

Are females getting angrier? Or is it just that they're getting better at expressing it?

When women's wrath is let loose

ARE flaring female tempers confined to those in the celebrity circuit, or are well-known figures throwing tantrums just putting the spotlight on what is a growing phenomenon amongst women?

Stories of sparks flying between Tiger Woods and his wife Elin Nordegren following a domestic dispute that ended in his crashing his SUV outside his Florida home last Friday is a recent example.

The cause of the grief? A National Enquirer report of an alleged affair with nightclub hostess Rachel Uchitel. Police reported that the top-ranking golf pro was found lying on the ground with facial cuts, drifting in and out of consciousness. His wife used a golf club to shatter the back window and pull Woods — all 6' 1" of him — out of the car.

It begs the question whether Mrs Woods is one of a growing band of women who refuse to put up and shut up.

Supermodel Naomi Campbell is known to throw a tantrum, singer Pink will scowl her way through sarcastic lyrics, disco pop queen Grace Jones has lashed out at Russell Harty, even diva Cheryl Cole was handed 120 hours of community service for assaulting a toilet attendant. But what about the rest of us?

Do we all let rip now and then? Our society has traditionally deemed it almost a badge of honour for a boy to lose it on the hurling pitch or rugby field, while at the same time telling girls to keep a lid on their anger.

Which might explain why — according to research from the University of Middlesex in Britain — women are more likely to use cooking metaphors such as 'simmering' or 'bubbling' to describe their anger, while men use the more explosive 'force' or 'flood'.

The question 'are women getting angrier?' is a dual one: Are we feeling more anger? Or is that we're expressing it more?

Bernard Henry, director and founder of the Irish Association of Anger Management (IAAM), says an increasing number of women are seeking out anger management programmes — and IAAM is now running women-only anger-management courses.

"Yes, women are getting angrier but we must remember anger is a fundamental part of being human. For years, women explicitly expressing anger was socially frowned upon in Ireland — anger was seen as a 'sin' — while passive, bottled-up anger went unchecked and maybe encouraged," says Henry, who points to forces in modern society that make it more acceptable for women to express their anger: the emergence of the 'ladette', where young women adopt more stereotypically male attitudes, and the prevalence of reality TV, where inappropriate expression of anger is presented as entertainment.

"A lot of conversation in today's world is about domination rather than dialogue, about making the other person wrong and making them pay," says Henry, who believes greater alcohol consumption among women also contributes to angry outbursts. "There's a massive connection between alcohol and anger. Anger lowers serotonin levels in the brain, making anger more likely."

The British research found women tended to be more angered by 'interpersonal' events



Cheryl Cole. Picture: L. O'Connell

Singer Pink. Picture: PAUL SHARP/SHARPP

Cheryl Cole was handed 120 hours of community service for assaulting a toilet attendant while singer Pink scowls her way through sarcastic lyrics

(talking to a good friend who isn't listening) and men by 'environmental' (a stranger bumping into them without apologising). Henry says research also shows women tend to get angrier at home, whereas men are more likely to get angry at work.

"Women are under enormous pressure in the home, especially if they're working mums. Listening to women, I believe the 'new man' is a myth. Women seem to have double the work, double the stress. They're still more likely to be responsible for running

the house, managing the finances and taking care of the kids, while holding down a job. "Greater stress leads to more anger, so maybe it's no wonder flaring female tempers are more common than ever."

Irish research seems to bear out Henry's views. The Rescue National Stress Survey, commissioned by the makers of Rescue Remedy, found women are more likely than men to agree with the statements: 'I sometimes can't sleep at night as my mind is racing' and 'I sometimes find it hard to unwind

when I come home from work'.

Women were also more likely (62%) to get tension headaches than males (37%)

People get angry for a whole host of reasons — feeling we're not being listened to, invasion of personal boundaries, unrealistic expectations of ourselves or others, being treated unfairly and feeling powerless to change it, someone going against a principle we consider important.

In itself, anger is a natural, healthy part of life, designed to get us out of stuck places or

Helen O'Callaghan sizes up the best strategies for dealing with this emotion



Naomi Campbell
Picture: Steve Parsons/PA Wire

programme, is seeing more women looking for help to deal with their anger. She has seen her fair share of exploders.

"You hear of dinners on the floor and the phone gets fired a lot. One client had broken three phones by the time she came to me. Why the phone? Because it's where you get your information," says Fitzpatrick, who says many clients come forward because they've been told by their partner or boss they've got a problem with anger.

Our need to be loved often leads to misguided fantasies about what love will look like, says Fitzpatrick, who believes this can trigger angry outbursts. "We come home, hubby's sitting on the sofa, the paper in front of him, the kids aren't in bed and it's 7pm. We tell ourselves stories — 'he's lazy and only cares for himself, he doesn't care about me or the kids or he'd have them ready for bed and the house clean'. We put these standards on people and when they're not met, we go on the attack."

So how do we deal more constructively with our anger? Pro-act, don't react, is key, says Fitzpatrick. "Recognise your anger. Identify where it is in your body. Remove yourself from the situation but don't dishonour the anger — do a little ceremony around it: a dance on the floor, punch a pillow. Then find a constructive way to talk about your anger. In the case of hubby-on-the-sofa-in-front-of-the-TV, allow him to show his creativity and come up with a solution. Ask: "What can we do to change this situation so I don't feel hard done by?" Remember your anger is always yours."

Therese Ryan, stress management consultant and coach at Renewal Consultants, debunks the myth that all women are in touch with their emotions. "This is actually not true. I've worked with female engineers and scientists who find it hard to talk about emotions," she says, adding that feelings of shame are often huge for women who are/get angry. "A majority of women won't say 'I'm angry' until the second or third session."

Anger is an emotion, neither right nor wrong. "But what I do with it becomes the problem or the solution," says Ryan, who advises first dealing with the excess energy around anger by doing something active — go for a run or mop the floor. But you still have to deal with the source of the anger, says Ryan.

"If you can't articulate it, stop trying to figure it out. Do something else. Come back to it in a calmer frame of mind and write down the issues that are making you angry."

Aiming for calm in a situation where all you want to do is let fly will pay dividends for your health too. "Expressing your anger clearly reduces stress and helps prevent ill-health and diseases such as cancer, heart disease, ulcers, migraine and stomach disorders," says Bernard Henry.

The Irish Association of Anger Management offers guidance in all aspects of anger and conflict-management.

From next week you can download the Association's free Stay Cool at Christmas pack, a 24-hour anger emergency plan, from www.difficultemotions.com. The website is currently being updated and is due to be up and running next week.

TIPS TO keep control

■ Anger is often out of proportion to the situation — we're reacting not just to the present situation but experiencing past hurts that have been triggered in the present. Remember: past hurts don't belong in the present situation.

■ Other feelings often lie beneath anger — hurt, fear, sadness, shame. Try to identify which one you're feeling.

■ When we're angry, we usually only see things in black and white, right and wrong — there's no room for grey thinking, mistakes or imperfections (our humanity). Remember: it's okay to make mistakes.

■ Ban the booze when angry — alcohol lowers serotonin levels in the brain, making aggressive behaviour likely.

■ When angry, avoid situations/people that annoy you.

■ When you feel yourself getting angry, step back and look at the big picture — this way you create time to have a good think about your needs, your feelings and the other person's.

■ Remember: you have no right to push your hurt or pain on to other people — you do have a right to share it.

■ Are you packing too much into your life and struggling to cope? Find ways to do fewer things, thereby reducing stress.

■ Be angry by appointment. Instead of blowing a fuse when somebody 'gets on your goat', arrange a time and place for a chat about the issues.

■ Breathe deeply from your diaphragm, slowly repeating a calm word/phrase, such as 'take it easy', 'relax'.

● From the Irish Association of Anger Management