

## The rage explosion: What has happened to the fairer sex?

By [Lucy Taylor](#)

Last updated at 9:46 AM on 05th October 2009

**Office rage, internet rage, even trolley rage. As a new study showed last week, women have never been more aggressive - or physically violent. So what HAS happened to the fairer sex?**

The other morning, I worked myself into a simmering rage.

It started at the swimming pool, of all places. I wanted to do a few lengths; it's my favourite sport and helps me relax. Normally. But on this morning, all the lanes were busy.

The fast lane was occupied by two women doing side-by-side, head-up breaststroke and TALKING; the medium lane was taken by a pushy father coaching his kid; and the slow one had two guys who looked as if they were training for the Olympics.



All the rage: Loss of self-control is leading to more acts of aggression in women

'Get the hell out of that lane: the FAST lane!' the voice inside me screamed as I glared at the two leisurely breaststrokes. They carried on, yapping away, oblivious to the heinous crime they were committing. So I turned my furious gaze on Pushy Dad, who also ignored me, and then at the pool attendant.

'Make them move. . . do something about this travesty . . . enforce some pool etiquette here,' I beseeched with my eyes.

The attendant turned away and started chatting and laughing with her colleague, while I sat on the poolside growling.

Then, when I could feel a tension headache coming on, I decided to slip into the fast lane, very apologetically (I know, so passive-aggressive) and sprint a couple of the quickest, splashiest lengths of front-crawl that I'd ever done. That'll teach them, I thought. That'll get them to clear off.

But when I stopped for breath, they sneered disapprovingly at me - then set off for another paddle/chat.

And so I climbed out, cursing and swearing under my breath, allthe while fantasising about things too terrible to put down on paper.

From the pool, I went to the supermarket and began the usual mad search for a parking space. When I saw the big gas-guzzler sprawled across two parking bays, it was all too much for one morning.

'Who are these selfish idiots?' I yelled, again inside, while punching the steering wheel, wishing it was the face of the gas-guzzler's owner. I felt as if my head might explode with the fury. I decided to go home, stay indoors for a while, do a jigsaw or something, in case I ended up murdering someone.

## GRRR...

### **Britain is the top road-rage country in the EU - more than 80 per cent of drivers say they've been involved in such an incident**

Apparently, I am not alone in getting myself worked up into such a murderous rage. Women are becoming more and more aggressive, with stressful situations increasingly ending in acts of physical violence.

Figures released last week showed that the number of women and girls being sentenced for crimes has hit a five-year high.

Earlier this year, it also emerged that the number involved in alcohol-related trouble has increased by almost a third in two years, and females are now involved in a quarter of all violent attacks.

The UK has the worst road rage figures of any European nation, and the second worst in the world. And nearly half of us regularly lose our temper at work: 64 per cent claim to have witnessed office rage, and 71 per cent have suffered internet rage.

We're also hearing more and more about aisle or trolley rage - earlier this year a woman was jailed for manslaughter after a queue-jumping incident in a shop.

There is no doubt about it: we are living in an age of rage. Momentary losses of self-control are increasingly leading to acts of aggression, and this is increasingly the case for female perpetrators. The number of women convicted of domestic violence has also risen sharply.

When people feel anger they undergo physical and mental changes. Their heart rate, blood flow and tension rises as the body prepares for action. The mind goes into tunnel vision as it focuses on the threat and loses the bigger picture.

Various factors would normally then inhibit the average person from responding aggressively, such as not wanting to behave violently in public.

But there are concerns that as more people react with violence, it is becoming the norm. It is as if there is becoming an unspoken 'social permission' to lash out - for both sexes.



### Aggressive: Women have never been more physically violent

I used to share a flat with a woman who was frighteningly aggressive. After a night out, fuelled by alcohol, she often trashed the living room, wrecking furniture and hurling things out the window. Yet during the day, she was as quiet as a mouse.

When her boyfriend threatened to leave her after she beat him up, she went on an anger management course.

'I cringe when I think about my behaviour in the past,' she says now. 'It was as if I had this beast inside me that was unleashed when I was intoxicated. I was like a good girl all day, then at night this evil and aggressive side came out.'

'I think this is because we're told we must never be angry or aggressive. But I had so much of it inside me. I've learned to manage it a bit better, but I think that's got a lot to do with the fact that I rarely drink now. I'm too scared to. I'm scared that I wouldn't be able to control the aggression and would end up doing something really awful.'

According to the experts, part of the problem is that women do not know how to handle their angry impulses.

Mike Fisher, author of *Beating Anger* and founder of the British Association of Anger Management, says men generally tend to scream or shout or display otherwise aggressive behaviour, while women tend to be more passive-aggressive.

'Women these days have a lot of aggression, and with good reason,' he says. 'They are juggling the stresses of home life, work and financial responsibilities. But they are not very good at understanding or communicating these difficult but powerful feelings.'

'They are not very overt, but instead tend to be critical, cynical, demeaning or patronising. Men are usually loud and aggressive; women tend to go around the houses a bit more.'

'But both are toxic. In fact, the passive-aggressive model is actually far more damaging and harmful than the aggressive-aggressive model because it is so insidious and inherently dishonest.'

'The other problem with passive-aggressive behaviour is that whatever gets held in, eventually comes out. It becomes explosive.'

## LITTLE MISS ANGRY

### Women are typically angry for longer, more resentful, but still less likely to express their feelings than men

Which may go some way to explaining the rise in women's aggressive behaviour: it can only be held in for so long before it erupts.

He believes part of the reason women are so poor at dealing with aggression is that they have been conditioned to fear and avoid it.

'The message women get from a young age is to look pretty and show every emotion apart from anger and aggression,' says Mr Fisher. 'Men, on the other hand, are conditioned to show no emotion other than anger. The consequences are potentially disastrous for both.'

Indeed, our culture bombards us with the message that anger and aggression are unfeminine. Unacceptable. Ugly. The result is that women have, in the past, tended to turn these emotions against themselves.

I remember once interviewing a psychiatrist who treated female self-harmers. He told me that these women, some of whom had scars all over their bodies, would insist that they weren't angry but were full of love. Yet they were aggressively mutilating their own bodies. No wonder psychiatrists talk about actions speaking louder than words.

The repression of aggressive impulses doesn't always result in such extreme behaviour. But there is no doubt that burying an important part of the personality comes with a heavy psychic price. According to the experts, the problem with aggressive impulses that are not understood is that they are either turned outwards against others, or inwards against the self.

One woman I spoke to said she did not think she had aggression in her until she went into therapy to deal with relationship problems. 'There is a common misconception about anger and aggression,' she said. 'Women think it is all about losing your temper and shouting. Because I didn't do that, and because if something annoyed me I'd be able to say so, I honestly did not think I had any issues here.'



#### Over 80 per cent of drivers in Britain have been involved in a road rage incident

'In fact, I learned I was unbelievably passive-aggressive. The facade presented to the world was all nice and sweet and compliant. Underneath, I was in turmoil - a rage.'

'I was obsessed with running and yoga and I didn't eat properly for years. I quite often had depression and feelings of self-loathing, but I didn't have a clue that this was all a consequence of avoiding certain emotions. For years, I was fighting a battle against myself because I couldn't actually deal with aggressive impulses or conflict of any kind.'

Although experts say this is typical of the way women experience and deal with their aggressive side, the statistics suggest the pattern is changing: women are increasingly acting it out.

Another woman I spoke to believes women would be better off if they embraced the angry and aggressive side of their personality, instead of pretending that it doesn't exist.

'I am Mrs Angry,' she says. 'A few years ago, when my husband left me for someone else, I ripped up his books, scratched his car, cut his suits and destroyed his CDs. And I don't see anything wrong with that. I was absolutely furious and I needed to do something about it.'

'I still get aggressive now, but about different things. I'm trying to juggle so many different roles - wife (I re-married), mother, lover, friend, worker - and I feel as if I'm failing at every one of them.'

'The other day I was waiting in a queue for a cash machine and the women in front of me checked her balance on three cards, oblivious to the number of people behind her.'

'I was in a hurry and, yes, I wanted to strangle her - but, of course, I didn't. Instead, I went to boxercise training that night and channelled my rage into a furious workout.'

'There is this myth that women are the fairer sex. In fact, we have as much anger and aggression as men.'

There are several other theories as to why women are becoming ever more aggressive. Some blame the increasingly fast-paced, highly competitive way we live. We're expected to do so much and have grown to expect instant gratification. Many of us

have, what the experts call, 'poor impulse control'.

If something or someone delays us, or if someone doesn't give us what we want, we often unconsciously interpret it as a threat to our sense of self-worth or feel that someone is 'disrespecting' us.

Dr Michael Sinclair, a consultant psychologist in London who specialises in anger management, says that, generally, people who grossly overreact to trivial events with violence are suffering from a deep-rooted lack of self-confidence.

'They tend to interpret everything - from losing a job or a partner, to having to wait in a queue when they're in a hurry - as a personal slight, threat or rejection,' he says. 'If they don't get what they want, or if they think something's not fair, they take it personally. In many ways, it is a very childish way of thinking.'

As Dr Sinclair explains, we learn anger and aggression as babies. They are instinctive, automatic responses to perceived injustice. Anger is one of the first emotions we learn. But it is probably the last we learn to manage as adults.

Unfortunately, like so much in life, there are no quick fixes.

Every human being has aggressive impulses. They can either be turned inwards or outwards - both of which are potentially destructive, even fatal, or they can be understood and managed - which takes time, effort and a lot of hard work.

But that is the only hope of ending the ever-increasing spiral of violence and rage in our society.

Places:

[London](#),  
[United Kingdom](#)

## Comments (39)

- [Newest](#)
- [Oldest](#)
- [Best rated](#)
- [Worst rated](#)

[View all](#)

You are surprised at this? As the economic crisis deepens you will see far more of this. Violence will grow to much higher levels. You should also remember that the British are a very violent people anyway.

- D Rumsfeld, London, 5/10/2009 5:39

You're right, but us we don't want to admit to this. We have a history of violence!

- Kat Anders, London, 05/10/2009 11:02

Click to rate  Rating (0)

[Report abuse](#)

I'm quite a mellow person until I get in the car then I turn into a monster, but I have to behave myself when my 9 year old son is in the car with me, so no swearing!

- Kate, Surrey, 05/10/2009 10:58

Click to rate  Rating (0)

[Report abuse](#)

The problem as I see it is two-fold.

1) People in GENERAL have less respect and concern for others, gone are the day's when we used to care/prioritise about other people and their feelings. We don't care about others, others don't care about us.

2) Those of us who do care and respect rules which are made for the comfort of all, quite rightly get upset when those rules are ignored by the selfish.

- Richard, Genouilly,France, 05/10/2009 10:58

Click to rate  Rating 2

[Report abuse](#)

"They have also forced women into jobs they hate, where, because business is naturally cutthroat, the atmosphere is combative and unfriendly. Women suffer and their families suffer. ...The unisex world that is being created is one of Labour's most prominent policies. Harriet Harman and her ilk do not want women to have a choice, and have decided the female ideal for

you.- Jack, London"

What utter rubbish. No one has 'forced' women into jobs they hate. If women don't like their jobs, they can leave and do something else. Harman has no control over my life. I make my own choices and decide my own ideal.

"we appear to have lost the ability to admit responsibility and apologise.- Brian, Dorset, 5/10"

The best point made so far! We have a society that doesn't allow us to admit guilt as perpetrators, nor offer forgiveness as victims. So everyone is angry.

- Maz, Yorkshire, 05/10/2009 10:57

Click to rate  Rating 1

[Report abuse](#)

The UK is a crowded place. Not only that, too many people have lost the social skills needed to get along from day to day. Shop assistants natter to their colleagues instead of serving you. Buggies and trolleys block supermarket aisles. Teenagers run around yelling at each other or playing music on their phones. People stop in the middle of doorways to chat. Drivers don't use their mirrors or indicators, and abandon their cars anywhere instead of finding a proper parking space. Etc, etc, etc...

This all means that someone just trying to get from A-B is impeded, stressed-out and frustrated at every turn, as well as being confronted with examples of selfishness, ignorance and rudeness. If everyone remembered their manners and used some common courtesy, we'll all be a lot calmer.

- Maria, Cheshire, UK, 05/10/2009 10:47

Click to rate  Rating (0)

[Report abuse](#)

Kiwimom - So you are saying that there is no change in a woman's behaviour when she is on the blob then?? really? seriously? perhaps you best ask your husband seeing as you don't seem to like holding a mirror up to yourself.

- Pete, Essex, 05/10/2009 10:34

Click to rate  Rating (0)

[Report abuse](#)

The views expressed in the contents above are those of our users and do not necessarily reflect the views of MailOnline.

- [Femail Headlines](#)
- [Most Read](#)
- [He wants to talk dirty but I find the whole idea absolutely mortifying: Rowan Pelling's sex advice column](#)
- [The secret diary of the Saudi princess who would be stoned to death if she returned home](#)
- [The lobe lift! They give away your age as much as your hands. But now there's a nip and tuck for earlobes, too](#)
- [The rage explosion: What has happened to the fairer sex?](#)
- [Audrey Hepburn glamour returns thanks to Anna Friel](#)
- [I spent £7,000 on my appearance to get a new job: How much does it cost to run YOUR body?](#)
- [LIZ JONES FASHION THERAPY: Does on-trend 'Bird's-nest hair' work on a real woman?](#)
- [Is nudity the next big thing? Fashion mags are suddenly full of naked bodies, but will baring all really catch on?](#)
- [Best of British: Forget Paris and Milan... the designs making a splash on the High Street are all home-grown](#)
- [MORE HEADLINES](#)
- [LIZ JONES FASHION THERAPY: Does on-trend 'Bird's-nest hair' work on a real woman?](#)
- [Rowan Pelling's sex advice column: He wants to talk dirty but I find the whole idea absolutely mortifying](#)
- [The lobe lift! They give away your age as much as your hands. But now there's a nip and tuck for earlobes, too](#)
- [The rage explosion: What has happened to the fairer sex?](#)
- [The secret diary of the Saudi princess who would be stoned to death if she returned home](#)
- [LIZ JONES: Sarah Brown should wear her £600 dress, it's better than Gordon in Primark](#)
- [Just like his dad: Why no-one had a bad word to say about Zac Goldsmith leaving his wife for a younger woman](#)
- [MOST READ IN DETAIL](#)