Why anger is contagious?

When you observe others and yourself you can not help but to notice an interesting phenomenon – *emotions are contagious*. It seems one can perk up and turn angry by merely watching another person get all hot and bothered. You may think sometimes, “It is almost unfair, this other dude is so ticked off but I can virtually taste his anger in my mouth as well...” Why is this?  Can anger, be subliminally contagious?

Mirror neurons

Meet the most recent and most exciting discovery of recent neuro-science – mirror neurons. Our “monkey see, monkey do” behaviour has finally been traced down to and attributed to a fascinating phenomenon taking place in our heads. The brain apparently has quite a talent of being able to mirror and synchronize it is internal states with an external environment. Kind like a chameleon, your brain’s mirror neurons can fire off signals making you feel exactly the same way as the person you are observing. Curiously, this type of neuron fires *both* when you are performing a certain action, and also when watching someone else perform exactly that same action. Basically, same neurons light up in the person you are observing and in your brain. As a consequence, other’s persons’ feelings are *mirrored* in your own brain, whether you want that or not!

This process overrides any thinking, it just happens. Rizzolatti, one of the neuroscientists who uncovered this mystery, says “Mirror neurons permit us to grasp the minds of others not through reasoning but through direct simulation. By feeling, not by thinking.” This is the social function of our brain that is responsible for making you cringe when others slip and fall, making your mouth water when you watch someone eating a lemon, and feel the spikes running up your back by observing some couple screaming at each other.

Mirror neurons serve a critical function – they make us social beings who can relate to each other and adopt to new environments. It appears that these neurons makes us not only susceptible to moods of other people but are constantly impacting mind states of other creatures as well.
Mirror neurons and Anger Management

Mirror neurons are one of the culprits behind why you may find anger to be such a terribly hard beast to control. You may feel that your anger “just happens,” like a knee jerk reaction. Do not worry though, you can change all this and I will show you how in the near future.

The thing to remember for now is this: the closest people that truly love you will always consciously or unconsciously identify with your qualities. If you find yourself angry a lot among family you can bet you are transmitting this energy to them via their mirror neurons that may eventually grow together and form a part of their identity. You will be angry, they will be angry, and this anger management issue will be transmitted to others; it will become an awfully viscous circle and will take a tremendous amount of effort to break out of.

Be mindful what you expose your mirror neurons to and whose mirror neurons are exposed to your behaviour. Review which people have the most influence in your life. Who are your idols? Are they angry, bitter and arrogant types? Are they kind, patient and resilient types? All of these people shape your identity by simply being around you or in your awareness field. The answer to whether your mirror neurons are you best friends or worst enemies depends on what people you surround yourself and identify with. It may be a good time to do a bit of “social restructuring.”