Chapter 10

Experiencing Another's Anger

To the extent that anger is an *interpersonal* emotion, the experiences of the angry person can provide only part of the story; the experiences of the target are also important, particularly for an understanding of the possible functional significance of anger. It is, after all, primarily through the target that anger must exert its influence. The purpose of Study II, reported in the present chapter, was therefore to explore the reactions of the target to another's anger.

Procedural Considerations

In order to study the experiences of the target, a questionnaire (B) was constructed that paralleled in many respects the questionnaire (A) used in Study I. A copy of this second questionnaire is contained in Appendix B. The rationale behind its construction was explained briefly in Chapter 7.

Participants

Only students participated in Study II. Subjects were recruited at the same time and in the same manner as the student subjects who participated in Study I. As may be recalled, these subjects were limited to unmarried, native-born Americans who were 21 years old or less. Students who volunteered were given either Questionnaire A or Questionnaire B on a random basis. Among those who received Questionnaire B, 10 returned unusable questionnaires—7 because the incident described occurred more than a month previously and 3 because the questionnaire was improperly filled out. Approximately 7% of the students who received questionnaires did not return them at all.

Questionnaires continued to be collected until 80 students (40 men and 40 women) had completed Questionnaire A (for Study I) and a corresponding number had completed Questionnaire B (for Study II). There were no significant differences in demographic variables between the students who completed one questionnaire and those who completed the other.
Data Analyses

This chapter is devoted to a presentation of the results of Questionnaire B and, where relevant, to a comparison between Questionnaires A and B. All of the subjects who completed Questionnaire B were, of course, aware of the other person's anger. For purposes of comparison, therefore, a similar restriction was placed on the episodes described in Questionnaire A. Specifically, comparisons between the two questionnaires were done using only those episodes ($n = 102$) from Study I in which the subjects indicated that the targets were aware of their anger. Also, because of the differences between the community residents and students who participated in Study I, subanalyses were done using only student subjects.

All of the results reported below that involve a comparison between questionnaires utilize the combined data of the community residents and students from Study I. However, no differences are reported as statistically significant unless they were also at least marginally significant ($p < .10$) in the subanalyses involving only the students who participated in the studies.

The Angry Incidents

As in Study I, subjects completing Questionnaire B were asked to focus on the most intense incident during the previous week or on the most recent incident prior to that. Approximately 60% of the subjects (49) reported being the target of anger at least once during the week, and the median time that had elapsed between the incident described and the completion of the questionnaire was 5.8 days. The mean intensity of the "most intense" incident was 6.6 on a 10-point scale. This was somewhat lower than the corresponding rating (7.1) of one's own anger (Questionnaire A), but not significantly so.

In spite of their somewhat lower ratings in terms of absolute intensity, 61% of the targets felt that the other person's anger was more intense than the incident called for; by contrast, only 35% of the subjects describing their own anger felt that their responses were unduly severe. This difference is highly significant ($p < .01$). The target was also more likely to perceive the angry person's behavior as "uncontrolled" and "impulsive." That is, subjects who rated another's anger reported a greater loss of behavioral control on the part of the angry person than did subjects who rated their own anger (5.6 vs. 4.2 on a 10-point scale, $p < .01$).

In short, although people may perceive another's anger as less intense than it "really" is (from the angry person's point of view), they still believe the anger to be more intense and uncontrolled than is warranted.

The Relationship Between the Target and the Angry Person

As we saw in Chapter 8, people say they are more likely to become angry at loved ones and friends than at strangers or those who are disliked. An equally strong trend in the same direction appears when anger is viewed from the perspective of the target. Specifically, in 80% of the episodes the targets indicated that the angry person