

**Ep #378: Anger Catharsis BS:  
Why Your Rage Room Visit Isn't Healing You**



**Full Episode Transcript**

**With Your Host**

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[Feminist Wellness](#) with B a Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

## Ep #378: Anger Catharsis BS: Why Your Rage Room Visit Isn't Healing You

This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, somatics and nervous system nerd, and life coach Béa Victoria Albina. I'll show you how to get unstuck, drop the anxiety, perfectionism, and codependency so you can live from your beautiful heart. Welcome, my love, let's get started.

Hello, hello my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. So I was recently a guest on a podcast and the host asked me a question I have been thinking about ever since. So she was talking about the women in her audience who are carrying a lot of anger and rage right now, the ones who are watching the political landscape and are feeling something that goes well beyond frustration, the ones in midlife who are waking up to just how much they've given away and to whom for how long, the ones who are just beginning to see the patterns that kept them outsourcing their sense of safety and worth and value and goodness to everyone around them for years and who are, understandably, furious about it. She asked, what should they do with all that rage? Should they go smash something?

And I had this thought that I had never formulated in this way before, which is, when exactly did the patriarchy decide that violence is the answer to anger? Right? That if you're feeling big feelings, obviously you should punch a hole in the drywall.

Somewhere along the way, we absorbed a very particular story about what anger is and thus what it needs. And the story goes like this: anger is pressure. It builds. If it doesn't have somewhere to go, it will explode or fester or turn inward and become depression. And the solution, the only solution, is to get it out. Release it, discharge it with a bat or a pillow or a plate, let it rip. And there is an entire industry built on that premise. A room full of very breakable things and a waiver you sign beforehand. I mean, somewhere right now some wellness entrepreneur is renting out sledgehammers by the hour and calling it healing.

Tennis rackets, stack of old plates and picture frames you're invited to throw against a wall. Maybe a punching bag with a like stock photo of like a

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stressed person taped to it just to like really nail the vibe. You pay money, you put on the safety goggles, you smash the things and then, presumably, you drive home, serene and emotionally complete, a person transformed for only 79 bucks plus tax.

This story has a name in psychology. It's called the catharsis hypothesis, and it is old. I mean, we're talking Aristotle old. As in, this idea was already ancient when people were still arguing about whether the earth was round. In his Poetics, Aristotle argued that watching tragedy, like really sitting with the suffering of characters on a stage, produced a catharsis in the audience, a purging, a cleansing of difficult emotion through the act of witnessing it. He was talking about art. He was talking about the specific alchemy of sitting in a theater in fourth century BCE Athens and weeping at Medea and walking out feeling lighter than you walked in.

Fast forward about 2,000 years and Freud and Breuer pick up the concept and do something quite specific with it. In Studies on Hysteria, 1895, they argue that repressed emotion is pathogenic, that it causes symptoms, and that bringing the memory to consciousness and expressing the associated emotion will discharge it, relieve the pressure, resolve the troublesome symptom. This is where the hydraulic model enters. Freud's particular contribution to the history of human self-understanding is the idea that psychic energy, including the energy of difficult emotions, behaves like fluid in a closed system. Pressure builds, it needs somewhere to go. If you don't provide a sanctioned outlet, it finds an unsanctioned one and you will not enjoy the results.

Aristotle was writing about the transformative power of art to move something in us. Freud was writing about the mechanics of repression and symptom relief. What popular psychology did was fuse these two ideas into something neither of them quite exactly said, which brings us to the actual problem with the model they built. Human nervous systems are not plumbing. Anger is not simply pressure in a sealed system. It is a signal.

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We talked about this in episodes 207, 208, 209. Anger is information that your body is generating about a boundary that was crossed, a need that went unmet, a threat that was real or perceived, a situation that your body has assessed as requiring a response. We talked about this at length. Go listen to those episodes. They're really good.

My beauties, signals don't need to be discharged. They need to be received. They need a destination. They need, at the most fundamental level, to be heard. And so when you simply take that signal and assume what this needs is to be smashed into a wall, something does happen. The arousal discharges temporarily. Yeah, for sure. Like your heart rate spikes and then comes down. You might feel briefly relieved in a way that any intense physical exertion produces relief. But the signal, it's still sitting there. The information and the anger, what it was about, what it was trying to tell you, what response it was organizing in your body, all of that's untouched. You're back at your desk in 20 minutes and the anger is exactly where you left it, which honestly fine is quite rude of it.

The research on this is actually quite consistent. And the most comprehensive review to date was led by a woman who was herself inspired by the rage room phenomenon. Sophie Sjøkvist, she's Norwegian. I'm doing my best here. I really hope I did her name justice. She's a communication scientist who wanted, in her words, to debunk the whole theory of expressing anger as a way of coping with it. In 2024, she and her colleagues published a meta analytic review in clinical psychology review that analyzed 154 studies involving more than 10,000 participants. What they found was that activities which increase physiological arousal, like hitting a bag, jogging, cycling, were generally ineffective at actually reducing anger and in many cases made it worse. What actually worked was the opposite. Arousal decreasing activities. Slow breathing, mindfulness, stillness. The body being held, witnessed. The body being given the opportunity to come down, not forcing it down, not saying, calm down little lady, but not ramping it up either.

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You're not releasing the anger when you smash things. You're rehearsing and intensifying the very physiological state the anger lives in. My beauty, you're practicing being angry with your whole body, and then you're wondering why you still feel angry. The pillow you punched was not the villain we needed, but it was absolutely the one we got.

And look, come on. Of course you want to punch something. You want to scream into the void and smash the steering wheel. Of course that feels like the answer. It's what's been modeled for us as the way that anger works in movies, in therapy offices, and every "just let it out" conversation you've ever had. And when you don't yet know how to be with yourself, when sitting with a feeling is so unfamiliar and so uncomfortable and nobody ever taught you how, reaching for something physical and external and loud and boom and wow, makes complete sense. Your nervous system is activated and it wants something to do. It wants to do something. And that's just the body doing what bodies do. The model was just always pointing you in the wrong direction.

Beauty, I've been saying this for a decade. In sessions, in Anchored, in every breathwork room I've ever held space for. Catharsis is cute. Integration changes lives. I'll do a whole podcast all about this. Catharsis is cute. Integration changes lives.

The model we've been handed is all catharsis, all big loud boom. It's all peak experience. It's all heroic dose and no integration. Right? It's been about discharge, about get it out, move on. Don't ask what it was trying to tell you. There's no message there. Ignore the man behind the curtain. Right? And so the catharsis model fails on its own terms. But it doesn't fail equally for everyone. And this is where it gets really interesting, my nerds. My nerds, my nerds, my nerds. This is where I want to slow down because I think this is the part that most anger conversations never get to and it's the part that matters most.

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The patriarchy handed this model to all of us. That's important to say clearly. The story that anger is hydraulic, it requires forceful, if not violent, expression, that emotions must be expelled rather than received. This story, get it out, don't hold it with compassion and care. This story does not serve anyone, regardless of gender. It flattens and harms men's emotional lives just as much as it harms ours, just very differently. Men are not the beneficiaries of this story. They are also its casualties. The patriarchy builds a model of emotional life that serves dominion, domination, and control. It keeps us under its thumb by keeping us swirling around with our ungrounded, unprocessed, and frankly, disrespected anger. Anger that hasn't been honored, anger we haven't learned from or understood the roots of. Anger we tried to escape instead of understand, tried to get away from like we could throw it like that mug across the room.

And here's what I want you to really sit with because I don't think we say this clearly enough. Venting anger with a bat and a couch cushion is safe. I mean, safe for the system, I mean, because it's contained. It's over in 20 minutes. Everyone goes back to work. You had your little moment. You wore your cute little safety goggles. Look how cute you are. You broke some plates. Wow, you feel temporarily relieved and you go back to your life. And the structures that produced the anger in the first place, they remain exactly as you found them, undisturbed, unquestioned, fully intact. The rent's still too damn high. The racism's still pervasive and Roe v. Wade, oh that was overturned. Don't worry about it. It's fine. Smash something.

Think about what a rage room actually is from a systemic perspective. It's a monetized pressure valve. It takes the energy of women's legitimate fury about real things, injustice, inequality, inequity, the accumulated cost of years of self-abandonment, the political moment we're living through, the fascism skinniness pipeline, right? And it routes that energy directly into a wall, literally into a wall. It extracts money from you in the process and sends you home spent and satisfied and not asking any questions. And

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that's not an accident. It's a remarkably elegant piece of social engineering, whether anyone consciously designed it that way or not.

Because here is what processed anger actually does. Not discharged anger, not performed anger, not anger bounced off a wall, but anger that has been truly felt, truly received, truly allowed to tell you what it knows. It clarifies. It organizes. It becomes specific. It stops being a general state of overwhelm and starts being precise information about exactly what is wrong, who is responsible, what you will no longer accept, and where your energy belongs.

A woman in that state is not going home to scroll. She's not going back to quietly managing everyone around her. She is asking questions about the systems that produced her rage. She is connecting her private pain to public structures. She is, to use a word that makes certain people very uncomfortable, politicized. In the best possible sense of that word. Awake, located, oriented towards change. That woman is considerably more inconvenient to systems that depend on her compliance than a woman who just broke 47 plates and is now taking a bubble bath.

And then there's the additional layer that human socialized as women carry because a girl or a woman expressing anger forcefully is not neutral in this culture. And the system knows it, which is why there is a particular additional cruelty layered on top of all of this for human socialized as women, because we don't just get handed the broken model. We get handed the broken model and then we're told we can't use it anyway. A girl or a woman expressing anger forcefully? Oh no, no, no. No, no, no. No, no, no, no, no. That's not neutral in this culture. She is hysterical. She's too much. She's dangerous, unhinged, difficult.

So we're handed the same broken instruction manual and then told simultaneously we cannot use it. Huh. Cool. Love a good double bind. Love that. Thanks. Beyond that, listen, many of us were never given permission to have the anger at all. Right? We were trained out of the anger itself long

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before the tool arrived. Not just handed a broken model for processing it, but taught that the anger was the problem, that feeling it made us bad, that the appropriate response to being treated badly was to manage our reaction rather than name what happened. I mean, the freaking audacity. Truly.

And so yeah, this creates a hell of a bind. And I want to stay with the bind for a moment because I think it explains so much suffering. And we wonder if something is wrong with us because we don't want to punch anything. We don't want to break anything. No, thank you. For some of us, the rage room feels like alien. Like the body is reaching for something else entirely. And that somatic mismatch between, you're angry, you should express, and what you want is a lot. For others, the resistance to actually expressing anger in this way we've been taught, it runs real deep. It runs so much deeper.

The prohibition on female rage, women's rage, got into the bones so thoroughly that expressing anger forcefully feels physically impossible, socially impossible, not just like uncomfortable, but like, oh, there's a real price to pay. And for others still, the pathway to any expression of anger, much less rage, feels physically blocked. The system having gone to freeze or fawn long before the anger could actually organize into movement. Different experiences, same broken model at the root of all of them that makes us feel like there's something wrong with us if we don't want to do the thing where the thing is like a violent, smashy kind of expression of anger.

Here's the thing, my sweet little llama, the tool was broken before it ever reached your hands. And the answer was never to like, well, let's find a better way to smash things. The answer is to stop assuming smashing is the answer and instead it's to start actually listening to our bodies. So if the catharsis model fails, what actually works? Well, my perfect angel bear, your nervous system has its own intelligence about how an emotion wants

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to move through and what it reaches for is often nothing like what you've been told anger looks like.

A barely perceptible drop in the shoulders after a long exhale, a pushing down on the table with both palms, a slow press of the feet into the floor that lasts four seconds, 14, a sensation of heat that moves up from the chest up through the throat and then settles, a tremor in the hands so small you might think you imagined it, that small, that quiet. That might be what your anger wants, how your anger wants to come out. I've seen this in somatic experiencing sessions so many times over these so many years. We have this story in our head, anger should release like this, but the body wants a different kind of energy.

Listen, I get it. Big things happen and sometimes the anger doesn't feel small and it's unimaginable that a small movement, a small gesture, a small pressure could relieve so much rage. Sometimes everything is boiling and your body is loud and insistent. You have that impulse that like, oh, I need to do something right now. The invitation before you reach for anything, hit anything, try this just once. Try it just once. Pause. Put your hands on your body somewhere that feels safe enough. Orient your nervous system, meaning look around the room you're in, and ask your body, not what am I supposed to do with this? That's the old question. The one that sends you right back to the foam bat, right? Into the smashing, into the screaming, into the throwing, right? Into the pushing, the like forceful expression of anger. The new question is this, my beautiful, perfect body, what do you actually want to do right now? What do you actually want to do right now? What do you need?

And listen, maybe it does want to push. Maybe it wants to push on the wall, push on the desk, push up. Great. Maybe it wants to walk. Maybe it wants to make a sound or shake or cry or sit completely still with both feet on the floor and just breathe like a person who's allowed to feel things. And maybe it wants something so small and so specific, you'd never find it on a list. But

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when you let your body tell you, it tells you, because your body is always known, your nervous system is always known. It's always known. And the only thing that's ever gotten in the way of that knowing coming to you is the story that anger has to look a certain way, that there's like a guidebook to it. And listen, I get that's not sexy. There's no boom, no bam, no moment you can point to and say, there, I did it. I fixed the anger. All gone, all better. It's more human than that. Quieter, less photogenic, and somehow more real for it. The kind of progress that doesn't make for a good Instagram caption. No safety goggles required, no waiver, no 79 bucks. Which means nobody's going to throw you a parade for it. There's no certificate. No one will know you did it except you and your nervous system. But your nervous system has been waiting a very long time for exactly this. For you to show up, for you to stop for a moment and for you to be present with you.

In order to do that, I think it's really vital that we acknowledge what it actually means to do this, to sit with your own anger, your own rage, your own frustration, to not fix it, not perform it, not apologize for it, not hand it off to the bat or the mug you throw across the room so everyone including you can pretend it's handled, but to just be with it. For a woman who's spent years making herself smaller so everyone around her could feel bigger, turning towards her own anger with patience, curiosity, care, compassion, gentleness, love, acceptance, my beauty.

For all of us of all genders, this is one of the most revolutionary things we can do. Not metaphorically revolutionary, actually revolutionary, because the woman who has learned to stay in the room with her own rage, to receive it, to let it clarify into something useful, that woman is changed. And changed women change things. Put that on a bumper sticker. That's history in the making.

My darling, my love, my tenderest ravioli, sitting with your rage, staying in the room with it, asking it what it needs instead of trying to evict it, that is an act of profound self-respect. It deserves acknowledgment. So I'm giving it

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to you right now, my loves, because the world certainly won't, my beauty. You felt your anger. You didn't abandon yourself to fix it. You stayed. And that counts. That more than counts.

Because most of us come to our anger with a very strong idea of what it's supposed to do. It's supposed to be big, it's supposed to be loud, it's supposed to look like something. And when it isn't those things, when the body offers something small and quiet, kind of strange or weird, we dismiss it. We decide we're not actually processing. We're just, I don't know, what am I doing? Am I dissociating? Oh, am I being avoidant? We look to the smashing, to the violence, to the out, because it's something to point to.

And so what I'm asking you to consider is whether you can let the something be small, whether you can receive the signal rather than expel it, whether you can be curious about what your anger is actually trying to tell you, what boundary it's pointing at, what need it's naming, what response it was organizing in your body before the story of how anger works got in the way.

So, back to the question the host asked me, what should they do with all that rage? What should they do with all that rage? Should they go smash something? Here's my answer. Feel it. Actually feel it. Let it land in your body instead of bouncing it off a wall. Let it tell you what it knows, because your anger about the state of the world is correct. Your anger about what midlife can teach you and what it's revealing, oh, it's correct. Your anger about the years you spent making yourself small so everyone could feel big and powerful, that's correct. And processed anger doesn't dissipate. It clarifies. It becomes direction. It becomes the thing that tells you exactly where your energy belongs, what you're willing to fight for, what you're no longer available for. A woman who has truly felt her anger, let it move through her on her own terms is not calmer. She's clearer. And clarity, my loves, is considerably more dangerous to broken systems than a smashed plate ever was.

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For the woman lying awake at 3 a.m. replaying what's happening in the world, feeling the rage rise in her chest with nowhere to put it, may this episode be permission to stop trying to manage that rage and start listening to what it's telling you about what you value and what you will not accept. Your anger is not a problem to solve. It is a map that is showing you exactly where the system's failed you, exactly where you were taught to abandon yourself, and it's pointing you back home to you.

If you're starting to see your patterns, starting to understand what it's cost you to outsource your worth to everyone around you for years, if you're scared of your own anger because you've never been allowed to have it, my beauty, you are allowed. You always were. It's been waiting for you, patiently in your body this whole time. Let me say it once again. Catharsis is cute. Integration changes lives and integration, making real change in our minds, in our bodies, in the way we live our lives, starts with this, with staying in the room with your anger instead of bouncing it off the wall. You don't have to smash anything to deserve to feel it.

Thank you for listening, my love. Thank you for letting your anger be. Thank you for showing up for you. If you're curious about working together, there are so many options from my \$37 courses to Anchored, which is a six-month deep dive into changing your life. You can learn all about it at [BeatrizAlbina.com/workwithme](https://BeatrizAlbina.com/workwithme). Lots of details there for you. I cannot wait to see you in a course so soon, my beauty.

Let's do what we do. Gentle hand on your heart should you feel so moved. And remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my beauty. I'll talk to you soon. Ciao.