

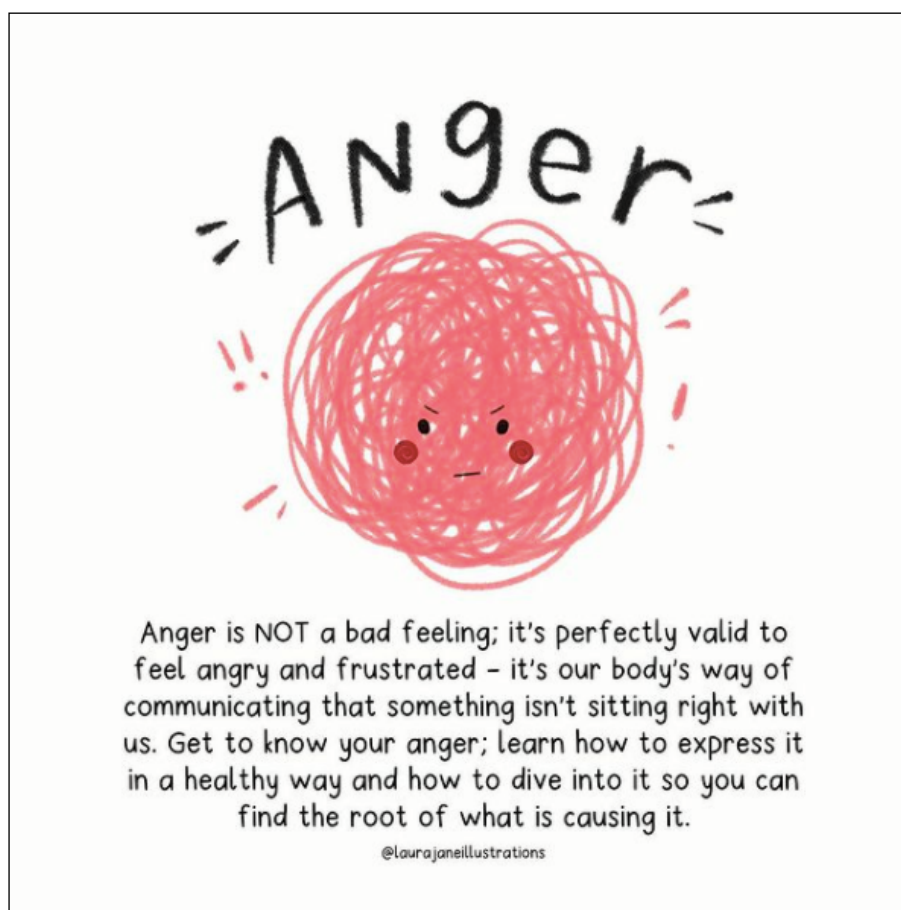
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# ICAV Perspective Paper

## Exploring Adoptee Anger

4 March 2022

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## Introduction

In my earlier years, I often heard the phrase “Oh, you’re just an angry adoptee” in response to something I’ve shared about being adopted. I’ve heard other adoptees also share they can relate to this experience too. It’s a phrase that is hurtful for many adoptees because it can feel like an attempt to silence us and minimise our experience.

Why do people assume our anger is somehow a terrible or negative emotion that needs silencing? Anger is an energy that tells us something is not sitting right within. It’s a force within that flags underlying issues and wrongs done to us that we need to address. When people deny or dismiss our feelings of anger, it somehow diminishes our complex experience and makes us feel it is not acceptable to express ourselves. I argue it is essential that we have support to navigate and explore our beginnings, the anger that our beginnings generates within us, and how our beginnings impact our life.

I occasionally hear from adoptive parents who reach out because they struggle to understand the journey of their adopted child - especially the anger. Too often the expression of an adoptee’s anger can turn into a power struggle between adoptee and adoptive parent and can lead to a complete cut from one another. Sadly this outcome triggers and amplifies the adoptee’s original feelings of abandonment even further. So I hope to give parents some insight into our complex journey so they can better understand and support adoptees who struggle to express their pain other than through anger.

When we are young, we just don’t have the language, the vocabulary, the hindsight of understanding the impacts of being relinquished and adopted to verbalise what our confused feelings are about. So let’s explore what adoptee anger is about, what lies beneath the surface of our anger and why adoptees can sometimes be validly angry.

Many thanks to the intercountry adoptees in this paper who were brave enough to expose their vulnerability and share. Without your courage, we wouldn’t be able to educate on such an important topic.

*Lynelle Long*

**Founder & Executive Director**

InterCountry Adoptee Voices (ICAV)

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## Ande Stanley

*Born in the UK and adopted to the USA*

Was I ever an angry adoptee? Yes. I still am. My therapist says anger is a normal response to being lied to and manipulated. But I am a late discovery adoptee. I can't say how I would feel if I had known all along. I think there would still have been some anger because of all of the lies I discovered had been told about my adoption by my families of origin.

I also kind of believe that there is a righteous anger that is appropriate when it comes to adoption. I wish my families were willing to at least try to look at my feelings through my lens, instead of fighting so hard to maintain their own narratives. I am expected to see theirs, yet they refuse to even try to see mine.



*You can read more from Ande at [The Adoption Files](#) blog and [Spotify](#) podcast.*

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## Andrea Johnstone

*Born in Canada and adopted to England*

I used to be angry as a teenager! I so desperately wanted my adopted mum and dad to see me for who I was and for them to meet my emotional needs. It never happened. I was the school bully as I had to learn to protect myself from all the racial comments.

My school teachers used to say to me, “You are nothing but a nigger!” Yes, that’s right f\*\*ing school teachers. I was pulled up by my jumper and hit against the wall from a PE teacher who said to me, “I hate you Andrea Johnstone!” Wtf!! So yes, I was f\*\*ing angry. The kids never got punished for their racial behaviour. The teachers had no idea that I was living in a very dysfunctional household – mother narcissistic with a depressive, passive father. So hell yes, I was angry!

However, the tides turned and I went into deep therapy after a suicide attempt. It was a long journey back to self. And I’m here now supporting many adoptees in the UK. So it was all meant to be, as I know that pain, I know that anger within. I know the primal wounding because I have been there.

That anger still continues at times to bubble within. But I know now how to soothe her xx and no regrets. All my life experiences are who I am today. I’m a bloody amazing, wise woman who has learnt to truly love herself and to remember I was the one I have been waiting for. To give to myself what I was needing.

All the looking outside myself, the love I looked for with men, nagh ... I can only have a healthy relationship with someone when I get one with myself first. And let me tell you it’s taken decades to work that one out. You have to dig deep ladies and gents because this journey as an adoptee is no walk in the park. xx

*For fellow adoptees needing professional support, Andrea is a psychotherapist in the Bournemouth UK area, you can connect with her at [Psychology Today UK](https://www.psychologytoday.co.uk).*



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## Anonymous

*Born in China and adopted to the USA*

I have experienced anger as an adoptee. For me it occurred in my late teens and early 20s in that transition time between high school and college. I was angry at my parents for adopting me and not putting in effort to learn or share my birth culture, I was angry at my birth parents for putting me up for adoption and having a baby they could not care for. I was angry at larger systems of poverty and inequality that put people in difficult situations. I was so angry at people telling me I was Chinese or Asian but I had no idea what that meant.



I was angry at Chinese people I met that were disappointed I wasn't more "Chinese." I lashed out at my parents and said very hurtful things to them about adoption. I also unfortunately turned much of this anger and toxicity onto myself and it negatively affected the way I viewed myself. For me, the anger was about being confronted with the understanding that adoption didn't just give me a family, but also meant that I had one in the periphery that I might never know. *I felt like a foreigner in my own body*, constantly being judged for my race but not claiming that identity. I couldn't process how to come to terms with the effects of poverty and the larger systems that led to me being placed for adoption.

I really felt anger as the onset of grief. Now the anger has faded, and I do feel a deep, complicated sadness when I think about these topics. What helped me the most was reaching out and connecting with other adoptees. It helped me to channel and validate my feelings about adoption, see more nuances in the process, and regain a lot of self-confidence and self-worth.

As I have gotten involved with adoptee organizations, I've found solace, healing, and joy. My parents, while we'll always have differences, love me and they never retaliated when I said mean things about the adoption process or them. From close friends and family, I was treated with compassion, love, understanding, and community. I think that's what every person needs when working through these big, unexplainable things.

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# Gypsy Whitford

*Born in the USA and adopted to Australia*

I am angry because I'm a product of a broken billion dollar industry. Because I had a price tag and got treated like a new toy. Because I could have been aborted if the health care system in the USA was better but instead, I was sold to the highest bidder. Because instead of abortion, I was bought by a white family that took my blackness and turned it white with no care or empathy for who I really am or where I should be. Everything I should know was striped from my very core.

I believe race, culture, and biology plays a big part in who we are. The generations before us are part of our identity and not having biological family affects us on a deeper level than most understand.

I'm angry because it's not just me living as a transracial adoptee with adoptive parents that have whitewashed me to the point they expect me to just deal with racism because they can't comprehend how it really is. Or they say things like, "Well, we raised you white so that's what you are." Or "Well, you could have been left with your real

family", except they truly had no idea about my bio family and my mum; no idea other than to use the manipulation and collusion my mum faced before my adoptive parents signed that cheque to buy me.



We are not all unwanted! We were loved but a billion dollar industry stepped in and sunk their teeth into them, in turn, breaking that mother and baby bond in the name of \$\$\$.

I am angry and will remain angry until the private infant adoption industry is dead!

*You can follow Gypsy on TikTok @gypseadoptee*

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## JD Glienna

*Born in the Philippines and adopted to the USA. Co-founder of [Adopteekwentokwento](#).*

I do become angry from time to time. I'm angry about all the lies I have to sift through to get to the truth. I'm angry that the system gave me abusive parents. I'm angry that there was no process to help protect me or educate them for improvements. I'm angry that I have to constantly work through the bad memories. I'm angry that I listen to the lies of how great a mom I had, or comments like, "This is my baby" when it damn well was lies. I'm angry that a child had to be the pummel bag for someone else's insecurities.

I may not always be angry, but it bubbles from time to time. I'm angry that some want a storyline versus taking responsibility. I'm angry that adoptees are the last part of the triad to be considered behind the adopting parents agenda, the government system, and then the birth mother. I'm angry at the lack of support for adoptees in post adoption. I'm angry for those who experience that they are a lie for someone and that they have to remain a lie. I am angry for all adoptees who want to be part of a family, adopted or biological and are constantly rejected.

You can follow JD @lakad.co or @Adopteekwentokwento





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## Kyleigh Elisa

*Born in Colombia and adopted to the USA*

I am angry for sure. I feel like my anger ebbs and flows. Like, some days I'm just ready to burst and others, it's a slow burn deep down.

When I was first given permission to be angry about my adoption about a decade ago by a therapist, it was like a volcano that erupted inside of me and I couldn't stop it for months. Back then it was more about always feeling unacceptable. Feeling like I hated how I was different in a sea of white people. That no-one close ever really acknowledged the pain inside me due to adoption. That I was made to feel like I was an exotic commodity, while also being told, "No, you're just like us. You're just our Kyleigh". I feel like that was some kind of unintentional gaslighting trying to make me feel accepted, but it had the opposite effect.



Since then I let my anger out more regularly and I don't drink to dull the pain like I used to. I am definitely still angry though and I hate being adopted.

I hate colonialism. I hate white supremacy. I hate the patriarchy. I am afraid of religious organizations that allow people to justify it all. I believe all these things contribute to why we are all adopted.

I just start thinking about it all and the anger billows. It's a thought path I have to force myself to interrupt because it does not help me. While I think it's good to be aware that stuff exists, I also cannot allow it to deteriorate my mental health. So I research and try to give back to our community and participate in adoptee organizations – this reminds me that I'm not alone.

Remembering I'm not alone helps a lot. Taking gradual steps to reclaim pieces of my culture that were taken from me helps too. It's scary while I try to get back what was lost, and that's upsetting at times, but in the end I reap the rewards accepting each little piece back to me, as it's mine to rightfully hold.

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## Kris Rao

*Born in India and adopted to the USA; recently discovered their adoption as a Late Discovery adoptee.*

In 2019 at the age of 34, I learned that I was adopted. Since then, I have become insanely familiar with the grief cycle. In a non-linear fashion, I have been relentlessly experiencing all the emotions associated with grief. Of all the emotions, anger, however, has become the one constant emotion when I think about adoption.



In the case of my experience, as a late discovery adoptee, I am angry for being lied to for 34 years. I feel deceived. Conned. Duped. Whatever words I can think of to describe it, ultimately for 34 years I was manipulated into believing I was someone that I'm not. Manipulated into believing strangers were my biological and genetic kin. The identity I was given never seemed to fit with the person I knew myself to be, and I was gaslit into feeling like the crazy one for my thoughts.

The thing about anger though, is that it is perceived as a negative emotion. All my life growing up, I have been taught to control it. To not let it get the best of me. Even now, as I write to share my experience and express my opinions on adoption today, there are those that tell me to not be so angry. That anger is not a good thing.

For quite a while after discovering the truth, I struggled with the anger. In a group for late discovery adoptees, I once posed a question about anger. More than 90% said that they still are angry, or struggle with anger. The most helpful responses were the ones that said it was okay to be angry. One adoptee even responded to something I wrote and said that it was a "righteous anger". And they were right. My anger is righteous and justified for my experience. It's okay to be angry. It's okay to feel it.

As Faith G. Harper wrote in her book [Unfuck Your Anger: Using Science to Understand Frustration, Rage, and Forgiveness](#):

"If feeling anger is OK, you can be angry and still be OK."

Looking back, I think I struggled with anger because I confused my thoughts about anger with how we manage and act upon it. There is nothing wrong with the emotion itself. Anger is a normal reaction to any negative situation, and it's how we deal with it that determines a positive or negative reaction. And that's the key thing, "*Anger is a response to a deeper emotion. It's a secondary emotion, meaning it's reactive. Not just to situations we encounter but to other emotions.*"

Negative emotions are okay as long as we express them in a healthy manner.

I was always frustrated growing up with how I was raised. Frustrated that I couldn't understand why I always felt different. That frustration turned into anger soon after discovering I was adopted. I'm angry about being lied to. I'm angry about all the abuse I experienced and for being gaslit into believing that it was for my own good. And I grieve because of it. It's a lot of negativity to deal with all at once. When I learned I was adopted, I was hurt. There was sorrow from what felt like a huge act of betrayal. That hurt would also become anger. The more I tried not to feel all these "negative emotions", the more "negative" I felt I was becoming.

Mark Manson wrote the following about negative emotions in his book [The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F\\*ck](#):

"The desire for a more positive experience is itself a negative experience. And, paradoxically, the acceptance of one's negative experience is itself a positive experience."

"This is a total mind-fuck. So I'll give you a minute to unpretzel your brain and maybe read that again: Wanting positive experience is a negative experience; accepting negative experience is a positive experience. It's what the philosopher Alan Watts used to refer to as "the backwards law"—the idea that the more you pursue feeling better all the time, the less satisfied you become, as pursuing something only reinforces the fact that you lack it in the first place."

It's been a lot of work, but I'm learning to reframe myself and how I view my anger. I am learning to simply accept what it is, and use that to process my grief, my trauma. Accepting the negative experiences of my adoption. Allowing myself to feel my anger, and not be it.

I came across this quote a while ago, and it stuck with me regarding my grief. "No one notices your sadness until it turns into anger, and then you're the bad person."

I don't know its origins, but it feels accurate. If anything, I want people to know that my anger is not about who I am as an adoptee. It's not even about who I am as a late discovery adoptee. It's about what I feel as an adoptee.

More importantly, I see my anger as a tool, because it not only has allowed me to establish and keep necessary boundaries to protect myself, but it is what drives me to write for change, share my experience, and restore all that was taken away from me. I've learned to use my anger to advocate for change, for sharing my experience and my unapologetic truth. I share the realities of adoption by writing just exactly what I feel and how I'm dealing with it.

My anger is about calling for accountability from those that don't want to be held accountable. It's about reclamation.

In an essay about anger, Brian Wong wrote the following:

“While anger might not be the most practically useful emotion to have in all cases, its epistemic and motivational productivity makes it the ideal candidate in steering victims towards making appropriate claims to compensation or reparation. It is the anger towards losing what matters that enables victims to pinpoint the most important components of their restorative process – of course, we might not think that restoration is intrinsically most valuable, but this critique misses the point. Anger can play a crucial role in recovering lost goods.”

Quite simply, that's what anger is. What it can be.

Healing from my past traumas for me isn't about letting go of my pain, or my anger. It's how I manage it and how I utilize that anger. It's about using my anger for a positive experience.

Anger as a reaction to a negative experience can provide us with the energy for change. It can be used to help keep ourselves safe and give us the courage to take back what we've lost. And that's a good thing!

*For more from Kris, follow at:*

[Kris-404:RootsNotFound](#)

*Twitter @adoptedindian*

*Instagram @indianlatediscoveryadoptee*

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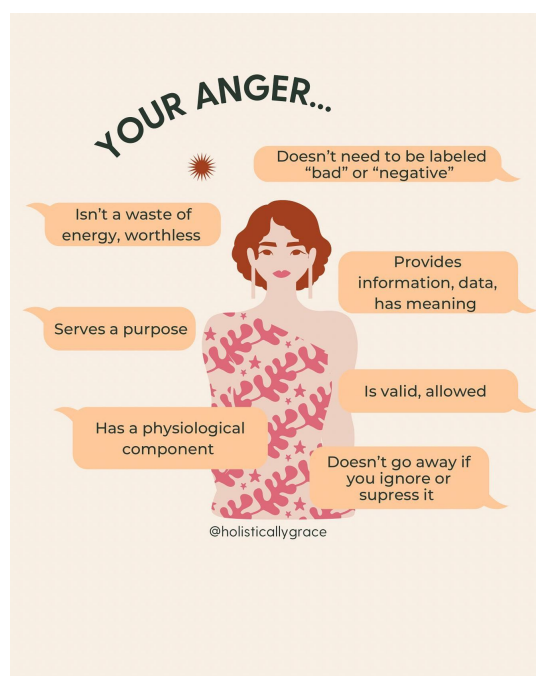
## Lynelle Long

*Born in Vietnam and adopted to Australia*

I was writing to an adoptive mum about how we adoptees express anger and it reminded me of how frightened people are, in general, of that “adoptive anger”. In the aim of creating greater understanding of this misunderstood and feared emotion, I thought I’d write about why anger is a valid component in an adoptee’s journey and how people can support an adoptee in the midst of the anger. I don’t speak for all adoptees but share from my own experience.

I don’t recall being aware of my anger being related to my abandonment until I reached my mid 20s. I do recall feeling angry as a teenager but at the time my anger felt like a result of feeling confused about my place in the world, feeling like I didn’t fit in, that people teased me about my looks, and at being treated differently in my adoptive family. I know if anyone had approached me during those teenage years and talked about adoption or abandonment I would have brushed it aside saying it had nothing to do with how I was feeling. I was a teenager who had no idea of the issues that were underlying my feelings. My adoptive family didn’t seek to look for issues other than normal teenage issues – they were told that love should be enough – an era where adoption and abandonment was just not understood.

I was the teenage adoptee who never rebelled overtly. Personality? I’d say it was my fear of rejection that created my drive to “fit in” and my desire for “acceptance” that drove me to succeed at school academically. My emotional outlet was music. I played the piano all the time and I recall my adoptive sister demanding I stop thumping the piano so loudly and angrily. Looking back I realise now it was my only outlet and sign of deep seated anger and primary to that, sadness. I certainly felt like I had no-one who talked to me about those feelings, to initiate those conversations, and perhaps I was so shut off from trusting anyone instinctively that I couldn’t see them even if they were in front of me. I grew up with other children at school and church who were also adopted domestically,



but I don't recall any conversations about "adopted" children except to overhear that they were causing their parents a lot of trouble.

As an adult adoptee, I personally know quite a few intercountry adoptees who grew up rebelling and getting into drugs, alcohol, sex. They're all addictions to a degree that help to bury our feelings because they are so overwhelming. I can totally understand why we turn to these comforts and what is driving them. For adoptees, it's our deep seated feelings of hurt at being abandoned. The persistent questions in our psyche of why were we given up? People are so blinded by the fairytale myths of adoption of "forever family" and "love is enough" they don't see the signs so obvious to an adoptee like me.

You may treat us like forever family and love is enough but WE don't feel like that. Not for a long time. For kids like me, who appeared well behaved, our struggles go undetected – only to show up later in early adulthood as deep seated depression and suicidal attempts or other covert symptoms. Perhaps parents should consider themselves lucky if they have a child who is acting out – at least the adopted child is trying to tell you there is something they are struggling with – it's their call for help. As for adoptees like me on the other hand, my parents had no idea of the depth of my struggles and for some unknown reason I'm still alive to write about it. For those adoptees who manage to cut off those feelings permanently by ending it all, I say it's a terrible reflection on our society in the ways we perpetuate adoption myths, failing to support and offer the help and acceptance they are seeking before it's too late! My parents certainly never realised I had deep seated underlying issues that might have benefitted from some guided assistance. I looked on the exterior as the model child, always conforming, performing highly at school, despite being caught for shop lifting in my early teens.

The reality is anger is a normal emotional response to our unordinary beginnings of loss, detachment, disconnection, severing of our ties to mother who carried us, loss of our genetic heritage, feelings of not belonging in our adopted land and environment, feelings of displacement, confusion as to where exactly do we fit in and why it is so hard to wrestle with all these feelings that no-one else seems to have, let alone relate to. Unless the people surrounding us and closest to us understand this anger and have an interest in "hearing" what this anger is about, I think as adoptees we continue to escalate in our behaviours of expressing anger in poor and dysfunctional ways which sabotage further our abilities to develop relationships that otherwise might be supportive.

I came to the realisation in therapy one day that in fact harming myself was my anger turned inward. Adoptees who act out their anger are displaying it out, those of us who are perfectionists and trying to conform will turn it inwards if there is no appropriate avenue to express it. So how can we best help an adoptee with anger? First and most importantly we need someone to listen to us and accept we have a real valid reason for feeling anger. This means not being afraid to hear the adoptee's anger. Don't turn the issue away from the adoptee and make it about you. I know many people who are afraid of hearing/seeing/being on what they perceive is the receiving end of anger – if so, I encourage you to read *The Dance of Anger* by Harriet Lerner. In blocking the adoptee's innate need to express that anger, you will also be blocking their need to express their innate sadness of loss and disconnection.

Second, don't react to the anger expressed in a negative way. If you do, this gives the impression that our anger is wrong. No, what is wrong is not the emotion and sound reasons for it, but the way in which we turn that anger energy onto others or ourselves. What we need when we express anger is someone to validate and confirm that our anger is ok and that underlying it is our pain and sadness at being abandoned.

Third, once you allow the anger to exist, you might be surprised to see it turn into tears of raw sadness, hurt, and pain. This is when we need a nice warm accepting cuddle that offers comfort and demonstrates you are sharing our pain with us.

As adoptees, if we constantly receive the message overtly or covertly that our anger is not ok, you are reflecting back to us that it is not ok to be who we are. We are a result of a terrible beginning so naturally our psyche has to resolve this and find a way to heal. If you block the anger, the adoptee will never get to the other end of the spectrum of healing because anger is our secondary emotion to sadness. If we are too afraid to express our sadness, we express it as anger. If you can't hear our anger, you won't be able to hear our sadness. If we never get to express our sadness and pain, we never get to resolve our beginnings.

The message I'm trying to convey is please don't be scared of our anger or try to inhibit it from being expressed. Once our anger gets heard, we won't be as explosive or reactive. It is like uncorking a bottle of wine, if you let the anger gas out, the wine goes nice and mellows. Now I'm not saying we only have to let our anger out once, no, sometimes we need multiple times of expressing this anger and being "heard" and listened to. In my experience, the power of healing for me came from being able to tell my

story fifty different ways to fifty different audiences. It was the validation I needed. Having people come up to me and empathise and give that understanding I'd been seeking all along. After a while of getting people's validation, I learnt that my feelings were ok and not to run from them. I learnt it was good to listen to my anger within but the trick was to find an appropriate method to channel the energy and turn it into something useful for ourselves. For me, it was to create a support network for other adoptees who were struggling like I did. For others, it could be an artistic outlet, music, writing, anything that allows us to express the anger and sadness in a safe and healthy way.

The above is written specific to adoptee anger based only upon the initial abandonment wound. If an adoptee gets further hurt, abuse, racism on top of their abandonment, then of course the anger gets compounded by these extra causal factors. I'm also not advocating for violence which is anger acted out towards others or justifying an adoptee purposely hurting others because of their "anger". I'm simply writing about a much misunderstood topic specific for intercountry adoption and hoping to share some insight as to why we display anger, where it's coming from, and how you might help us resolve it in a healthy way.

My wish is to live in a world where an adoptee's anger will be heard for what it is i.e. instead of labelling us and pushing us away because people are afraid of the force in the emotion, they would instead embrace us and validate that we have every reason to feel sad and angry. If our anger is embraced, you will enable us to heal ourselves by being true to our feelings and to start to truly connect to you and share our deepest needs by embracing who we are at our deepest core.



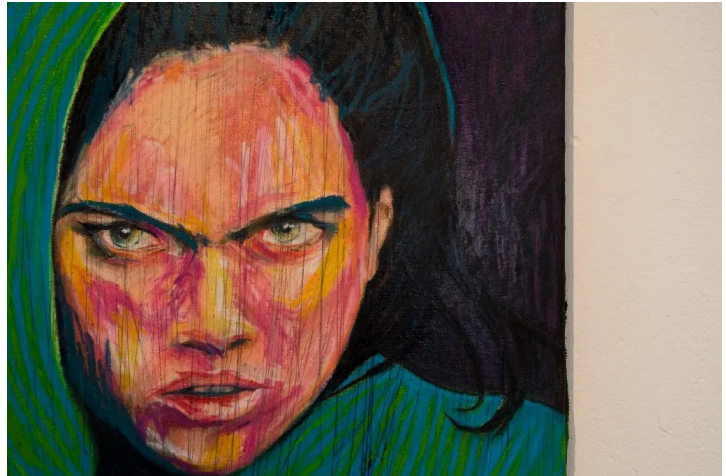
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## Ofir Alzate

*Born in Colombia and adopted to the USA*

I am an adoptee with anger. Does this get passed down to our children because I have three angry boys. Now as an adult, I do feel like I can handle anger a lot better – I'll walk away from confrontation before it gets bad.

It pisses me off now because I remember a few times the adopted couple used to say to me, "You're always so angry and that's all you do, is want to be in your room with the door closed", and I had to open it. How does somebody not see a problem when it's right there in their face, like what the f\*\*\* did you expect? That I was going to be jumping up and down happy because I got my family taken away, my country, and nobody looks like me and nobody is the same colour as me? Not to mention I didn't even know what they were saying for the longest time. I wanted to go home! I wanted my mom! I hated it here! I don't belong here. I was given the wrong family.



I love my 3 boys and my 7 grandchildren but I am ready to leave it all behind. I'm currently waiting to hear about my passport. Even though it was just a copy, I received my birth certificate that my mom sent me along with my baptism certificate from Colombia. I cried for almost a good hour in my room. I touched something that my mom touched!

I've been feeling really down ever since Christmas and I also received my high school report card – my 9th and 10th grade report cards. It broke my heart that my grades were so bad. I only had an A in gym. I was getting Ds and Fs in Spanish. I remember struggling throughout my school years. Along with everything else, I know I have ADD. That definitely was the worst mistake of my whole life was quitting school, but then again, I didn't have the support.

I just wanted out of that house, so I left when I was 16 and never went back.