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**John Moe:** Let's talk about Godzilla. First thing, gender. Although characterized as male in English language films and translations, Godzilla's gender is intentionally obscured in the Japanese films. Could be either male or female or something else. In Japan, Godzilla's pronoun tends to be "it." Now, Godzilla is an enormous creature. And when we see it, it is really, really upset. It's furious, it's angry, and it goes on to breathe fire and crush buildings and do all sorts of destructive behaviors. What makes Godzilla so interesting though is that I don't think it's a monster. That term, monster, makes me think of someone wanting to cause harm for the sake of causing harm. Godzilla generally has a motivation. Depending on the movie, it's trying to stop nuclear testing and weaponry. It's trying to save the Earth. It's actually trying to protect humanity from other creatures sometimes.

Godzilla can be scary, sure—powerful fire breath, that screeching sound. But as a viewer, you can get a lot more out of a Godzilla movie by figuring out why Godzilla does what it does, figuring out what Godzilla wants. I'm going somewhere with this, I swear. The episode isn't about Godzilla. I'm not really talking about Godzilla. It's *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Godzilla, for the purposes of this show, is anger: natural and powerful, potentially destructive, potentially intense and overwhelming anger, and definitely not as understood as it should be. Is it a mental disorder? No, it's an emotion. Can it be a factor in your mental health? Hell yes. So, let's talk about it.

Dr. Ryan Martin is an anger expert, one of very few in the world actually—which is surprising for so common a feeling. Ryan is often referred to as the anger professor, a descriptor that he's fine with. It doesn't make him mad. He's Dean of the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences at the University of Wisconsin Green Bay. He's a trained clinical psychologist and author of the books *Why We Get Mad*, and *How to Deal with Angry People*. He's a really nice guy!

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Ryan Martin, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

**Ryan Martin:** Thank you so much for having me! I'm excited to talk to you about this today.

**John Moe:** If we can start with square one—because I think it's a concept that I feel like a lot of people have different opinions on, different views of what this actually is. How do you, the anger expert, define anger?

**Ryan Martin:** So, I'm glad we're starting here, because you're absolutely right. People define this differently. So, anger is an emotion, and by that I mean it's a psychological state. It's a feeling state, much like sadness or fear or even happiness. As an emotion, it's associated with some other things, like a physiological arousal. So, when we get angry, our heart rate

increases, our muscles tense up, and so on. It's associated with particular types of thoughts. Usually thoughts maybe of like judgment, how people should behave, how they should not behave. Maybe thoughts of revenge, thoughts of disappointment in people and so forth.

And then it's associated with some behaviors. And a lot of times this is where I think there's a lot of confusion, because people oftentimes mistake the emotion for those behaviors. Because those behaviors are the things we see. And the behaviors include lashing out aggressively. And so, I think a lot of times when there's confusion, it's confusion over anger versus aggression. Whereas anger is an emotion, and aggression is a behavior where there is an intent to harm someone. And it's really important to— Even though those two things are related to one another, you are often angry without hurting anyone, and you sometimes intend to hurt people, and it's not motivated by anger. So, those things, we have to keep them separate.

**John Moe:** Is it an emotion that is more prone to specific behaviors, more prone to action than other emotions?

**Ryan Martin:** Yes. So, we tend to think about emotions as having— There's sort of high arousal emotions and low arousal emotions. And so, high arousal emotions include those where you're kind of activated to do something. Anger is certainly one of those.

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Fear is one of those. Low arousal emotions are emotions that include things where you're less inclined to do something. So, sadness is oftentimes considered a low emotion—a low arousal emotion. And you can think about this in terms, honestly, of positive emotions too. So, you can think about how, you know, excitement is sort of different—even though you think of it as positive—is different from, say, contentment. Right? Which is more of a low arousal happiness. And so, anger is one of those that when you feel it, you wanna act, and you're inclined to engage.

**John Moe:** What do people, in your experience, get wrong the most often about anger?

**Ryan Martin:** Uhhh. I'm gonna cheat a little bit and give you two answers. One is I think that piece we already talked about, which is confusing it with aggression. The other thing is then people tend to lean into a very specific— They don't think about it this way, but they're leaning into a very specific metaphor, which is that we need to blow off steam. And so, they tend to think of themselves as these human pressure cookers. You know, “Hey, if I don't let off steam, I'm going to explode.” Now, it might be true that you need to process your emotions in some way or else you might explode, right? That you have a certain amount of anger building up—or stress or whatever building up—might lead to just feeling overwhelmed and exploding in some way.

But it isn't true that you need to go find a place to break stuff or bash stuff or—you know—or go punch a pillow or tear up phone books or, you know, punch the walls of a padded room or anything like that. That actually isn't good for you. That isn't really— It may feel good in the moment, but it leads to— You can think of it as practice making permanent, right? That if

you just keep doing that when you're angry, well, then that's what you learn to do when you're angry. And there's much better ways to express your anger.

**John Moe:** Yeah, I ran across your name, Ryan, in this article in *The Guardian* about rage rooms. And these are rooms where you pay a fee, you go in, there are plates and other things to smash, you destroy things. And the whole pitch is that you let out the anger, you vent, and you feel fine as a result. You were pretty dubious about that.

**Ryan Martin:** Yeah. There's a lot of research that will tell you that those spaces are not good for you. Especially— I mean, if you are using those spaces as a way of, quote/unquote, “managing” your anger, they keep angry feelings at top of mind. They increase arousal. And ultimately, it's that practice piece we just talked about—that they become the thing—that becomes the thing you do when you are angry.

This is really confusing to people, because what I hear is, “But it feels good. So, you know, I feel better afterwards.” That may be true, but that might also be true if you got super drunk. That might be true if you ate so much, you—you know, just if you always leaned into eating and consuming things that were bad for you. It'd be true if you—maybe if you had a cigarette. Like, there's a whole bunch of things that we do that might feel good in the moment, but that doesn't make them good for us. What we see— And the way they do this research is that they have basically— They bring people into a lab. They find a way to make them mad; they provoke them in some way. And then they either direct them towards some sort of form of aggression, like a rage room type thing, or they direct them towards some other boring activity or more calming activity. And then they look to see who is more angry, who is more aggressive afterwards.

Consistently—and truly 60 to 70 years' worth of data on this, consistently— Not rage rooms specifically, but catharsis. 60 to 70 years' worth of data on catharsis will tell you that, consistently, people who go the rage room catharsis route are the ones who are more aggressive and more angry afterwards.

**John Moe:** So, if you wanna go to one of these rooms because it's fun to smash things, that's one thing. If you're going for therapeutic purposes, it's sort of like going to a bar and drinking a lot to address your alcoholism.

**Ryan Martin:** (*Laughs.*) Yes. I like that a lot. Yeah, that's the thing. I don't wanna begrudge people's fun. A if that's the approach you're taking is, “Hey, I know it's not good for me, but I like to do it because it's fun.” Look, I was— I had to take a big load of like lumber to the dump a while back, and as I was unloading it from the back of my car, I—

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I just took a two by four, and I decided I wanted to throw it as far as I possibly could. Right? And when I did it, I had this moment where I thought, “Huh. That felt good.” Right? I liked that. You know? I get it. Like, I get that it feels good. And so, if you're using it that way, that I think is fun, and you acknowledge this is not my therapeutic approach to dealing with it, but it's just something I like to do for fun every now and then? That is fundamentally different.

**John Moe:** And I wanna get in—in a little bit—to kind of the positive sides of anger and how it could be a healthy force. But I've been told—I feel like I've been told by various people—that anger is often kind of a shallow emotion. It's a defensive move for someone who has been hurt or fears being hurt. And the real emotion then is the hurt or the fear. And the anger is just the high fence that you put up over what the real issue is. Where do you come down on that?

**Ryan Martin:** I'm really glad you asked this. This is another one of those things that I might put in the myth category, though not as much of a myth as some of the other things we've talked about. I think anger absolutely can—and that's the key word there is “can”—be a sort of mask for some other pain. It can be a way people are reacting to feeling hurt or being scared or being sad. I think that happens. Especially in people who aren't particularly emotionally mature. I do, though, think we wanna be careful. Because anger absolutely can just be the primary emotion. And that's the language sometimes people use: anger as a secondary emotion versus anger as a primary emotion. Anger absolutely can be a primary emotion and often is a primary emotion. It's a reaction to being treated unfairly, being treated poorly, or having your goals blocked in some significant way.

And honestly, one of my concerns when we talk about it as a secondary emotion is that we actually minimize people's like very real suffering. Like, people who have been treated unfairly or people who have like had their goals blocked in some meaningful way. And we say, “Well, you're not really angry. You're sad or you're scared.”

It's like, “Well, no, I'm sad too. But honestly more than anything, I'm just mad. Because I was treated badly, or I was treated unfairly.”

And so, I certainly wanna acknowledge that it can be that mask. But I don't want to leave people with the opinion that it's always that mask.

**John Moe:** Why does that happen, do you think? Like, if it's— So, from what I'm hearing from you, when we say it's a secondary emotion, it's covering else up, it's almost like it's devaluing the injustice that provoked the anger. So, like—you know, if someone is being abused, if there is injustice, and I get angry about that, to say that I'm just covering up my sadness sort of minimizes the impact of that inciting incident.

**Ryan Martin:** No, I absolutely agree. I think— Here's where I think it sometimes acts as a secondary emotion is if we take a situation that maybe isn't truly unfair; it's just disappointing. This is why I talk about emotional maturity a little bit, because this is something you see and expect from children—right?—is that like kids have a real hard time identifying the difference between something being unfair, like legitimately unfair, and something just being, “Hey, I just didn't get what I wanted.” Right? Like, those are two different things. Like, sometimes it's not that it was an unfair outcome, it's just you didn't get what you wanted, and you're disappointed.

Sometimes I think— Let's take an adult who doesn't get something they wanted. And because they aren't particularly emotionally mature, or because they're really hurt or they're really disappointed or they're really sad or maybe they're even scared, they tend to gravitate towards that anger. And instead of saying, “I'm disappointed or I'm hurt,” they say, “I'm mad.” And

so, you might see this with— I actually feel like I come across this a lot with people in relationships in that a guy might be rejected by a person that they are interested in having a relationship with. And instead of acknowledging like, “I’m sad that this person doesn’t want to be with me, or I’m hurt,” they gravitate towards, “Well, that’s not fair. I dedicated all this time and money into this relationship. I worked really hard.”

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“I treated her well. Why isn’t she interested in me?” Right? And so, that’s kind of what I mean of like it—at the core of that is some sadness that’s being diverted into anger, because that feels safer. And you don’t have to admit, “Maybe there was something wrong with how I treated them. Maybe I—you know, maybe I did something wrong. Maybe I’m not who I think I am.” You know? Or “maybe they just didn’t like me.” And that part is a bummer.

**John Moe:** And then that connection so often leads to the aggression, the violence that you talked about.

**Ryan Martin:** Exactly. Exactly. And so, it translates into— Because now it’s—once it’s anger, then it becomes easy—and you believe you’ve been treated unfairly—it becomes easier to rationalize in your mind how they deserve some sort of punishment or some sort of consequence.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Just ahead, how to spot the thought patterns that connect anger—which is a normal and involuntary emotion—to aggressive behavior—which is a choice and can be dangerous—and how to reroute that connection.

*(ADVERTISEMENT)*

**Transition:** Gentle acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** We’re back talking with anger expert Dr. Ryan Martin.

We’ve talked about cognitive behavioral therapy on this show before and thought patterns and trying to reroute them. Does that come into play here in the sense of like feeling the emotion—you know, caring for the emotion, giving it the recognition that it merits by dint of existence? Versus the action. Like, it’s the rerouting. Is that what we need to do to avoid acting in a socially unacceptable or dangerous way to the emotion?

**Ryan Martin:** Yeah. I thin— There’s a couple different ways. When we think about how to intervene in our own anger, like how we can sort of manage it, there’s lots of different places that we can essentially intervene there. And so, what I typically— And certainly one of those are the thoughts we’re having about the provoking incident or the person who provoked it, right? And so, what we know is that people who get angry often they tend to do a couple things. They tend to overgeneralize, right? So, you know, they say things like, “Oh, this always happens to me. I never get what I want,” and so on. They tend to do what we call

misattributing causation. They sort of oversimplify the cause a little bit, and they say, “Well, this is because X happened, or because they don't like me,” or whatever. They tend to catastrophize. So, they blow things way outta proportion, and they talk about how things are gonna ruin their entire day or week or month or career or life. And they also—and this is probably the biggest—is they tend to label people. And so, you might label a person an idiot or a fool or something far worse than that. And once you do that, you're now responding to the label. You don't think about that other person as like a full human being with nuanced motivations.

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**John Moe:** You've dehumanized them at that point.

**Ryan Martin:** Exactly. They're just an idiot. Right? That's what happened. And so, I don't—you know, I wanna be really careful, because there may be idiots in the world, and there may be catastrophic outcomes. I don't wanna minimize that either. What I always encourage people to do is I want people to have a realistic understanding of the consequences of—you know—whatever they're sort of dealing with. I want them to have a realistic understanding of who they're dealing with. And so, one of the easiest places to talk about this is driving, because we can often understand the—you know, we can all experience it. Right?

So, let's say I get stuck at a stoplight, and I'm really frustrated 'cause I'm running late. One of the things I often encourage people to do—and I try to do—is think about, well, what are the actual consequences of this? How long is this delay? What does it actually mean? And if we employ that same sort of thinking to lots of circumstances where I can say, “Okay, so what will this mean to my life, to other people's lives?” Sometimes it means something truly terrible, and we need to acknowledge that in an honest way. Sometimes maybe it's not that big a deal, and we can acknowledge that in an honest way.

**John Moe:** You have said in the past that that anger is a powerful and healthy force and that it's good that you feel it. This is from the TED Talk that I see you give. I think that goes against how most people feel about anger who haven't studied it nearly as much as you have. (*Chuckles.*) Because I think they're so afraid of it. How is it a powerful and healthy force?

**Ryan Martin:** Our emotions, all of them, essentially do two things for us. First, they are signals. So, in the case of anger, it alerts us to injustice. It lets us know you have been—(*correcting himself*) you may have been treated poorly or unfairly. Or you may have had your goals blocked. And that's the same way your fear alerts you to, “Hey, there may be a threat.” Or your sadness alerts you, “Hey, you may have lost something.” Or your guilt says, “Hey, you may have done something wrong.” Right? It's one of the ways that your brain essentially signals to you, “Hey. You have been treated poorly. You may have been treated poorly.”

And the next thing your emotions do is they energize you to respond to whatever that is. So, when our heart rate increases and our muscles tense up and we start breathing heavier, when our sympathetic nervous system kicks in essentially, that's one of the ways that our brain is giving us the energy to respond to that injustice in saying— This is why we wanna lash out, honestly, is because we've got all this energy to do that. Now, lashing out is oftentimes not the best thing to do, is oftentimes going to hurt us. But if we can channel that energy into

something positive, into something pro-social, into some more positive way than lashing out? Well, then that's how we can use our anger for good. And so, I get mad about some injustice I see, and I channel that anger into some sort of pro-social approach to dealing with that injustice. That's a positive use of our anger.

**John Moe:** So, what's the difference between that and denying or suppressing anger? Which are presumably bad things to do. What's the difference?

**Ryan Martin:** Yeah, so I think acknowledgement is probably the biggest difference. So, oftentimes when you're denying or suppressing, what you're really doing is saying, "I'm not mad. I'm fine." And that isn't a—

**John Moe:** Sometimes you yell, "I'm fine."

**Ryan Martin:** (*Chuckling.*) Yes. Yep! So, those are not good, healthy ways of dealing with it. Because what you're fundamentally doing is denying that signal, right? That you've got the signal that says, "Hey, you may have been treated badly," and instead of acknowledging it and processing it and moving forward with a plan to address it, you're just saying, "Well, no, I wasn't treated unfairly," or "no, I wasn't treated poorly." And that is ultimately not gonna be good for you. It's not gonna be— One, it's essentially— I mean, this is when I say having a realistic understanding of the consequences of something, if you're denying it, then you don't have that realistic understanding. But the other problem is, you know, you're ignoring that signal. That the benefit of your anger is that it's telling you, "Hey, here's a thing that you should respond to," and you're ignoring that. And that potentially can be unhealthy.

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**John Moe:** And then what happens—? I was gonna ask what happens when you deny your anger, when you suppress it, when you say, "I'm fine," where you don't acknowledge it. And I get back to this verb of "vent." And it's the only emotion—I feel like—that we treat as a gas. (*Chuckling.*) Like it needs to be released. Like we're a nuclear power plant or something.

But what happens when you sit on it, and you don't do all those things? Does it accumulate? Does it need to come out at some point, or will it fade?

**Ryan Martin:** Yeah. So, I'll start by saying I think sometimes it does fade. Like, sometimes—you know—time does lead to some decreases there. So, it might. Especially if the original sort of trigger doesn't continue, right? So, if you experience a really bad thing, and you suppress it, I do think over time it might start to fade away. Some of the time. I think more often than not though, that as a tendency—just suppression or denial as a tendency—I think it can lead to a couple different outcomes. One, are some other negative emotions. I think sometimes people start feeling guilty, start engaging in some self-blame. That can be bad for them. Sometimes it leads to just a tendency to get walked on, to put other people's needs ahead of your own.

I think sometimes it can even lead to some health consequences. Sometimes some direct ones, meaning that we see that people still—you know, too much anger, regardless of how

you express it, can lead to cardiovascular problems, can lead to things like chronic pain or disease proneness and stuff like that. All of that is very true. But also, sometimes some indirect consequences. Because, again, they might overeat; they might use substances in ways that are unhealthy; they may live too sedentary a lifestyle. And so, it has some indirect consequences too.

**John Moe:** So, it's a matter of recognizing the anger, trying to figure out what the injustice is and a proper and healthy way to address the injustice, rather than just screaming, "I'm fine."

**Ryan Martin:** Yep. And if you can't— I mean, it's the problem, and I'm sure some listeners are sort of screaming right now, "But what if there's nothing that can be done?" Right? And that happens. I mean, sometimes we are— I don't ever wanna say we are entirely powerless in a situation, although that happens, but sometimes we are mostly powerless. And when that happens, we sometimes do have to embrace some form of acceptance. We might have to embrace— We might have to decide, "Okay, maybe there are little things I can do that will actually not really make much of an impact in the problem but will help me feel like I'm doing something. And that's important to me."

But ultimately, there are times where we have to say, "Look, this is—this truly is what it is, and I am unable to change it. It doesn't mean I'm not mad about it, and it doesn't mean I'm not sad about it. It just means there's nothing that can be done."

**John Moe:** Yeah. Yeah. Sometimes you just get screwed.

*(Ryan agrees.)*

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** So, anger is a thing that happens. But when should you worry about its impact on your mental health?

**Promo:**

**Music:** Playful, plucky synth.

**John Hodgman:** Greetings. I am John Hodgman, co-host and co-creator of the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast, along with Jesse Thorn, here on The Maximum Fun Network. And I am here with MaxFun member of the month Keith, who's been a Maximum Fun member since—when, Keith?

**Keith:** Oh, at least three or four years now. I don't recall exactly when I fell prey to the pledge drive, but it got ahold of me, and I've yet to relent.



**John Hodgman:** Oh, and we shall not ever let go. Now you join us telephonically from a different country from ours, which is which?

*(Idyllic sounding birdcalls in the background.)*

**Keith:** I moved to Aveiro, Portugal back in August of this year.

**John Hodgman:** I hear evening birds chirping behind you. And what are the names of those birds?

**Keith:** We do have quite a few spoonbills and quite a few flamingos as well.

**John Hodgman:** So, what would you say to the birds around you and the people listening who are considering supporting the show?

**Keith:** You know, it's just nice to have a little bit of investment in the things that I love.

*(Birdsong quiets down.)*

Knowing that I'm making sure that those podcasts are still being created makes me feel good!

**John Hodgman:** We're so pleased to have you be our Maximum Fun member of the month. Thank you very much, Keith in Portugal: this month's Maximum Fun Member of the month.

**Keith:** Obrigado.

**Speaker:** Become a MaxFun member now at [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join).

*(Music fades out.)*

[00:30:00]

**Promo:**

**Music:** A bright, playful tune.

**Emily Fleming:** I'm Emily Fleming!

**Jordan Morris:** I'm Jordan Morris.

**Matt Lieb:** And I'm Matt Lieb.

**Emily:** We are real comedy writers!

**Matt:** Real friends—

**Jordan:** And real cheapskates!

**Matt:** On every episode of our podcast, *Free With Ads*, we ask, “Why pay for expensive streaming services when you can get free movies from apps with weird names?”

**Emily:** Each week we review the freest movies the internet has to offer—classics like *Pride & Prejudice*.

**Jordan:** Cult classics, like *Point Break*.

**Matt:** And “holy (*sensor beep*), what did I just watch?” classics like *Teen Witch*.

**Emily:** Tune in every week as we take a deep dive into the internet's bargain bin.

**Jordan:** Every Tuesday on [MaximumFun.org](https://MaximumFun.org) or your favorite pod place.

**Music:**

*Free with ads!*

*(Music fades out.)*

**Transition:** Gentle acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** We're back talking with anger expert Dr. Ryan Martin.

When does anger become a mental health problem? Because as you say, we all feel it. But when does it become a thing that needs to be addressed and a phone call and an appointment?

**Ryan Martin:** Yeah. So, let me first start with a question if I can. I don't know how often you and listeners talk about the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual on Mental Disorders.

**John Moe:** It's come up, yes. The DSM-5.

**Ryan Martin:** Exactly. So, the DSM-5 has a complicated relationship with anger, because anger isn't really listed as its own disorder anywhere in the DSM-5. Now, it exists as symptoms of some other conditions. And then we have some aggression-related disorders where it's more focused on that sort of outward expression of anger. But by and large, the DSM actually contributes to this myth we talked about before of anger essentially being depression turned outward. And I say that because one of the places it's listed—not anger specifically, but irritability—has to do with depression, especially in kids.

Anger—I bring this up because it actually—I think it's—(*Stammering.*) Now, I can—there's a lot I could say about the DSM as a tool, but I'm gonna ignore all of that and just say it's a tool that people use. And the fact that anger isn't listed in it has led to some challenges in kind of how we think about anger as a mental health condition. To get back to sort of the crux of your question, how do you know when it's a concern? I would say you really have to focus on the consequences. Much like you would with any emotional problem, you should really focus on, “Okay, so what impact is my anger having in my life? And am I satisfied with that? Am I concerned about that?” If it is harming my relationships, either because—and that can look a lot of different ways—but either because it's causing fights, verbal or physical fights, or maybe it's not causing fights, but “I learned that some people are kind of scared of me and don't like to be around me because of it,” that might be an impact. “Is it causing me to do unhealthy things?” Like, we talked about overeating and using substances. “Is it causing me to drive dangerously? Is it leading to some health consequences?” The cardiovascular things.

If it's doing those things, and my anger is making me less healthy in all these different ways, then it probably warrants some therapeutic attention. You know. And therapeutic attention can look lots and lots of different ways. It doesn't necessarily mean “I need to get angry less often,” though it might. It could also mean I just need to learn to channel it better. I need to process it more; I need to think about the circumstances I'm putting myself in and how to adjust those.

**John Moe:** It's curious that— And I've talked about this before on the show, like the emotions that happen to you, you're not responsible for those, ultimately. Those come to you. They are in the house, and then you need to figure out what to do about them. The behavior is your responsibility. And so— You know, it seems like—from what I gather and from what you're saying—that it's not the anger that's the issue, it's what it does in your life: the effect that it's having on your functionality. And it's a little bit like depression in that way, because depression is a lot of things, but we have this term—“major depressive disorder”—that we use when it starts to interfere with the function of our lives—how we live in a healthy way, how we treat others.

(*Ryan agrees.*)

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And then there's all sorts of insurance protections (*chuckles*) and medications and other things like that. It seems like anger is the same sort of thing, but we don't really talk about it or study it much. I mean, I've done shows about mental health for nine years. This is the first how—first episode—I've ever done about anger.

**Ryan Martin:** Yeah, it's really interesting that way. And part of it too is, you know, when you ask people—one of the interesting things that happens when we talk about anger, as compared to maybe anxiety disorders or as compared to depressive disorders, is when you ask people about culpability—like, who's responsible—when you ask people about depression, oftentimes they'll think, “Well, depression is something that happens to someone. It's not their fault.” When you ask people about anxiety, same thing. They don't put a lot of responsibility on the person who is anxious. When you ask someone who is angry—*(correcting himself)* or ask people about someone who is angry, a lot of times they do hold them responsible in significant ways.

Like, that's when we tend to think of a person as being like, “Well, guy's just a monster,” right? “He's a jerk.” And so, there's a lot of reasons why, if you are an angry person, it's actually hard to get help. Because there's stigma attached to it.

**John Moe:** People are scared of you.

**Ryan Martin:** Yeah. People are scared of you. Therapists don't always know as well how to deal with it, because they're not as experienced. There aren't as many treatment protocols out there for anger-related problems because of its absence from the DSM. The pharmaceutical approach doesn't have as many treatments designed for it—again, because it's not in the DSM. So, we have a lot of barriers there. Which is somewhat shocking, because we know it's a chronic problem. I mean, we know that it's an issue for the people who have it, but it's also an issue for the people around them and a broader societal issue.

**John Moe:** Yeah. What got you interested in it?

**Ryan Martin:** Yeah. A couple things. One, I was raised in in a house with an angry dad for the first chunk of my life. Interestingly— Like, I wanna be really clear. Not an abusive home. He was actually not angry at me very often, but he was just an angry person. And he used to— I think I just—it was always sort of a running sort of narrative throughout my life was the, quote/unquote, “Martin temper.” And there was a time when I don't think I controlled my anger very well, especially in my teenage years, which was— I think like a lot of people. And so, I just sort of grew up around it and interested in it in all those ways.

I also, when I was in college, I worked at a shelter in St. Paul for at-risk youth. And one of the most salient problems for them was ability managing their anger. And to be clear, these kids had a ton to be angry about. Justified anger was definitely there. And you know, it was probably unreasonable to expect those kids to be able to manage a lot of what they were dealing with, because it was so, so difficult. But it got me really focused in thinking about the fact that I didn't feel like enough people were really paying attention to it.

**John Moe:** I mean, is there a lot of research happening now? Like, is there funding for research for people to really study anger? Because it's— Given how often it leads to violence and given how much violence there is in our society, it seems like it's an urgent thing to be understood.

**Ryan Martin:** I think we're much more attuned to it now than we once were. I still think its absence from the DSM is a concern from a treatment and research perspective. I do think

that. I mean, if you just—if you go into any library database and you type “anger” in as a search term, you’ll see far fewer articles about anger—with anger in the title—than, say, depression or anxiety. So, it’s still not getting the kind of attention that those other things get, but I do think we’re becoming much more attuned to it. We’re seeing much more research on therapeutic outcomes and things like that. So, progress is being made for sure.

**John Moe:** Why was it so far behind, and why is progress being made now? What changed?

**Ryan Martin:** Great question! I suspect a big part of it—and this is gonna go way back. But you know, the DSM is rooted in a lot of psychodynamic thinking, right? Its original DSM, you know, was heavily rooted in psychodynamic approaches. And it took a while for it to become, quote/unquote, “atheoretical,” which is the term that is used about it. I don’t know that that term is accurate, but it took a while for it to become that.

[00:40:00]

It wasn’t until, say, the DSM-3 that we started to think of it as, quote/unquote, “atheoretical.” I think because of that and because, you know, Freud oftentimes leaned into this idea that anger was depression turned outward, it’s just that that idea has kind of hung with psychology for a long time. And so, it took a while for us to branch away from that. And then I think—I do think that what’s in the DSM really does drive what gets funded, what gets researched and so on.

**John Moe:** The president (*chuckles dryly*) has been going off on angry tirades against specifically the Somali immigrant communities in my state—and your state—of Minnesota. And it’s horrible, but I don’t think it’s getting noticed, because I think we’re so used to this enormous volume of anger in politics and political discourse. As someone who studies anger, what do you think anger has done to the state of our politics and to America?

**Ryan Martin:** Yeah, I’m very concerned about this for a couple different reasons. I think there’s a couple things happening here. One is there’s a lot of outrage fatigue. I think some of us who have been witnessing this for a long time now from the president are just—It’s hard to stay mad—as mad as we should be—over time. Right? The other thing is I think this way he communicates has been normalized in a way it simply shouldn’t be normalized. And so, you know, when the president refers to someone as a—what did he call the journalist? A piggy, I think, if I’m remembering correctly. You know, when that kind of hostility and that kind of aggression is so common, I think—yeah, it’s shocking, but it’s also not—I mean, it’s also not new. And so, I think it’s becoming so normalized that people aren’t necessarily responding—myself included—with the kind of outrage we should, in a given moment.

**John Moe:** You know, as you said, people feel anger all the time. It happens. Happens to everybody. I think it can be frightening for a lot of people, and—you know—frightening as a society. We talked about how it could be frightening, and that maybe has blocked us from learning all we could about it. What’s one thing that you wish everybody in the world knew about anger that you feel like they don’t know enough?

**Ryan Martin:** I’m trying to focus in on some things maybe we haven’t yet talked about, because I do want people to understand that it’s normal, that it can be healthy, that it isn’t

always destructive. I think all those things are true. I do think, though, that it is— I mean maybe... maybe this, in addition to a lot of the things we've talked about already: I wish people were able to sometimes separate a person's feelings from their actions. Because— I'm gonna use an example. Maybe I do something wrong at work. Or on the road, I cut someone off, whatever. And someone gets mad at me. You know, I might actually deserve their anger in that moment, because I actually did something wrong. That doesn't mean I deserve whatever treatment they throw at me. And I bring that up, because I think sometimes we make one of two mistakes. We either figure, “Well, because I did something wrong, I deserve whatever they throw at me,” which I think is a mistake. I think— Or we ignore the fact that we did something wrong, because they were cruel in response. Meaning, okay, I screw up. Their response to me is totally inappropriate. That doesn't actually change the fact that I screwed up. Right?

And so, I bring this up, because I think sometimes it's on us to make right, regardless of what the other person did, but also not to accept what the other person did in response. And so, we've gotta, I think, to the best that we can separate those things and acknowledge like, “Hey, I blew it. I made a mistake. I'm sorry. I'm gonna try and fix this thing that I did wrong. However, none of that actually justified what you did in response. Like, that's a thing you've gotta make right.”

And so, I think that if we can try and separate those things out—which takes an extraordinary amount of emotional maturity and confidence and patience—

**John Moe:** Honesty. Yeah.

**Ryan Martin:** Patience and psychological safety and a whole bunch of stuff. If we can separate those things out, I think we're gonna be healthier people.

**John Moe:** Last question. You mentioned having kids.

[00:45:00]

When your kids get angry, are they so well adjusted because you're their dad that they just take a breath and then are totally fine?

**Ryan Martin:** No!

*(John chuckles.)*

Wish that were the case, but no. Absolutely not. It's funny, my youngest is a really, really competitive athlete. Both my kids are super athletic. One of them is a competitive dancer, and he is fantastic. The other one plays basketball and soccer. And the youngest one is very, very competitive. And what that means—because competition is gonna be linked to anger over and over and over again, right? These things are tied together in a lot of ways. What that means is he leaves a lot of games angry. And I have discovered I need to give him time. It's not time to vent, necessarily. I just need to give him time. He's not ready to process anything. So, our approach is— And he's aware of it too, so maybe this means he's well adjusted. He's

aware of this too, is that he just takes his time to say whatever he is thinking, whatever he feels, whatever he wants to. He just kind of talks through the things that didn't work, what he is upset about, all that.

I don't try to intervene in those moments. I don't try to calm him down other than to stay calm myself. And then— And just to be clear, he's not like yelling or screaming or anything. He's just saying stuff about the game. And then we hit a point where I ask, "You want to hear my thoughts on this?" And if he doesn't, I don't interject.

If he does—if he says, "Yeeeah, go ahead," then I'll tell him what I'm thinking.

But—so, you know, we work on that stuff. I think. I mean, the truth is, when it comes to kids and development, their brains actually aren't really capable of a lot of what we're talking about until they're in their mid-20s. So much of their brain development, the parts of your brain you need to really manage your emotions effectively, aren't really there until your mid-20s, maybe even later. And so, I think trying to provide a little bit of patience when it comes to that stuff is important.

**Music:** "Building Wings" by Rhett Miller, an up-tempo acoustic guitar song. The music continues quietly under the dialogue.

**John Moe:** Ryan Martin, thank you so much.

**Ryan Martin:** Yeah, thank you! This has been great.

**John Moe:** Dr. Ryan Martin, the anger professor, is online at [AllTheRageScience.com](https://AllTheRageScience.com). And he has a new book coming out next month! *Emotion Hacks: 50 Ways to Feel Better Fast*. You can pre-order that now and be ready to recover from the holidays. We exist because people fund our program. They give us money, so we can keep making shows, so you can keep making more sense of this beautiful, complicated mind that you have, and so other people can be helped too. We think that's a good cause. If you already give to the show, thank you so much. If you don't, it's so easy to do. Just go to [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join). You can join at the \$5 a month level, \$10 a month, whatever makes sense for you. So, at [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join) just pick that level, pick our show from the list of shows, and you'll be helping us. And if you already do, thank you so much. Be sure to hit subscribe. Give us five stars. Write glowing reviews. That gets the show out into the world also where it can help folks.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline can be reached in the US and Canada by calling or texting 988. It's free. It's available 24/7. We're on BlueSky at [@DepreshMode](https://DepreshMode). Our Instagram is [@DepreshPod](https://DepreshPod). Our newsletter is on Substack. Search up John Moe or *Depresh Mode*; you'll find it. I'm on BlueSky and Instagram at [@JohnMoe](https://JohnMoe). You can join our Presbies group. A lot of people hanging out there, fans of the show, people supporting each other, people talking about all sorts of things, sharing laughs, sharing pictures of dogs. I'm there too. Just search up Presbies on Facebook. Our electric mail address is [DepreshMode@MaximumFun.org](mailto:DepreshMode@MaximumFun.org).

Hi, credits listeners. It's interesting that danger and anger are almost the same word, but they're pronounced differently. But! It's not all that interesting.

*Depresh Mode* is made possible by your contributions. Our production team includes Raghu Manavalan, Kevin Ferguson, and me. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, "Building Wings". *Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

**Music:**

*I'm always falling off of cliffs, now*

*Building wings on the way down*

*I am figuring things out*

*Building wings, building wings, building wings*

*No one knows the reason*

*Maybe there's no reason*

*I just keep believing*

*No one knows the answer*

*Maybe there's no answer*

*I just keep on dancing*

**Aaron:** I'm Aaron Sentel from Maryville, Tennessee. And you may not know it, but you are amazing, and you've got this.

[00:50:00]

*(Music ends.)*

**Transition:** Cheerful ukulele chord.



**Speaker 1:** Maximum Fun.

**Speaker 2:** A worker-owned network.

**Speaker 3:** Of artist owned shows.

**Speaker 4:** Supported—

**Speaker 5:** —directly—

**Speaker 6:** —by you!