



**PASSIVE  
AGGRESSIVE**

# **DEALING WITH PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIORS AT YOUR LIBRARY**

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# ROAD MAP

- WHAT IS PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR?
- WHAT CAUSES PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR?
- REFRAMING CONFLICT AND ANGER
- GENDER AND PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR
- ARE YOU AN ENABLER?
- STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR
- DISCUSSION AND Q&A





# MY EXPERIENCES



**PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR IS AN ADAPTIVE  
RESPONSE TO A MALADAPTIVE SITUATION.**

# WHAT IS PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR?

- PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR DOES NOT MAKE YOU A BAD PERSON
- A COPING MECHANISM AND/OR (MAL)ADAPTIVE RESPONSE
- WAY TO EXPRESS FEELINGS IN A WAY THAT SEEMS NON-HOSTILE
- A SURVIVAL MECHANISM

# COMMUNICATION STYLES

- AGGRESSIVE-BLUSTERING AND BULLYING, INSULTS, REACTIVE AND THREATENING, THEY SNAP EASILY, OVERBEARING DOMINEERING, WINNING IS EVERYTHING TO THESE INDIVIDUALS
- PASSIVE- ARE NOT GOOD AT EXPRESSING THEIR NEEDS OR OPINIONS, APOLOGETIC, RETIRING, CONCERNED WITH PLEASING PEOPLE
- PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE- PASSIVE COMMUNICATORS MAY BE UNAWARE OF THEIR STATEMENTS AND THE EFFECT THEY HAVE, MUTTERERS, THEIR WORDS SAY ONE THING AND EXPRESSION SAYS ANOTHER, FREQUENTLY SARCASTIC
- ASSERTIVE- DIRECT AND CLEAR, CONSTRUCTIVE AND COLLABORATIVE, NONREACTIVE AND RESPECTFUL, GOOD LISTENERS

# ANGER, AGGRESSION AND ASSERTIVENESS

- THESE THREE WORDS ARE LUMPED TOGETHER BUT ARE DIFFERENT. HOWEVER, THEY ALL INVOLVE A “NO.”
- ASSERTIVENESS IS THE ACTING OF MAKING A STANCE WITH CONFIDENCE
- AGGRESSION IS DIRECTLY CONFRONTATIONAL BEHAVIOR. YOU CAN BE AGGRESSIVE WITHOUT BEING ANGRY AND VICE VERSA.
- ANGER IS THE EMOTION GENERATED BY FEELING PASSIONATE ABOUT AN ISSUE AND MAKING A STANCE

# EXAMPLES OF PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

- INACTION OR STALLING
- ACTS OF REVENGE
- SPEAKING NEGATIVELY BEHIND SOMEONE'S BACK
- WITHHOLDING PRAISE OR AFFECTION
- NEVER SAY NO; OR ALWAYS SAY YES
- HEAVILY SARCASTIC
- NEGATIVE OUTLOOK
- FRUSTRATED AND IRRITABLE
- CHRONIC FEELINGS OF VICTIM





# **WHAT CAUSES PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR?**

FROM CHILDHOOD TO THE WORKPLACE

# INFLUENCES IN CHILDHOOD

- ONE PARENT DOMINATES
- INFLUENCES OF OLDER SIBLINGS, FRIENDS & OTHERS
- UNREALISTIC STANDARDS FROM PARENTS AND OTHERS
- CHILDHOOD ABUSE
- HIGH CONFLICT OR CONFLICT AVOIDANT HOUSEHOLD
- AUTHORITARIAN UPBRINGING, THROUGH FAMILY OR SOCIETAL STRUCTURE

# OTHER INFLUENCERS

- CULTURE: STUDIES SHOW THAT CULTURES FROM CHINESE AND EAST ASIAN CULTURES ARE MORE LIKELY TO FEEL MIXED EMOTIONS DURING A POSITIVE EVENT.
- RELIGION: GROWING UP IN AN AUTHORITARIAN OR RIGID RELIGION CAN INCREASE PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR
- CULTURE/ETHNICITY: CHILDREN WHO ARE TAUGHT TO BE SUBMISSIVE TO ELDERS AND NOT EXPRESS ANGER CAN DEVELOP PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR
- CHILD ABUSE, NEGLECT AND HARSH PUNISHMENT
- BIOLOGICAL ISSUES SUCH AS DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, ADHD, ODD, AND MORE



# **GENDER AND PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR**

WHY DO WOMEN EXHIBIT MORE PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR?

FROM AN IN-DEPTH 2012 STUDY OF CHILDHOOD AND EMOTIONAL  
REGULATION: “RESEARCHERS FOUND ‘SIGNIFICANT BUT VERY SMALL  
GENDER DIFFERENCES’ IN BOY’S AND GIRL’S EXPRESSION AND  
EXPERIENCE OF EMOTIONS, BUT SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN HOW  
THEIR EMOTIONS WERE TREATED BY OTHERS.”

--RAGE BECOMES HER BY SORAYA CHEMALY

“

IT'S OKAY—EVEN EXPECTED—FOR MEN TO EXPRESS ANGER. BUT WHEN WOMEN HAVE A NEGATIVE EMOTION, THEY'RE EXPECTED TO EXPRESS THEIR DISPLEASURE WITH  
SADNESS

”

DR. KERRI JOHNSON, PROFESSOR OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES AND PSYCHOLOGY, UCLA

ANGER IS AN “APPROACH” EMOTION. SADNESS IS A “RETREAT” EMOTION.

# REPRESSING ANGER HURTS US

- WOMEN WHO REPRESS THEIR ANGER ARE 2X AS LIKELY TO DIE FROM HEART-RELATED DISEASE
- WOMEN ARE 3X MORE LIKELY TO DEVELOP AUTOIMMUNE DISEASES
- PEOPLE WHO RUMINATE ON NEGATIVE FEELINGS INSTEAD OF EXPRESSING CAUSES A HIGHER RISK OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE



# **WOMEN HAVE A REASON TO BE ANGRY. BUT CAN'T EXPRESS THAT ANGER**

STARTING AT A YOUNG AGE, GIRLS AROUND THE WORLD DO 30% MORE UNPAID WORK THAN THEIR BROTHERS, INCREASING TO 50% DURING ADOLESCENCE

BOYS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE PAID FOR THEIR WORK AT HOME

A HOUSEHOLD WITH CHILDREN DOES NOT AFFECT A MAN'S SLEEP, BUT INCREASES A WOMAN'S SLEEP INTERRUPTIONS BY 46%

IN THE US, 65% OF WOMEN REPORTED BEING HARASSED

IF WOMEN'S UNPAID CAREGIVING WERE INCLUDED IN THE US GDP IT WOULD MAKE UP BETWEEN 30-50% OF IT



# REFRAMING CONFLICT

IT'S OK TO BE ANGRY

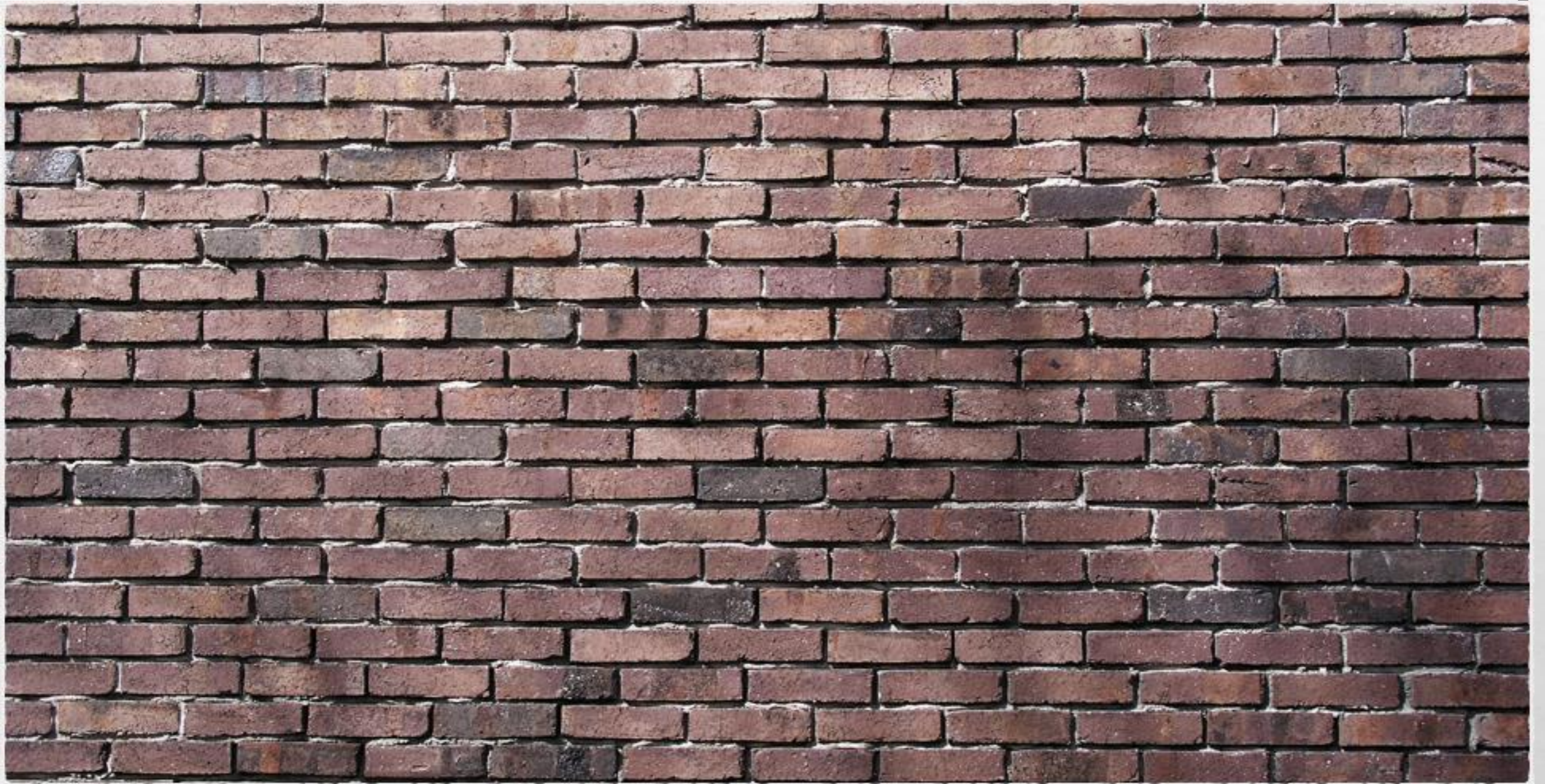


"THE MORE WE RUN FROM CONFLICT, THE MORE IT MASTERS US;  
THE MORE WE TRY TO AVOID IT, THE MORE IT CONTROLS US; THE  
LESS WE FEAR CONFLICT, THE LESS IT CONFUSES US; THE LESS WE  
DENY OUR DIFFERENCES, THE LESS THEY DIVIDE US."

**-David Augsburger**

# BENEFITS OF ANGER

- SPURS YOU TO ACTION
- ANGRY PEOPLE ARE MORE OPTIMISTIC THAN DEPRESSED PEOPLE
- ANGER PROVIDES SELF-INSIGHT
- ANGER CAN HELP NEGOTIATE
- ANGER CAN HELP RELATIONSHIPS
- ANGER INSPIRES AND MOTIVATES PEOPLE FOR BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE



# SETTING BOUNDARIES

BOUNDARIES ARE IMPORTANT IN PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

**“BOUNDARIES ARE THE INVISIBLE LINES THAT DRAW  
OUR SELF-IDENTITY.”**

**-ANDREA BRANDT, AUTHOR OF 8 KEYS TO ELIMINATE PASSIVE  
AGGRESSIVENESS**



- BOUNDARIES CAN BE PHYSICAL, ATTACHED TO EGO OR ABOUT SELF-IMAGE
- THOSE WHO DEMONSTRATE PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR TYPICALLY HAVE WEAK BOUNDARIES AND DON'T RESPECT OTHER'S BOUNDARIES
- THOSE WITH WEAK BOUNDARIES ARE EASILY PERSUADED

# WHAT ARE BOUNDARIES?

# HEALTHY VS. WEAK BOUNDARIES

## HEALTHY

- Flexible and adaptive to the person or circumstance
- Ask assertively for what they need and/or say no
- Understand their own needs and feelings
- Can separate their own feelings from other people's feelings
- Don't tolerate any abuse

## WEAK

- Boundaries that are rigid, intolerant, black and white and intended to isolate
- Fear of conflict and expressing feelings because they don't want to be abandoned
- Always say yes, or always say no. Get taken advantage of or take advantage of others



# **ENABLING**

**ARE YOU ENCOURAGING PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR?**



# ARE YOU AN ENABLER?

DO YOU?

- BAIL THE PERSON OUT OF TOUGH CIRCUMSTANCES
- MAKE EXCUSES FOR THEIR BEHAVIOR
- KEEP QUIET TO “KEEP THE PEACE”
- HAVE A HARD TIME SAYING NO
- DENY THERE IS A PROBLEM WITH THE BEHAVIOR
- APOLOGIZE FOR THINGS THAT AREN'T YOUR FAULT

# TRAITS OF ENABLERS

- CAN BE EMOTIONALLY NEEDY
- MIGHT HAVE GROWN UP IN AN ENVIRONMENT OF CONFLICT
- SOMETIMES GREW UP IN HOMES WHERE THEY HAD TO BE THE “FIXER” OR LIKE “LITTLE ADULTS”
- HAVE A NEED TO FEEL WANTED AND INDISPENSABLE



PLANNING



# STRATEGIES

FOR DEALING WITH PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR IN EMPLOYEES, YOUR BOSSES AND AS AN INDIVIDUAL



# DEVELOP A HEALTHY DETACHMENT

- Set limits
- Let others solve their own problems
- Try not to take things personally
- Take the most compassionate view of when people communicate to you
- Develop healthy outlets to release anger. What do you love to do? Hobbies?
- Express empathy but do not take ownership of their problem i.e. “That’s tough.”
- Step away with love

# IF YOU KNOW YOU HAVE PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR



WHAT ARE REASONS THAT  
YOU MAY BE  
DEMONSTRATING PASSIVE  
AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR?



HOW CAN I STAY  
OPTIMISTIC AND POSITIVE  
IN THE FACT OF ADVERSITY?



HOW CAN I BE MORE  
HONEST AND DIRECT WITH  
OTHERS?

# OTHER TIPS FOR INDIVIDUALS

- THINK ABOUT FORGIVENESS A DIFFERENT WAY. OUR PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR CAN COME FROM FEELING TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF, BETRAYED, HURT. IF WE FORGIVE IN A WAY THAT IS SELF-SACRIFICIAL THAT DOESN'T HELP. AND FORGIVE NOTHING UNLESS YOU ARE READY, AND DON'T FEEL SHAME IF YOU DON'T.
- CHALLENGE GENDER BINARIES. UNDERSTAND THE GENDER STEREOTYPES INVOLVED IN HOW WE PERCEIVE OTHER'S EMOTIONAL EXPRESSIONS.
- PROVIDE OUTLETS FOR PEOPLE TO EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS AT WORK. PASSIVE AGGRESSIVENESS CAN COME FROM FEELING HUMILIATED, CONDESCENDED TO, OVERWORK AND STRESS. IS THE WORKPLACE THE PROBLEM?



# DEALING WITH A PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BOSS

- THIS IS A VERY DIFFICULT SITUATION, IF YOU CAN GET OUT: DO
- OVER-COMMUNICATE
- ALWAYS ASK FOR CLARIFICATION, DON'T LET THEM BE VAGUE
- TRY TO FIND HEALTHY OUTLETS AND SAFE SPACES
- DOCUMENT PROBLEM BEHAVIOR, TAKE IT TO HR IF NECESSARY
- TAKE IT ONE DAY AT A TIME

# DEALING WITH A PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE EMPLOYEE

- COMMUNICATE IN WRITING AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE
- BRING WITNESSES INTO DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS IF POSSIBLE
- DON'T TOLERATE PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR- CALL IT OUT
- BE DIRECT IN YOUR COMMUNICATION
- SET CLEAR GOALS DURING PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS







STORY SHARING

**DISCUSSION**

SHARE YOUR STORY



# RESOURCES

8 Keys to Eliminating Passive-Aggressiveness by Andrea Brandt

Living with the Passive-Aggressive Man: Coping with Hidden Aggression from the Boardroom to the Bedroom by Scott Metzler

Bright-sided: How Positive Thinking is Undermining America by Barbara Ehrenreich

“One angry woman: Anger expression increases influence for men, but decreases influence for women, during group deliberation.” Salerno, Jessica M.; Peter-Hagene, Liana C. *Law and Human Behavior*, Vol 39(6), Dec 2015, 581-592.

The Angry Smile: The Psychology of Passive Aggressive Behavior in Families, Schools and Workplaces by Jody and Nicholas Long and Signe Witson

Rage Becomes Her: The Power of Women's Anger by Soraya Chemaly



# QUESTIONS?

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