



The Disguises of Anger

No one likes the idea of being a victim, so we suppress or disconnect from taking on that role. There are many creative ways to be a victim and also endless ways to conceal it, both from others and from one's self. Here are some of the ways:

- Having strong opinions – being “right”
- Feeling sorry for yourself
- Suppressing negative thoughts/ emotions
- Dissociating – closing the door on the past – experiencing a “new beginning”
- Identifying yourself as “cool and calm”
- Being perfectionistic/ self-critical/ “high ideals”
- Being judgmental
- “Frustrated”

As you become more honest with yourself and recognize your victimhood, you can at least give yourself a little credit for creativity. I joke with my patients that disguising my anger is my most highly developed life skill. I wish it were a just a joke.

Write these disguises down.

- Don't throw this list away.
- The intention of writing down these disguises is to give you more awareness of your reactive patterns. They are not who you are.
- This step is not intended to be a re-programming step.
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Perfectionism – the Ultimate Victim Role

I would like to discuss what I think may be the most common, almost universal disguise of anger. I had no idea it was a problem until I had crashed and burned.

Perfectionism is a common way for people play the victim. Many view perfection as the standard that must be reached in order to be successful. It's held up as a virtue in all aspects of our lives, especially in professional and vocational endeavors. We feel pressure from others to be perfect, and we feel pressure from ourselves.

Perfection does not exist in the human experience. The closest thing to perfection I see is in the nature and design of the human body. A newborn baby is beyond wonder.

Perfection fits into the anger cascade in the following manner.

- A given situation, person, or you, are less than your concept of ideal.
- You blame one of the above for being “less than perfect.”
- You are now a victim of “less than perfect”
- And now you perpetually exist in some state of conscious or unconscious agitation.

David Burns in his book, *Ten Days to Self Esteem*, points out that the gap between your concept of perfect and your reality is the degree of your unhappiness.



Since perfection is unattainable, why do so many of us continue to embrace it? I will offer a couple of observations from the perspective of an extreme perfectionist. First of all, we are programmed to “be all that we can be.” We are also taught that “pushing yourself” is the best way to accomplish this goal – except that pushing evolves into punishing in the form of self-criticism without limits. Since this strategy often achieves

impressive short- and medium-term results, it seems like a reasonable pathway. It's not. The same driving energy that pushes you up the hill takes you down the other side. Striving for perfection becomes a well-established programmed pattern.

I feel a second, and maybe bigger factor, is that the victim role is so powerful that humans will do almost anything to create and hang onto it. Since perfect is unattainable you are able to remain a victim of imperfection indefinitely. It is the ultimate in self-flagellation. The DOC Journey is about letting go, allowing yourself to fail, and moving on. Perfect does not allow for failure.

Perfectionism Seems to be Everywhere

A friend of mine had recently lost his wife. He was a high-level professional and was trying to meet someone to start a new life. Invariably he became upset over feeling inadequate, not being a good conversationalist, having interests that are too narrow, not liking his appearance...and the list went on. Then it came out that he placed these same labels on his dates. What he was not aware of, is that our minds project onto other people and situations the way we feel about ourselves. This is psychology 101. The term is **projection**. So, when you are in a judgmental mode and expressing it to others, you are revealing to the world the way you feel about yourself. This is particularly true if you are upset.

I hold a Q&A session a couple of times per week. Perhaps the most common topic that keeps coming up is "not feeling good enough" and self-criticism. I joke that we could call our roundtable, "The perfectionist's club," except it is not funny and actually is tragic. The accomplishments of this group are remarkable, yet there is a limited capacity to enjoy their successes. Perfectionism is what was the essence of my personal demise.

Creating a vision of excellence is much different than having "high standards." You understand and accept where you are along with your resources. Then you create a plan to get there. Part of this involves filling your brain with positive solutions as well as accepting the inevitable failures. This is a different journey from wasting your energy flagellating yourself for your inadequacies and failures. If you are not willing to fail, then don't attempt the journey. Paradoxically, you will have an endless amount of additional energy to achieve your goals. Happiness is only possible while pursuing a vision of excellence.