

# ***CNN American Morning*** ***March 12, 2010, 7:30 AM CT***

## **CNN ANCHORS**



**JIM ACOSTA**



**KIRAN CHETRY**

## **GUEST M.D.**



**EMIL COCCARO, M.D.**  
**University of Chicago**

**To see the video please place the following link in your browser:**

**[http://www.youtube.com/UChicagoMedCenter#p/c/9F0D05FBB9F8DF36/0/\\_UOTFxSrN0](http://www.youtube.com/UChicagoMedCenter#p/c/9F0D05FBB9F8DF36/0/_UOTFxSrN0)**

**JIM ACOSTA:** Kiran, nothing makes a good tabloid headline like a star losing their cool. In the sports world there was the chair-throwing basketball coach, Bobby Knight, and Serena Williams and her “f-bomb” tirade.

**KIRAN CHETRY:** And in the fashion world Naomi Campbell has been accused more than once of using her cell phone as a weapon. And on Capitol Hill this week we saw outgoing congressman Patrick Kennedy taking his shot at the media.

**ACOSTA:** He went a little –

**CHETRY:** Yes, he was shouting and gesturing. But is this just “moments of anger” of these people or is there a medical reason behind anger?

Here for an "A.M." House Call this morning is Dr. Emil Coccaro, Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neuroscience at the University of Chicago. Thank you for being with us this morning.

**DR. EMIL COCCARO, RESEARCHES MOOD, ANXIETY, AND PERSONALITY DISORDERS:**

**COCCARO:** *Glad to be here.*

**CHETRY:** *We showed the classic road rage and airline rage. Is rage part of the social culture? Has this been a problem all along?*

**COCCARO:** *Well, anger (and rage) is a normal emotion, so you are going to see it in people from time to time. The question is, is it too frequent and does it get you into trouble?*

**ACOSTA:** *What is a normal anger response? There is something called the intermittent explosive disorder, and I have not heard of it before but it's something you're familiar with in your field?*

**COCCARO:** *Yes, it's been in the DSM since the very beginning. It characterizes people blowing up frequently and getting in trouble because of it.*

**ACOSTA:** *Like an IED? [An Improvised Explosive Device is what is meant here.]*

**COCCARO:** *Yes.*

**(LAUGHTER)**

***The DSM-V may change the name of it, actually.***

**ACOSTA:** *Is that right? And obviously here is the normal and the abnormal response. There are two types of responses.*

**CHETRY:** *How do you gauge what is a problem? In some instances, isn't it about what is socially accepted as well? Is there an element of society accepting bad behavior and anger more readily than, let's say decades ago?*

**COCCARO:** *I don't know. It really depends on how public it is to some degree. It depends on how often it happens and the context in which it happens.*

*So if you're in a high stress environment, people will “cut you slack” for having some outbursts, but even there if you have it too often and it interferes with work or interpersonal relations, it's a problem.*

*You have the “floor” where you start out in the day, and if your “threshold” is low, you don't need a lot of stresses and strains to get you over that threshold. And so people who have had a terrible day and, then they reach their threshold, explode.*

*Normal people have a very high threshold, so you need a “lot of stuff” to get them over that threshold. But the people that have a problem with it have a low threshold and are predisposed to overreacting when something happens that would irritate anybody.*

**CHETRY:** So how do you treat that? If somebody goes to talk to somebody and they find out they have an anger disorder, what is the next step?

**COCCARO:** *First off, there's a biology, genetics, and neuroscience to these types of problems. They can be treated with a specialized form of psychotherapy, and they can be treated with certain medications, such as Prozac-like drugs. And what the cognitive-behavioral therapy does is it helps you deal with what is in the moment so you have other options of how to respond to what might irritate you.*

**CHETRY:** There was a quiz linked on our blog, and it was an anger quiz. You had to answer some questions -- first of all, your car stalled in traffic and the person behind you keeps blowing his horn. Are you mildly irritated or not at all or extremely upset or very, very upset.

And Jim and I answered these. And Jim and I took all of these, and surprisingly enough we turned out to be relatively peaceful.

**ACOSTA:** The doctor wants to know how we scored. And this was anger management, and not "anchor management."

**COCCARO:** *I took it too.*

**CHETRY:** What did you get? I got 57.

**COCCARO:** *I got an 18.*

ACOSTA: My, goodness!

COCCARO: *Well, my wife doesn't think I'm an 18.*

ACOSTA: Were you conscious when you took the quiz?

COCCARO: *Yes, but I was very peaceful when I took the quiz. And it does depend on what state you're in.*

*Five years ago there was an article that came out and got a lot of publicity and I was on lots of talk shows. And that evening I was in the parking lot at the hospital and somebody was blocking me from getting out and they were screaming at me because I was trying to get through.*

*And I sat there drumming my fingers on the steering wheel because I thought all I need for me to happen is to have an "explosion" so in the papers the next day we see "Anger Doc Explodes in Hospital Parking Lot."*

*(LAUGHTER)*

CHETRY: You were letting your mind rule, not your emotions.

COCCARO: *That's right.*

CHETRY: He got a 51.

COCCARO: *That's normal.*

CHETRY: The things that made Jim angry, like you got upset on one of the questions about you got a stain on your shirt or ripped your pants, and that type of stuff I didn't get angry about. The thing I got most angry about was having to with driving.

So it seems every individual have different triggers. Is it figuring out what makes you mad and being more aware of it?

ACOSTA: And having fewer triggers?

**COCCARO:** *Yes, absolutely. That's what happens in therapy, you find out what the triggers are. My own trigger is somebody treating me as if I am "not important" and "not worth their time". So that's what gets me triggered.*

*But it depends on what state you are in. If you are frazzled that day, being behind somebody who is not moving in traffic is –*

**ACOSTA:** Well, Dr. Coccaro, this was well worth our time and we appreciate it very much. You are important and we do appreciate your time.

**CHETRY:** And our producer said if we don't wrap this up, he will blow, so I can't risk that.

**(LAUGHTER)**

**Dr. Coccaro, great to have you on the show this morning, thanks.**

**COCCARO:** *Thank you so much.*

**CHETRY:** It's 38 minutes past the hour.

**(COMMERCIAL BREAK)**

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