur Chu of recent Jeopardy-fame pointed out in the *Daily Beast*³¹ recently. Frustration and aggression may be unchecked and in fact kindled and reinforced in this ‘alternate family’ that provides a validation of a kind of masculinity and an escape from isolation at the very least.

The Asian American man can feel not only relationship-less but stateless, a refugee adrift in a sea of longings, unmoored and un-amoured, always on the edge of social defeat, scanning the horizons for some island to call home. Perpetually estranged by the presumptions and rejections of others, the stereotypes and gross and subtle racisms of a limited cultural imagination, he is always reminded of outsider status and exclusion. To be unloved, to not be touched, to have your masculinity indicted first by

³¹ <http://thebea.st/1xIyl6d>

your family, then popular culture, then the women you're attracted to – is a decidedly unpleasant and, even excruciating scenario. It is a situation conducive to unhappiness, resentment, and alienation – yet it is not uncommon for the young Asian American man. Feeling frustration and anger is understandable, but it is complicated. Expressing it outwardly towards more powerful targets invites blowback and retribution. Stifling it lends to passivity. Misogyny and abuse become, then, a “safe” expression of power against an even more vulnerable victim.

While I've highlighted the potential sources of conflict between Asian American men and women, I should point out that many Asian American men are angry on behalf of women as well. We've seen the abuse of our mothers, witnessed mistreatment of our sisters, friends and colleagues, and carry anger towards the perpetrators. We worry for our daughters. Our masculine rage and concern is protective and empathic, we aim to be responsible and responsive to women's issues. But this doesn't immunize us from the problems of anger, or shield us from sometimes also being hurt by and angry with the women in our lives. “You can be enlightened to everyone but your family,” as the saying goes; thus anger enters our relationships and complicates them. Speaking for myself, as I've witnessed the explosive effects of anger, I feel particularly self-conscious and wary of being in anger's grasp, even so-called “righteous anger” or “moral outrage.”

But we're still not free, either of the stimuli for anger or the need for it.

Poet and community activist Bao Phi says³² “one thing that I've been thinking about lately is how other people can accept Asian people's grief, but not our anger. Other people can accept, and in many cases consume, the stories of tragedies and sorrow from Asian and Asian

³² <http://coffeehousepress.org/authors/bao-phi-2/>

American people. They have a harder time accepting, validating, or seeing our anger. Anger at injustice, at being silenced. I'm a person that accepts my anger, and is comfortable talking about it. Beyond that, there's not much to say, really. I mean, I didn't become a poet to make friends. I didn't write about these things to be popular. If the goal was to be popular, I wouldn't be a poet. I don't invite hatred, and I certainly don't enjoy being hated. But, as you say, the people who take the time to really read my work understand that it comes from the challenge of love, and with hope we can all be better. Including my own jagged, flawed self."

As psychiatrists, we know the importance of empathizing with and validating anger – we know that it often comes from a place of hurt. Anger can be an activator, empowering the angry person to take charge of their lives in a meaningful way. Anger in relationships and human relations is unavoidable, at least on occasion, and provides an energy and intensity that might be in some way necessary for the relationship. With perspective and mindfulness, conflict can help couples³³ become closer, better friends. Anger at society, when received with empathy, can lead to constructive change. Phil Yu's Angry Asian Man blog³⁴ advances the cause of awareness and activism about issues of discrimination. His yearly message in ads for the San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival is "Stay Angry, CAAMFest!" Indeed, the Center for Asian American Media³⁵ (CAAM) and many other non-profit institutions vital to our communities were born out of a sense of disaffection with the status quo and a wish to change it. Anger is necessarily part of what we bear, a marker of discontent. Anger

³³ <http://bit.ly/RelationTips>

³⁴ <http://blog.angryasianman.com>

³⁵ <http://www.caamedia.org>

resonates across Asian America, as it does across all distressed and marginalized communities.

Arthur Chu, in another Daily Beast article,³⁶ referenced Bruce Banner's transformation from self-effacing, nebbish nobody to the brawny, green-with-rage Hulk as a stand-in for the Asian American male experience. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde – we carry complex emotions arising from personal and communal struggles. Chu closes his essay by quoting Bruce Banner: “I am always angry.” It's a shout out to nerd-dom, and a bit of a daring taunt and macho posturing.

This is the Asian American man, fast and sometimes furious. We are, in other words, dangerous. Filled with possibility, passion and hard-won pride – yet all too frequently, passed over and dismissed. But you cannot dismiss a dangerous man, can you?

Still, the psychiatrist in me reads in Chu's declaration and the anger of the Asian American man as saying, on a deeper level, not just “I am always angry” but “I am always dissatisfied. I am always defensive. I am always wounded. I always have fear. I always have shame. I always have suffering.” My nerd shout-back to Chu would be, “young Padawan, fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering.” (Yoda, for all those muggles out there, to mix nerd metaphors. I'll take his green-skinned wisdom over the Hulk's any day.)

Grief and anger come in a bundle, spiraling like a strange samsaric carnival ride. Depression is said to be “anger turned inwards”. I think in part, anger is sorrow turned outwards. But it is always complex. I always ask “what is underneath my patients' anger? If they weren't feeling anger, what would they be feeling?” This gives important clues to their personhood. Anger can rise from

³⁶ <http://thebea.st/1rpERt3>

or substitute for anxiety, uncertainty, fear, isolation, loneliness, blame, guilt, regrets, a sense of being wronged, silenced and misunderstood, a sense of being shamed. Carrying shame and insecurity about one's identity and connection with others predisposes to anger, directed inwardly and out. And as we know all too well, the righteous anger directed against big picture societal issues often lies on top of and at the mercy of more personal angers and discontents with self, family, and relationships. Anger and frustration with the world can double back on itself, lashing itself to the nearest available target. Anger at closer targets can be displaced onto the world. Anger can come tied with love and expectations. Anger is both a marker of separation, and the wish, or demand, to be one.

Here is where the angers of the Asian American man come to meet the dilemmas, angers and predicaments of Asian American women. Each of our angers is complex and multifactorial – but all too often, instead of facing the world outwardly, they are directed at each other. The alienation of the Asian American man can channel itself to demands on Asian American women, demands that are often met with resentment, resistance and rejection. And the cycle continues, in spirals and switchbacks that can be on a downhill trajectory. The limbic system's fast and furious defense mechanisms override the slower-working cortical regions where love, compassion and long-term planning do their plodding work. As we've seen, this story of estranged identity can lead to violence.

This is not to say that angry Asian American men are necessarily abusive or even angry with Asian American women. Our relationship is, after all, largely characterized by love, support and shared struggle. But we are dealing with an insidious and shapeshifting emotion and mindset that do have an impact on our ability to be supportive of one another – and at their extreme, do lead to abuse, with

the statistics to prove it. Anger does not always abuse, but it is always a crisis for relationship.

All the more reason to understand this fearsome, powerful, and in the thick of it, consuming, raw passion. Are we rising with anger, or rising out of it? Can we put borders on rage, or is it by nature without bounds, first looking for expression, then satisfaction, then control, and then carrying out its own oppressive strategy? I think we would agree that anger, whatever its benefit, however necessary it might be, and in any case, how unavoidable – should not be in charge of a personality. That would be yielding to resentment, hostility, bitterness and continued suffering and difficulty in relationship. We have to find ways of leavening anger, and perhaps even empowering people to increasingly be beyond its reach, while empathizing with its source as a marker of identity. But of course, the main motto in dealing with anger is “strike while the iron is cold.” It’s sacrosanct that you can never tell an angry person to “not be angry” or to “just get over it.” Unless you want them to be more angry, harden your own heart and give yourself points for a lack of empathy. “Don’t add insight to injury” is another motto. As my friend, transpersonal analyst Seymour Boorstein is fond of saying, “don’t give them an insight. Give them a crust of bread.”

Anger, especially hostility, is frowned on by all the wisdom traditions. It is one of the seven deadly sins, after all. Sogyal Rinpoche, Tibetan Buddhist teacher, says “anger obscures 90% of reality,” and hostility is one of the three poisons in Buddhism, arising out of a sense of self separate from others. The Buddha said “Hate never conquers hate. Only love conquers hate. That is the eternal law.” We find concurrence in Christianity (“love your enemies”), and Judaism and Islam have their versions of the Golden Rule. Stoic philosopher Seneca frowned on even righteous anger 2000 years ago, writing that you can’t

get to a virtue from a vice. “A mind that becomes a slave to some passion must exist as though in a tyrant’s realm,” he wrote, cautioning against anger’s possessive and destructive potential. Anger is “an abominable sort of cure that puts health in disease’s debt.” The stoics are criticized for being sanguine apologists for the status quo, though, essentially stifling dissent by stifling anger. (Quotes from *Anger, Mercy, Revenge*³⁷, a translation of and commentary on Seneca.)

The status quo is unacceptable – so “what choice do we have other than being angry?” some ask. But anger can become less a choice than a default re-enactment of an internal status quo. Doesn’t this status quo need to be changed as well? Certainly, the status quo of abuse and violence against women demands a change in men’s attitudes towards women, including their attempts to control women through the use of anger. Since we are all connected, maybe this means all Asian American men have a responsibility to change our relationship to anger, and of course, share power equitably with the women in our lives.

Violence and the threat of violence enforce a hierarchical power structure – it is used by a dominating group to control and suppress others, and by individual men trying to assert power over women. You can call it sexism or patriarchy, but it is certainly a devaluing of the personhood and psychological and physical integrity of women in favor of men. We see violence in all forms of prejudice and discrimination, from racism, gay hatred, oppression of the poor, religious intolerance, ethnic division, and so forth. Physical violence is only the most egregious example of a rigidly enforced power structure. Since men have largely been “in charge”, at home and in society, they are the ones both insecure about their power and most likely to “go mad” with power. “Power tends to

³⁷ <http://amzn.to/1D6buEF>

corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely,” wrote Lord Acton in 1887. The Asian American man is both disempowered and, in some contexts, empowered – as is the Asian American women. When we hold power, we are corruptible. Our lives are not lived in parallel and separate, but are entwined and complementary, and thus our relations to power and anger are joined and require mutual exploration.

There are other ways to carry our disconnection and devaluation, to parry with life’s conditions. Humor. Activism. Art. Building community. Being miserable! A deeply etched sense of absurdity and tragedy. Applying ourselves to love and work, *lieben und arbeiten*, Freud’s twin pillars of life. A deeper exploration of suffering, and a quest to overcome it. Therapy. Asian American men and women can and do use all these mechanisms and more to cope, survive and thrive against this feeling of injustice and things not being right, of there being cultural and historic forces that threaten our sense of self and even psychological and physical survival. Relationships and a sense of meaning or purpose in one’s life are vital to happiness³⁸, and anger distorts both. Thus we must contend with and resolve our anger, or remain powerless in the face of our unhappiness.

Wesley Yang wrote about the frustrations of the Asian American experience in a memorable, award-winning 2011 New York Magazine article.³⁹ He voiced his rage against “Asian values” he found limiting. “Let me summarize my feelings toward Asian values: Fuck filial piety. Fuck grade-grubbing. Fuck Ivy League mania. Fuck deference to authority. Fuck humility and hard work. Fuck harmonious relations. Fuck sacrificing for the future. Fuck earnest, striving middle-class servility.” He highlights

³⁸ <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-pacific-heart/201106/six-keys-happiness>

³⁹ <http://nymag.com/news/features/asian-americans-2011-5/>

ways that Asian Americans have to transcend “Asianness” in order to succeed entrepreneurially, sexually, and creatively in America. Asians are viewed as “coolies”, from the Chinese word for “bitter labor”, hardworking but incapable of taking the aggressive, alpha, leadership role. The bamboo ceiling prevents them from rising in corporate and institutional ranks. Asian men haven’t learned how to be aggressive and assertive in pursuing sex and romance. Asians have more anxiety about risk-taking and standing out. Yang implores Asian Americans to break through these stereotypes and cultural barriers to get what all Americans are supposed to want.

But Yang leaves out psychological success and mental health in favor of more visible outward signs of prestige. He does rightly triumph individuality and creative resistance to racism as paths to self-expression, self-respect and some kind of status. “Dare to be interesting,” he concludes – but his version of interesting seems to be a form of assimilation and capitulation to the most pugnacious and aggressive of American values. When anyone falls short of an idealized self, finding inadequacy or defect within themselves, when they find they are not “interesting” either to themselves or a desirable other – they fall prey to shame, at the root of Yang’s disaffection, his alienation from his own reflection in a window that opens the piece. Yang’s article implies that shame can be dissolved through massive exertion. I think it’s not so easy. And perhaps dissolving Asian American shame involves exalting Asian American identities, plural, and not disavowing “Asian-ness” or “immigrant-ness”, whatever those might be.

Shame is an intense primal emotion, hidden deep beneath layers of defense and adaptation, but uncovered in moments of self-comparison. Yang highlights one example: an Asian American woman eats dinner with a wealthy white family, and is struck by their casual

domesticity and worldly conversation, far different than her own family's more haphazard ways. In my own life, I felt deep inadequacy and a sense of irreparable chasm when my High School friend invited me to his home, filled with books and a father who knew his way around them, both of which I lacked. These are moments of recognition of place, status and deprivation. It is a common immigrant experience, realizing that whatever their parents did provide, they were still not *established* in the country. They didn't *belong*, in the same way, as others. They didn't get the baptism of pop or haute culture that some more fortunate others got. They didn't have the right *connections* or the time and understanding to make them. Their families might not even have known *what* to provide them. They didn't always see or support their unique and individual gifts. Encounters with racism are only the most extreme forms of emphasizing the *not-belonging* and undesirability. They can feel ashamed of their parents' or forefathers' countries of origin. Asian Americans can feel as if they have been swallowed up by the people who have conquered or reign supreme over the land of their ancestors, and who certainly dominate their minority island, even when they chose to come here. Immigrant lives are lived bricolage, with make-do sensibility born of lesser means. Their lives are of happenstance provenance rather than the perceived surety of generations. The Asian American is often left thinking they have to find their way on their own, grasping at an elusive American dream. Every setback and rejection is a reminder of "inadequacy" and uncertain, wobbly-footed beginnings. This is the shame of lack, absence and loss. The mother's breast milk didn't deliver a country; there is some form of persistent malnutrition. It is not envy, really, but shame of identity and selfhood. We can take pride in immigrant, hybrid identities, pride in our family's accomplishment and

provisions for us, but pride is a repair of shame. Even gratitude for our circumstances is a release from shame.

There is also shame about body: height, size, shape, skin color or even face. Shame of accomplishment – it's never “good enough” to feel really accepted. Shame can be contagious, a father's shame visited on the children, or children feeling shame for their parents. An accomplished Asian American can feel shame at his or her success, practically apologizing for it. I am sensitive to the fact that I have attained in one generation what many others have not, educationally and financially, despite their advantages of implicit Americanness, despite my lack of father and his knowledge of books. I sometimes feel others' jealousy or judgment at my attainment; they transmit their shame at being “outclassed” by a newbie like me. Would they feel this way if I were white? At the same time, I feel I could have or should have done more than I have, if less hobbled by immigrant circumstances. I am accomplished, yet it can feel like I've just made do, still not fully successful, still not fully accepted, still not fully belonging, still incomplete.

Losing face, the Asian-figurative equivalent of shame, rebounds directly on feelings about the acceptability of one's actual face, body and personhood. Rejection by a woman can inflict or inflame shame in a man, and if he can't bear to feel that, he will experience anxiety, depression – or anger.

The remedies for shame lie in acceptance and compassion – but from whom? Oneself, certainly, but this requires Herculean and seemingly unsustainable effort. Our most certain oases during our desert wanderings are in relationship, communal and romantic. And this is where we are still falling short. It is a perpetual striving. Perhaps shame is more prevalent in America than greed or pride; perhaps all the deadly sins spring from it. If we are to heal the Asian American soul, we must face our shame, injury

and disconnection, and learn how to grant each other a feeling of society.

Dealing with shame – about our bodies, about how we think we’re viewed by the people we love and desire, about our position in the community, nation and world – I think is a central part of the therapy of anger. If love is the antidote, then self-love and self-compassion has to be a main ingredient. The deepest, most true repair of shame, in my view, includes an appreciation and love for Asian American identity, culture and history, and using these perspectives to creatively push for social change, inclusion and representation.

In the end, anger is not just a two-edged sword. It is at least a two-person emotion, requiring two to evoke, and two or even more to work through. If we are to resolve anger, we have to take responsibility. Responsibility for our own emotions and yes, responsibility for others. Asian American men and women need each other. If we're going to fight together, fight for the good cause before us, we have to have each other's backs.

This “world-defining relationship” of men and women, marred in the extreme by violence, is prime evidence of the world’s brokenness and suffering. It is also, by nature, the main hope for the world’s redemption, which must, of course, be in the triumph of love. If there is a gender war, there are many more gender collaborators. We are, after all, not entrenched enemies. We’re mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, partners, friends. Community.

With, one hopes, a mutual, common destiny.

(For more information, see the Asian Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence’s report on Engaging Men.⁴⁰)

⁴⁰ <http://www.apiidv.org/issues/engagingmen.php>

Anger – the Good, the Bad and the Beautiful

(For a colorful PDF of this and the next chapter, direct from their original publication in *Nhà Magazine*, including illustrations courtesy of Lela Lee, please go to <http://bit.ly/angerpdf>)

Did you even think someone could make a career out of being angry?

How about an Asian American woman?

Lela Lee has capitalized on anger, much to the joy and empowerment of girls and women across the country. She created an animated cartoon and comic strip, *Angry Little Asian Girls*, after – yup, you guessed it – after getting pissed off at racist and demeaning cartoons at a Spike & Mike’s Sick & Twisted Festival of Animation. Her outrage fueled her creativity, and her first animated short screened to much laughter and acclaim. (You can learn more about Lela and her work by watching the miniseries “Searching for Asian America”, available from the Center for Asian American Media, <http://caamedia.org/films/searching-for-asian-america/>) In it, the Angry Little Asian Girl (ALAG) hums sweetly on her way to school. All seems fine until her teacher and classmates make derogatory comments about her eyes and ethnicity (“you could blindfold yourself with dental floss”, for example). She explodes in expletives, then hums sweetly all the way home. The ALAG won’t put up, shut up, or give up.

Angry Little Asian Girls grew into *Angry Little Girls* (now at www.angrylittlegirls.com) with its rising

popularity, and featuring girl characters of all ethnicities united in anger. They are sisters in the struggle, divas of destruction, sandbox superheroes, wondergirls of the wordfist, the kick-ass answers to Hello Kitty. The girls have their own personalities, from the original angry girl to gloomy, disenchanted, fresh, and crazy girls.

The website includes links to cartoons, a discussion forum, and quite a selection of merchandise, from Angry Little Girl T-Shirts to tote and messenger bags, videos, mugs and mousepads. There are bold and vibrant gifts for every sparky and angry girl in your life.

Lela Lee's creation empowers as it informs, and entertains as it lights a flaming sword. She shocks some and excites others by turning the stereotype of the submissive (Asian) woman on its head.

Now personally, I've never known a submissive Asian woman. Strong, dynamic, principled, energizing, quietly capable, easygoing – but never submissive. But I do know that anger and dissent are looked down upon in many Asian cultures, and accommodating to the family or group will is preferred and even enforced. Women feel this pressure even more than men. In America, as minorities, there is even more pressure to blend in, assimilate, to go unnoticed, to keep silent. Sticking out risks disapproval of the majority group, with potential consequences.

But this is also a land of extreme emotions and individuality, in which the pursuit of happiness and identity can lead the individual to butt heads with disagreeable opposing forces. This is certainly what Lela Lee faced when she saw those demeaning cartoons in college.

We construct our identity around race and ethnicity, gender, class, occupation, immigrant status, sexual orientation, disabilities or illness, our achievements, etc. Imagine someone being contemptuous and dismissive of any of these traits, and it's easy to see how anger can get stoked by identity issues.

We live in a culture that can marginalize and deride us as Asian Americans. Senator McCain's use of the slur "gook" a few years ago is but one example. Many of us feel injured when these things happen. We've been slighted. When our identity is slighted, we feel disrespected and diminished. The end result of diminishment and scorn in our minds is non-existence: death itself. Slightings can seem like death threats to our survival brains. Underlying our anger is fear, usually fear of loss or death.

Lela Lee resonates with so many Asian Americans because she advances the image of strong and independent girls (and women) with powerful voices. She makes this palatable by letting cutesy, disarming children say the most alarming things. And by doing so, she protects and promotes the identity and equality of women. Hopefully, her work will result in empowering the identity called "Asian American Woman", as girls and women proudly wear their Angry Little Girl T-Shirts and gain courage to respond to demeaning situations. We all need that encouragement and bonding to build self-confidence and appreciation of who we are as individuals.

Thanks to Lela Lee, we have another advocate for our identities as Asian Americans.

Sidebar – A Closer Look at Anger

Let's look at Lela Lee and Asian American identity from a psychological viewpoint. Her powerful use of anger, her enshrining of it in an age of extreme emotions, is very welcome to many. And troubling to some.

What is anger? Is it good or bad?

Anger primes our bodies and minds for a fight. It makes you feel stronger in situations that seem threatening. It is to be distinguished from aggression, which is actual threatening or damaging behavior. It is also different than hostility, which is an attitude and set of judgments that lead one to dislike others and evaluate them negatively. Anger, as one of our basic emotions, is neither good nor bad in itself, but has potential for being either.

Generally, anger springs from three sources. You may feel angry when (a) you are being threatened; (b) someone/something you love or care about is being threatened, or (c) your needs aren't being met and you become frustrated. At their cores, all these reasons hinge upon the survival instinct. If you are threatened or your needs aren't being met – you might die. So your brain sends signals to tense your body, raise your heart rate, pump adrenaline, and get ready to attack. You've been pushed into fight-or-flight response mode.

Anger is a difficult emotion, a burning fire hard to tame. At times we need fire to clear the dead undergrowth so that a new forest can grow. And the anger of Lela Lee or Bao Phi (the Minneapolis-based poet featured in the September/October 2004 issue of *Nhà*) is vital in establishing our identities and boundaries as Asian Americans. Similarly, the anger of political activists is

useful in motivating and energizing them to do great deeds on behalf of the community. Their anger may have its personal roots as well, but serves to protect threatened ideals or peoples.

So is anger good or bad? That question is probably not as important as getting curious about the anger itself: understanding where it's coming from, and what to do with it. It's an important signal that something's awry. Perhaps its energy can be turned to constructive purpose. Certainly, "stuffing it" or bottling it up inside, can lead to worse problems – like depression.

But sometimes anger burns up both self and other. It can morph into hostility and aggression. It can burn unresolved for years, wounding the angry individual but doing nothing to the target of the anger. We are confronted with inappropriate anger frequently, from road rage to vitriolic marital arguments. Psychotherapists and other counselors help individuals and couples explore the roots of their anger, the fears that underlie it, and coach skills to deal with unhealthy anger. A skilled therapist can help uncover and heal wounds of early life that can fuel and misdirect anger.

The most effective way to deal with a short fuse is to take a time out when you notice your tension rising. Distracting yourself, not thinking about the problem, even holding ice cubes or running cool water over your hands can help. Connecting with supportive friends helps.

Marital disputes are a challenge as well. The Gottman Institute in Seattle studied and analyzed many couples, and has generated a wealth of data about what works and doesn't work, especially in arguments. They can actually predict whether or not a couple will get divorced by watching the first three minutes of their arguments! They've come up with the "Four Horsemen" of marital conflict, which actually can come up in all kinds of couples, happily married and not. They are (1) Criticism;

(2) Stonewalling; (3) Contempt; and (4) Defensiveness. It turns out that stereotypically, women can tend to open a disagreement with a harsh, angry or critical startup, and men respond by stonewalling or shutting down. Obviously this leads to cyclical patterns that don't solve or even address the real issues that are sparking the argument. Couples that do well in marriage have five times more positivity even in their disagreements. Couples that do poorly have more negativity. The biggest indicator for divorce turns out to be showing contempt for the partner, or deriding them as persons unworthy of respect. Contempt turns out to predict the partner's likelihood of being sick over the next four years, since it actually weakens that partner's immune system.

Learning communication techniques that don't trigger your partner's survival brain helps. One wise method for delivering criticism is "five strokes before a poke", or leading any criticism with plenty of compliments. Building up your "emotional bank account" with many small acts of fondness and admiration for your partner can serve you when the chips are down.

Finally, becoming more sensitive and responsive to the emotional needs of those around us, and generating kindness, love and compassion even for those we disagree with is important in creating our own well being, and ultimately in creating a world where defensive anger is rare, because we will be actively protecting and nurturing each other.

Until then, though, here's to all the Angry Little Asian Girls and Angry Little Asian Boys out there! Your energy and motivation is vital to all of us – and to your own growth! But remember, anger can destroy as it protects. Perhaps it's possible to purify anger, to treat it like a precious instrument, finely tuning it so it hits the right pitch at the right time, and then goes silent afterward.

Is anger good or bad? It's a question that needs to be asked about each instance of anger. Why did it arise? Where did it lead us?

The Social Network is an IndigNation

This is an excerpt from the book-in-progress *FaceBuddha: Transcendence in the Age of Facebook and the Other Social Networks*. Sylvia Boorstein had this to say about it: “I heartily recommend FaceBuddha, a wonderfully written, exciting and at times elegiac and rhapsodic presentation of the potentials and difficulties of connecting in relationship - especially in our modern age of technology and as seen through a Buddhist lens. Ravi Chandra is a wonderful storyteller, a psychiatrist, a Buddhist student and teacher, an Asian American, and an able, eloquent writer with the capacity and personal experience to address all the contemporary issues this book brings together. I think the book will be inspiring to many, many people.” Sign up for a newsletter at www.RaviChandraMD.com to support this and other projects by Ravi Chandra, M.D.

Among active and interactive users of Weibo, the Chinese version of Twitter, anger is more viral than happiness, sadness or disgust. (Fan R, Zhao J, Chen Y, Xu K. Anger is more influential than joy: sentiment correlation in Weibo. 2013, accessed at <http://bit.ly/1CbME3X>).

Anger, researchers found, travels more quickly, broadly and definitively across the social network than the other wan-by-comparison emotions, tying users together in

tighter bonds of hell-yeah-me-tooism and retweeted rage. The internet is the angernet, a handy transmitter to broadcast one's discontent and rage, and connect with discontented others in a rising chorus of ire-amplification. Complaints are contagious. Notes of protest propagate prolifically, passionately pal-literative punctuation points of public pique, replicating clonally and sometimes pandemically, perhaps more polemic than poetic. Anger pops. What arises as a means to overcome one's own powerlessness, isolation and weakness, to rise up against a menace, a survival-brain boost of energy, is naturally strengthened when joined in tribal, primal scream. There is, always, strength in numbers. Oppositional Facebook rants and tweets are as attractive as they are polarizing, drawing the like-minded into their magnetic "like" orbit. Anger is pure unbridled power, pushing an individual's synapses into full alert, and readying the body for a fight. We all are easily enticed and entrained to the flow of anger's yellow bile, which draws us to our most vigorous heights of surly strength and wished-for vanquishing of the triggering, and thus dangerous-in-our-minds, offender.

It is the most active, urgent and actionable of our emotions. When the conditions are right, or perfectly "wrong" and therefore unacceptable, they spark us to righteous rage, and a bonfire is sure to follow. When conflict catches us, we catch fire. Social discourse is most powerful and noticeable when people unite against a common threat. Social media have become a spontaneous, rapid response engine that can quickly take aim at issues and incidents that are felt viscerally by hundreds, thousands, or even millions. Clearly, the consequences for racist, sexist or homophobic comments and actions have changed dramatically in recent years. The anger of the masses – the conscience of the masses – holds leaders, businesses, and governments more accountable. All seemingly for the better. Online activists defend social

media as if it were their mother – or messiah. They point to concrete examples where a chorus of tweets and posts cause real world change. L.A. Clippers owner Donald Sterling's withdrawal from the NBA after his racist comments drew widespread disapproval. The book deal of the Trayvon Martin juror that was canceled after online protest, a notable Twitter-takedown. George Zimmerman, who shot Trayvon Martin, who was charged only after an online petition forced the issue. The outpouring of social media messages after the Mike Brown shooting in Ferguson, Missouri. Emerging protests the world over that are enhanced and organized with social media tools. All are examples of a population's anger crystallized and made crystal clear on liquid crystal displays.

The people can speak, and in numbers, be heard. Attention can be focused. Conversations started. Social media can turn heads, and if the expressions of anger are noted by a receptive party or government, they can catalyze change. In a democracy, the will of the people is a force to be reckoned with – and now, Facebook and Twitter can make that will known with immediacy. The nightly news spotlight is increasingly aimed by trending conversations on Twitter and Facebook. The complaints of the community can become nothing less than a call to conscience, and certain, palpable evidence of communal mood. Important issues of civil and human rights resonate around the world, share-by-share, tweet-by-tweet.

The power of righteous rage and indignation is undeniable. Is it not moving us closer to solving the problems of racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination, persecution and bondage? Isn't social media part of a sea change in the life and strivings of humanity, reinforcing and advancing our highest values? Certainly. Dictators, oppressors and one-party states have reason to fear rapid communication and dissemination of ideas, and even more so, the easy spread of anger against

them. Social media pushes creatively against control. Censors may impose some limits, but people find ways to skirt those prison bars. The network, the loosely organized or completely unorganized online “flash mob”, is taking aim at hierarchical power structures across the globe. If people power is a forbidden fruit, then social media seems like a blossoming orchard of possibilities. It is a genie that can’t be put back in the bottle, a necessary torch to combat the darkness of ignorance and tyranny. Perhaps, even, a spur to enlightenment, as our newfound connection can inspire us to rise above greed and hatred, and towards compassion and wisdom. Our collective compassion and wisdom certainly will determine our fate. Anger is part of our struggle to make sure that there is an end to all forms of the gulag. In case of emergency, break silence.

Anger is a vital component and provocateur of our egos – and must be heard, met and resolved in our advance towards a healthier, more inclusive society. Anger disrupts the status quo – and the modern mantra of technological change is “disruption”. Anger spreading through social media may be the ultimate disruptive force in our global tweet-à-tweet. Facebook and Twitter are conveyance mechanisms for our angry prayers and insistent demands. We become the “hearer-of-all-cries”, the bodhisattva responsive to the suffering of all, the bodhisattva who delays enlightenment to help others become free. When we feel and observe anger, we recognize suffering. We are reminded of the First Noble Truth – “Life entails suffering”. Something deep within us is compelled. We become restless until we find the cure for what ails, the remedy for the wails and woes of a world in distress.

Anger comes to us readily on smartphone screens and social media apps, reminding us of the frustrations of our friends and the world we share. No princess can sleep happily with a troublesome Facebook post, an irksome tweet-pea, under her mattress. They are reminders of the

journey, more immediate and personal than a newspaper, because they are being served up by someone you know. They can be a litmus test of our spirit and resolve. If enlightenment, or even community, is our goal, then we must learn to listen to the angers of others, and understand our own.

But as our eyes trip on peeve-after-peeve, we recognize that social media anger can be a burden. I can rhapsodize about anger in theory, appreciate it when used for causes I care about, value my right to use it as well – but in practice, viewing an anger-filled feed gets old quickly. Here’s what we can step in when we log on: there’s anger at spoiled, snooty 20-somethings (“spit in their drinks!”), government in general (“our government is bought by corporations”), Rand Paul (“why would we vote for a candidate who hates government?”), insurance companies (“spent 2 hours on the phone with Blue Shield”), Bill Maher (“Racist!”), rapists (video of alleged perpetrators being beaten by crowds in India), trolls (“Eff these racists who sent death threats to Asian American students”), bad airport food (“I hate this crappy airport burger!”), amenities (“worst WiFi experience ever!!! And the coffee sucks too!!!”) and even angry rants about angry rants. There was even anger about the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize. “Why did Malala have to share the prize?” “Why did Canada give her honorary citizenship, and my friend hasn’t been able to get citizenship for 3 years even though she’s married to a citizen!?!?”

There is no firewall for the ire-wall.

We all get to our emotions honestly, and have every right to express them. But do we really need to permaculture our peevishness? All these issues need to be communicated, in principle – but when they come as a barrage, the medium becomes a source of dissatisfaction in itself. We discover we want peace, not peevishness. To find it, we must return to the real world, relationship, and

responsibility for one another, and leave this shallow texting engagement with little context. Our anger needs relationship. It requires empathic reception. Facebook and Twitter can't provide these fully. A 140-character rant or even a five hundred word update can never give you the full 360. We can feel validated by likes and comments, vindicated by our ability to voice our annoyance, but these do not take us where we need to go.

We must touch the flame of anger, but then explore more deeply to understand the fuel of rage. There are no easy answers here. We may rather be right – and angry – than related, but related we must be. Through all our views of anger, we can create a mosaic to help guide our relationship to ourselves, the world, and each other. Where did this anger come from? Where did it lead? If I wasn't feeling anger, what would I be feeling? What is underneath my anger? How do I want to heal this suffering? Anger is not the answer; it is a question. "Who am I?" "Who would I like to be?" As possessing as it is, anger is not our whole story; but on social media, it can seem like our only note. A shrill and possibly dangerous one, at that.

Anger can become hatred and then hostility, one of the three poisons that Buddhism warns against (the others being greed and ignorance of interdependence). A mind prone to anger, a mind that reignites its anger with swipes and taps of a screen, is not creating a path of peace, is not journeying towards enlightenment. Anger comes between us, dividing as often as it unites. As we become enraged, irritated and annoyed, as we are distracted, entrained and entertained by anger – we create a habit energy that reduces our capacity for peace. "Habit energy" is also called "karma", the "throwing power" of our actions. Karma is the rut we make for ourselves, the mental groove we deepen. Where does the newsfeed rut lead us? As much as I like to keep my ear close to the ground of my friends' concerns, I find that hearing them in this way can take me

farther from the ground of reality, relationship, and resolution.

Anger is the call of identity, of self-hood, which waits for the response of interdependence. Anger may call for a just world, but anger, in itself, is not just. We cannot be just until we become love, until we cultivate love in all our actions, attitudes, relationships and institutions.

Love is the real social network, the foundation of society. The IndigNation is not a land I would choose to live in, but is perhaps we can pass through this state, journey on, to a country of hearts.

**Views of Mt. Fury –
Bonus Poems about Anger**

The Door

Hear my angry knock at your door!
Somebody let me IN!
Let me IN to this house!
I've been outside so long!

Insisted Living

I had to fight for every scrap of flesh
on these weary bones.
This blood has to be beat out
of a heart the size of a fist.
Don't tell me to stop fighting
Don't tell me to lay down -
You think this was easy?
This body, this mind?
You're confused
And that's why I fight.

Did you see what just happened?

You can't believe in beginningless, blameless time
And then blame someone for their anger.
Did you see what *just*
happened to them -
In their previous life?
They are angry
Because they are.
Because they existed
And are trying to exist
Subsisting on the energy to resist
this red-eyed, flaming, bloodstained province of samsara.
Their face before their grandparents were born
Is hidden behind generations of hurt.
Blows that laid them low
Manifest in these moments of fire.
Don't blame them.
Just listen.
Let them clear their throat
Find their voice
And come to.
They are waking up.
There will be
time for tears,
here in samsara,
time for love.
After all, only love –
stops time.

Anger never goes abroad alone

Anger never goes abroad alone
It always moves with a pack
Sometimes in the lead
Sometimes in the back.
See it urged now by shame,
And later by regret and guilt.
Then it rides high with blame,
Before sadness chews its leg lame.
Anger and love are rivals
Nipping each other's heels.
Which leads the herd and gaggle?
Which one holds the wheel?
I'll say only this to your riddles:
At the end of all their travels
They all come home to suckle.

The Path

Blame lay like brambles;
resentments, thorns on the path;
grudges were sharp stones.
I was angry, in my bare feet,
until I remembered –
I'd spread them here myself -
they marked the way home.
I took a broom and swept.
I had this road to walk.

As I cleared, the sun caught.
Sun-dappled, we were.
Forgiveness is a soft,
hesitant light.
Shadow-broken but warm.

Which one is it?

When I'm angry,
is it about me,
my little-s self,
or is it always about some
bigger picture slight?
The exploitations of race, gender and class,
The fact that my brown-skinned flesh embodies
some kind of upending
of a system that plots to keep me in check?
Or is it my ego's toes
stubbed on not-getting-their-way?
Is it possible to know
which anger is in my plight?
I'm not sure,
but it's important I ask.
I need to know
how best to hold my rage
and where to aim it;
how to wear
my critical mask;
how to come
to critical mass.

Anger slams the door

Anger slams the door
on those who need a kick.
pillaging pirates,
imperialists with gunships
colonialists bearing greed and war
on their rotten trips.
Anger slams the door,
Anger will do the trick.
They've eaten your food,
now they want your wife, and children too.
Anger slams the door.
Anger will do the trick.
Anger was long in coming,
but now anger comes quick.
But they keep knocking, rudely.
They keep assaulting, rudely.
You bar the door and build your walls thick.
It's a long drawn-out battle,
of brick and realpolitik
ink and think, imagining from darkness -
Imagining into being - light.
Your only ally is time,
and your house's increasing might.
Love is in the foundations,
after all,
and love is in the fight.

We are set in motion

Things are not set Things are not set Things
are not set
They are set in motion
We are rollin' with the ocean
We sail with the wind of our will
We seek the rays of our sun
We do what has to be done
We make love
We make love

Things are not set
They are set in motion
we are waves on the ocean
lost in separate devotions
but our cresting emotions
remind us we are one
remind us we are one

Things are not set
They are set in motion
We are waves of the ocean
Separated by our caution
Call it fear – call it delusion -
But then returning to the one
But then returning to the one

Things are not set
They are set in motion
We are waves of the ocean
An ocean that is love
An ocean that is love

Things are not set
They are set in motion

Our hearts set in motion
Driven only by the notion
we must collect ourselves
we must connect ourselves
and be one
and be one

We are not set We are not set We are not set
We are set in motion

R/Evolution

*Dedicated to Malala Yousafzai, Kailash Satyarthi, and
Grace Lee Boggs*

Antsy young woman, twitching revolt
Asked century-old sage
Wheelchair bound
But with ideas still
rolling through the ages -
"Why has there been no revolution?"
My mind turned and balked
I couldn't hear the answer.
My rebel heart shouted
Remembering the past:
Walls fallen, countries reborn,
Endless time, curing itself
In necessary struggle.
Revolutions evolving
in geologic, cosmic, and microscopic scale,
eyes on every sparrow.
Even one mind
overturning itself
is a revolution.
Listen up:
There are many waves
In a sea change.

Roses and Thorns

I realized, the other day,
The world is fucked up
Because God – wants angry poems,
And poems singing love.
How else to set us buzzin'
Than to send the world
Roses, and their cousins –
Thorns.
Romance and tragedy are born
From these flowers cast on caskets
And couples florally adorned.
We're sent wandering and adrift
Between a chasm and a rift.
A Shakesperian ravaging
Or ravishing of souls –
A world that plunders you
Like a miner pummels ground for gold.
Or a peace-prize winning President sends
Missiles and drones –
Potent proof of roses and thorns.
What a hellish heavenly passion is borne
On roses and thorns.

Beauty that lifts
And the pain that comes with –
The blood that's spilled
When the rose is picked.
If the rose is hope, does it rise
From bodies and cinder?
Even when it rises
the thorns still linger
and blood still flows from wounds and anger.
Are hope and hurt
forever mingled?

Roses and thorns.

Are these the only poems
this world can sing?
And if God wants poems
what am I to bring?
Is the scent of my poem
All that you're after?
Is that why you keep
feeding us disaster?
Am I only a container
For soon-cremated bones
and words
for some dark muse and master?
What am I to Him or Her?
Something to be torn asunder
Cast aside, left to wander?
Is the world but burnt offering –
perfumed smoke a poetic squander?

Life can feel so meaningless
When misery and strife come along so relentless.
Gunshots ring in a temple –
I look for roses,
But see a barbed-wire fence of thorns.
Roses and thorns.

Is our nature so cruelly mixed
Is this the only way to exist –
in roses and thorns,
through roses and thorns?

Can I look for hope some other way?
Stop grappling with thorns

And grasping for roses -
Stop bleeding over pages
gasping out in crimson ink?
Can I go past pain for the sake of soul?
Can something else grow,
From mud and blood and grief of sun?
Are these thorns the only axis?
Are blood-stained roses the only goal?

All I can do is keep scribing and describing,
keep hoping my wagon's
hitched to a different star -
Keep hoping my sutra
Will be a suture,
And this thread
Can lead me home.
Keep hoping that my words
Can reach God or Buddha or you
And remind you -
The lotus - has no thorns -
And love -

matters.

subprime tsunamis

(From *a fox peeks out*, 2011)

subprime tsunamis leave us all underwater.
the whole nation's in deep, in debt.
man-made hurricanes,
earthquakes of default
spill toxic assets across our land
and people into the streets.
Even when Mother Nature deals us deadly hands,
it's our own greed and ego
which breaks levees
and floods Fukushimas.

We need barrier walls in our minds.
We need containment for power.

The ones in charge never seem to understand –
the bottom line is bonus checks,
dividends, stock options and cash.
But all I see is people with no options,
drowning.
Who cares for their health? Who cares for their lives?
Joe Millionaire doesn't want regulations, or taxes,
or health care for the masses.
Joe Millionaire says, "I'm a working man too!
I got rich driving a tractor, moving mountains of money –
Why shouldn't I keep that loot?
I stole this money fair and square!"

Mountains do get built from earthquakes,
great masses of earth pushing into each other,
pushing the ground up.
That always leaves a hole someplace.
Maybe Joe Millionaire's really digging a grave

big enough to hold our ideals.

Mountains are transcendent, though,
pure and grand, ideal.
But they are made from earthly instability,
a steady, determined violence over ages.
Maybe these earthquakes, these tsunamis
will shape us a great mountain mudra.

Greed must be contained by wisdom.
Compassion must be the greatest power.
Only so, can the waters purify.
Only so, can earthquakes
give ascent,
instead of annihilation.

Where are you from?

She took one look at my brown skin
And asked “where are you from?”
Not from here, it was clear -
I answered with this truthful sum.

Fingerprints of freedom rides,
Footprints of King and Gandhi;
Synaptic connections of Malcolm X
Proclaiming liberation of countries.

Mandela’s fist and Biko’s gifts
Spirit I carry within me;
Buddha’s words – “Thus have I heard”
The power to set all beings free.

Face of Sun, Wisdom bright
The light of the world surrounds me.
Face of Moon, Compassion’s might,
Enlightenment is the mission before me.

My upright spine spans all of time
My skull the sphere of heaven.
My eyes envision future bright
My ears hear history’s lessons.

My nerves gather all mankind.
My blood contains the Ocean.
My heart beats a universal march:
Love, the transcendent emotion.

Each breath of lung breathes all breaths breathed
My alveoli purify, unify and heal.
There’s only one breath between us all
We all ride the same wheel.

My skin's not thin, it's worn with miles
And miles to go before me.
My old soul's been everywhere there is
Gathering my people's destiny.

Ask me where I'm from
I'll tell you clear –
I come
From where we're going.

About the Author

Ravi Chandra, M.D. is a psychiatrist, poet and writer in San Francisco. His non-fiction book-in-progress, about the psychology of social networks through a Buddhist lens, is called *Facebuddha: Transcendence in the Age of Facebook and the Other Social Networks*. He blogs for Psychology Today (The Pacific Heart) and the Center for Asian American Media (Memoirs of a Superfan). He was featured in *Indivisible: An Anthology of Contemporary South Asian American Poetry*, winner of a Special Recognition Award from the California Book Critics' Circle, and his first collection of poetry, *a fox peeks out: poems*, won Honorable Mention at the 2012 San Francisco Book Festival.

If you like what you've read, and want to find out about and support the author's future publications, please go to www.RaviChandraMD.com and sign up for an occasional newsletter.

Please also follow @going2peace on Twitter and "like" Sangha Francisco - The Pacific Heart on Facebook.

Also, watch this inspiring film about the worldwide movement to end violence against women and girls! Produced by One Billion Rising, directed and edited by Kirithi Nath: <http://bit.ly/OBR4JFilmy>

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