



Anger in Animus Development

by Sharon Martin

It is my belief that women are born angry. Most of us believe our anger is inappropriate, dangerous and shameful. I propose that anger is an altogether necessary and even essential element for psychic development. Consider this statement by Emma Jung, a woman of extraordinary intelligence, wisdom and courage, who also happened to be married to Carl Jung: “even though a woman may think otherwise consciously, the idea that what is masculine is in itself more valuable than what is feminine is born in her blood.” This idea *should* make our blood boil! The feminine principle has been profoundly devalued in our culture, our religion and our world. In our elevation of masculine values, our feminine rhythms have been discarded. Women naturally feel violated by this system, and anger is the healthy response to being violated. However, most of us have been taught that an angry woman is both unattractive and undesirable. This is a view absorbed from many sources in our culture, and though we may not intellectually believe it, it has a profound unconscious impact on us.

I submit that if a woman does not consciously embrace her anger, she cannot let go of it and move into the wholeness that rightly belongs to her. Since no aspect of the psyche can be eliminated, the anger must fall into the unconscious where it activates the animus, her masculine aspect, and takes possession of her. Because it is unconscious, it functions destructively and will remain primitive and undeveloped. The animus at this stage is her own *excluded* masculinity,

and it may act out against her in destructive and violent ways: self-torturing by starving or purging, self-mutilation, self-abuse with drugs, alcohol, or other destructive behaviors. Alternatively, she may find a man onto whom she projects all of her split-off rage and aggression, allowing him to “carry” these dark aspects for her. Since this aggressiveness is alien to her, that is, to her consciousness, it holds a certain strange and mysterious fascination and may become exotic and tantalizing. This explains the attraction many women have to violent, abusive, or even criminal men.

Every therapist knows that the victim of a crime cannot heal until they are able to access their anger about it. Anne Wilson Schaeff, feminist author and psychotherapist, describes the unconscious plight of women born into what she calls a White Male System as a quest to absolve themselves of the Original Sin of Being Born Female. This obviously evokes rage because no one likes to be innately inferior, but women are told from childhood that their rage is inappropriate. But is it ever inappropriate to get angry about being labeled innately inferior? I assert that it is actually a sign of good health! Angry or depressed women are much easier to work with in therapy than those who are numb.

Within this problem lies a wealth of untapped energy, since the suppression of anger requires tremendous effort and energy. Until a woman makes contact with this internal reality she is blocked, unable to evolve into a relationship with the positive animus. This often brings depression, exhaustion, and even illness. Jung said, in reference to the anima and animus, “Those who do not see them are in their hands, just as a typhus epidemic flourishes best when its source is undiscovered.”

We find an interesting parallel in a fairy tale entitled

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“Fitcher’s Bird,” a story of feminine empowerment through animus development. In this story a murderous wizard captures young, pretty girls, taking the form of a poor man who goes house to house begging. He carries a basket for collecting food, and when he comes to the house of a man with three pretty daughters, he has only to touch them, and they jump right into his basket. He then carries them off to his house in a dark forest and tests them to see whether they are worthy to be his wife. When the first two sisters fail the test, by looking into a “forbidden room,” they are murdered, dismembered and thrown into a basin filled with body parts of previously unfortunate women. In a long narrative, the third sister finally learns how to defeat and destroy him, by re-membering and resurrecting her slain sisters and sending them for help. The help they eventually bring, their brothers and kinsmen, are the positive masculine aggression in the service of ego-development which has been missing in the story.

The wizard is a male magician/godlike figure representing the all-powerful figure who determines whether they are worthy of life or death. This symbolizes the rendering of worth based on a masculine paradigm, which symbolically fractures and dismembers a woman’s psyche and robs her of her own power. Only as she finds the courage to look into the “forbidden room,” that is, to look within and see her own suffering, shame, loss and resulting rage, can she re-member *herself* and move toward her own authority.

In a commentary on this tale by Donald Kalsched, “The father of our three daughters has apparently left them extremely vulnerable to enchantment by the negative, diabolical side of the masculine with its archetypal aggression. Psychologically, this is the inevitable legacy of either outright neglect by the father or his failure to set limits on the daughters and thereby provide the opportunity for working through aggression interpersonally. In other words, both love and aggression must be experienced toward the same father if a woman is to have a ‘whole’ image of the masculine and hence be ‘immunized’ from infection by the negative masculine...”

The cultural father, represented by the male Christian god, generally expects women to be quiet, demure, kind, ladylike,

sweet-tempered, unselfish, and maternal. This requires the sublimation of her anger and the denial of the dark side of her nature. When a woman denies her aggression, she loses a quality necessary for psychological development. She is then defenseless in its unconscious power, resulting in the neuroses of repetitive destructive relationships, addictions, depression, disease or even psychosis. This is perhaps the most tragic aspect of the playing out of this problem in actual, everyday life—the terrible vulnerability of a woman who has no conscious relationship to the positive masculine.

The effect of her unconscious aggression and anger on her relationships with other people is also deeply troubling. At this stage she functions primarily in one of two roles: mother or daughter or an alternating combination of these two. Because she only feels validated or worthy when she is taking care of others, she tends to feel “owned” by her children, husband or other family members. She may find it difficult to separate herself even from the most tortuous of relationships, because she is dependent on them for feelings of worthiness. This too constellates resentment and anger, which can give her valuable instruction.

Because she does not treat her own feelings with tolerance and compassion she has little or no real compassion for other’s weaknesses. The inner masculine standard demands perfection of her and she is therefore intolerant of other’s mistakes. At this point she often compensates for her self-doubt by becoming forceful in her opinions, which are generally dogmatic, rigid, undifferentiated and cold. She may also become manipulative and passive aggressive.

It is this stage in particular that seems to correlate best with the description of the infamous “animus-possessed woman” in much of the Jungian literature, who incessantly puts forth vehement opinions based on sweeping generalities. *The crucial point not usually made is that it is the woman herself who suffers most at the hands of the inner relentless critic.*

Differentiating the voice of the animus and her Self is the key that unlocks hope that the animus can be transformed and actually become a helpful psychological factor. It is only in looking inward and seeing her internal life as a woman in a patriarchal society and experiencing the inevitable anger this engenders, that she can begin to move forward into a more positive and developed relationship with the animus.

To sum up I again quote Emma Jung: “To discriminate between oneself and the animus, and sharply to limit its sphere of power, is extraordinarily important; only by doing so is it possible to free oneself from the fateful consequences of identifying with the animus and being possessed by it. Hand in hand with the discrimination goes the growth of consciousness and the realization of the true Self... when women succeed in maintaining themselves against the animus, instead of allowing themselves to be devoured by it, then it ceases to be only a danger and becomes a creative power. We women need this power, for, strange as it seems, only when this masculine entity becomes an integrated part of the soul and carries on its proper function there is it possible for a woman to be truly a woman in the higher sense, and, at the same time, also being herself, to fulfill her individual human destiny.”



Erin Magbee, photo for project at SCAD, 2010