CROSSING THE LINE(S): A DUAL THRESHOLD MODEL OF ANGER IN ORGANIZATIONS

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We present a theoretical model of contextualized anger expression to challenge prominent antisocial, aggression, and individual actor perspectives reflected in the current literature, and we assert that organizational observers' judgments and reactions help determine whether anger results in more negative or positive outcomes. The dual threshold model includes an *expression threshold,* which is crossed when individuals communicate rather than suppress anger, and an *impropriety threshold,* which is crossed if expressed anger violates organizational emotion display norms.

Anyone can get angry—that is easy. . . . but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way, that is not for everyone, nor is it easy (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics:* 1109a25).

Scholars and philosophers have pondered the value and risk of anger expression for centuries (cf. Aristotle, 1992). Recent trends in organizational scholarship increasingly have focused on specific emotions, including anger, to explain various workplace phenomena (Allred, 1999; Brief & Weiss, 2002; Domagalski, 1999; Fitness, 2000; Glomb & Hulin, 1997; Morris & Keltner, 2000; Pillutla & Murnighan, 1997). A number of empirical studies report negative outcomes from anger expression for both individuals and organizations, such as raised blood pressure and heart disease (Begley, 1994), decreased productivity (Jehn, 1995), reduced job satisfaction and increased job stress (Glomb, 2002), and reciprocal anger responses (Friedman et al., 2004).

Less frequent has been research that specifically examines the potential benefits of anger

expression. However, studies show that positive outcomes from expressed anger include problem resolution, increased mutual understanding, improved relationships, enhanced status and power, increased work motivation, and improved attitudes (Averill, 1982; Callister, Gray, Schweitzer, Gibson, & Tan, 2003; Fitness, 2000; Glomb & Hulin, 1997; Kassinove, Sukhodolsky, Tsytsarev, & Solovyova, 1997; Tiedens, 2000; Tiedens, Ellsworth, & Mesquita, 2000). Scholars considering adaptive change and continuous improvement also suggest that anger expressed about organizational problems can highlight critical areas requiring transformation and can provide opportunities to gain competitive advantage by increasing organizational knowledge and learning capacity (Huy, 1999; Kiefer, 2002; Nonaka, Toyama, & Byosiere, 2001).

Despite acknowledgment that both favorable and unfavorable results from anger are possible, less is known about the circumstances that enable either to occur. Models addressing anger expression typically equate these emotional displays with aggression and organizational deviance (Fox & Spector, 1999; Funkenstein, King, & Drolette, 1954; Neuman & Baron, 1998; Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Spielberger et al., 1985), emphasizing only its harmful effects. The dual threshold model presented here is unique in that it distinguishes multiple forms of workplace anger, including nonaggressive expressions, and it offers a theoretical framework that identifies conditions likely to increase the probability of negative outcomes along with those

that may generate a higher probability of positive outcomes from anger expression.

Extant models examining workplace anger also focus primarily on individuals expressing anger, resulting outcomes that those individuals report (Allred, 1999; Fitness, 2000), and the importance of their own emotion management (Gross, 2002; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). Such individualistic approaches to anger expression fail to acknowledge the interpersonal nature of emotion episodes or to consider how anger targets and other impacted participants might influence subsequent outcomes (Averill, 1982; Côté, 2005). The dual threshold model adds perspective to existing models by emphasizing the key role *observers* play in determining whether more or less favorable outcomes will emerge following anger expression at work. We broadly define observers as anger targets and other involved organizational members, including co-workers, subordinates, and/or superiors—as individuals or groups—who judge the appropriateness of anger expression at work. Their assessments, we propose, help generate outcomes that may or may not prove beneficial for either individuals or the organization.

Further, we argue that observers, as well as the angry individual, are influenced by the social context in which they operate—namely, the cultural norms, values, and emotion display rules (Ekman & Friesen, 1971; Kramer & Hess, 2002; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989) that help individuals determine whether or not anger should be expressed and what constitutes an acceptable expression. Rafaeli and Sutton's (1989) seminal model of emotion expression acknowledges that organizations try to teach and maintain certain display rules, but it does not articulate the mechanisms or processes by which organizational members evaluate rule compliance nor the consequences that may result if such norms are perceived to be violated. The dual threshold model proposes that organizational norms establish emotion *thresholds* that may be crossed when employees feel anger. Viewing anger norms from a threshold perspective introduces a new and useful way to explain how organizational members determine display rule compliance and the likelihood they will respond to observed anger with support or sanctions.

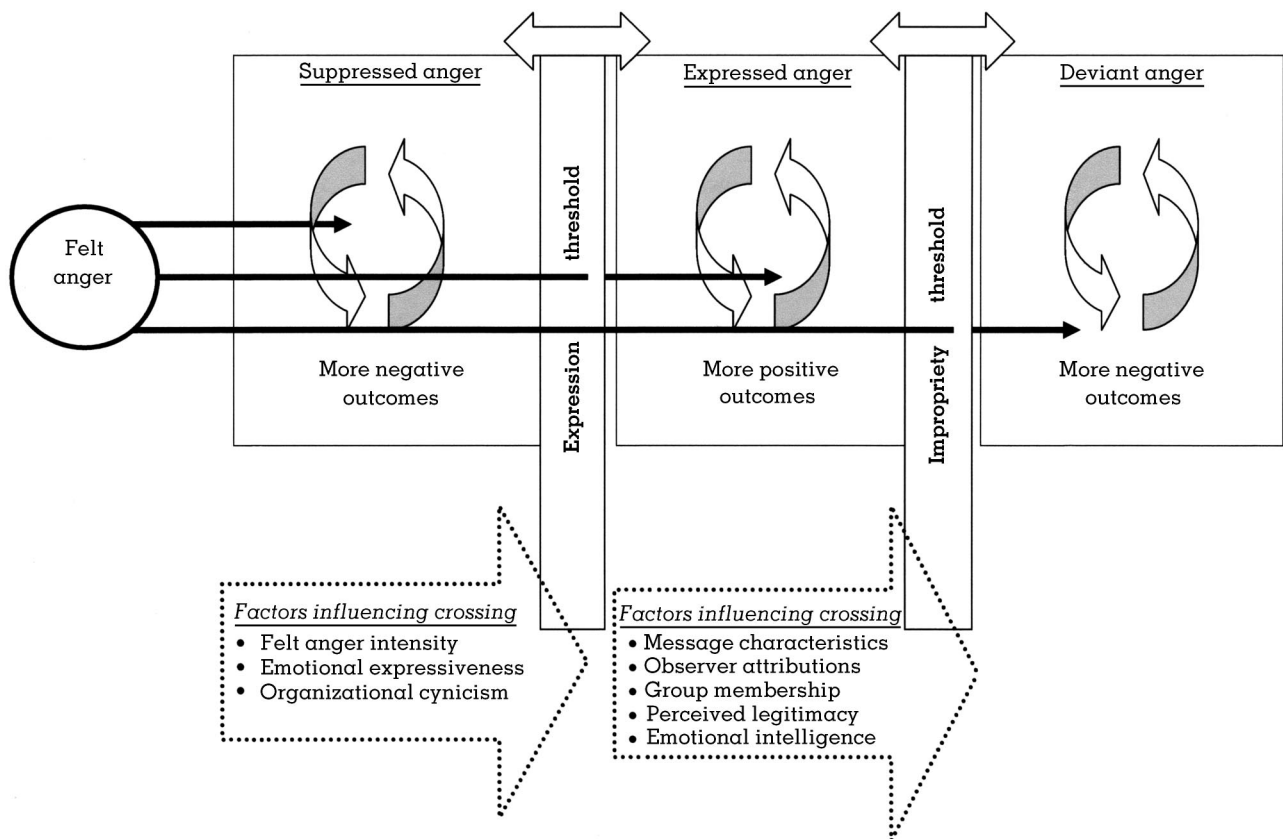Finally, our model draws on a social constructionist perspective of emotion and expression as acquired, socioculturally determined patterns (Armon-Jones, 1991; Fineman, 2000; Hochschild, 1983) and proposes that organizations can alter emotional display norms in ways that result in more positive outcomes from anger expression. We argue that adopting individual and organizational practices toward expressed anger, such as supportive communication (Gibb, 1961; Redding, 1972), compassionate responses (Frost, 1999; Kanov et al., 2004), and bounded emotionality (Martin, Knopoff, & Beckman, 1998; Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Putnam & Mumby, 1993), can create cultures infused with social awareness and responsibility that provide sufficient space to listen to, support, and learn from anger expressions.

THE DUAL THRESHOLD MODEL OF ANGER IN ORGANIZATIONS

The dual threshold model of anger in organizations proposes that two thresholds exist when individuals experience anger in the workplace (see Figure 1). The first, "expression threshold," is crossed when an organizational member conveys felt anger to individuals at work who are associated with or able to address the anger-provoking situation. The second, "impropriety threshold," is crossed if or when organizational members go *too far* while expressing anger such that observers and other company personnel find their actions socially and/or culturally inappropriate. Crossing this threshold is a function of both actor behavior and observer perceptions; thus, there is a type of *actor-observer* interaction inherent in the model. The thresholds and their placement in relation to each other represent emotion display rules and norms operating formally or informally within the organizational context. The thresholds also demarcate three forms of workplace anger: suppressed, expressed, and deviant.

We argue that anger at work is likely to generate a mix of favorable and unfavorable outcomes for organizations and their members; however, a higher probability of negative outcomes from workplace anger likely will occur in either of two situations. The first is when organizational members suppress rather than express their anger—that is, they fail to cross the expression threshold. In this instance personnel who might be able to address or resolve the anger-provoking condition or event (e.g., management, human resources, operations, and/or
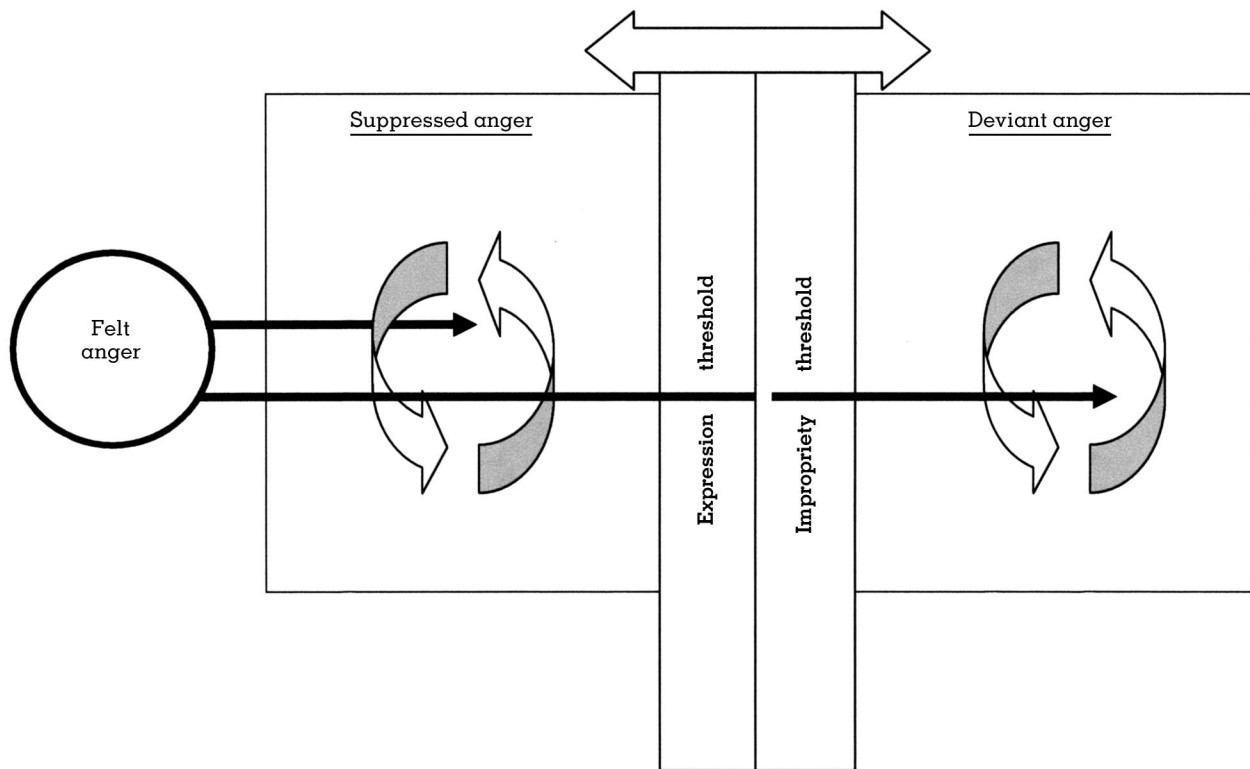
FIGURE 1
The Dual Threshold Model of Anger in Organizations

those responsible for provoking the anger) remain unaware of the problem, allowing it to continue, along with the affected individual's anger. The second is when organizational members cross both thresholds—"double cross"—displaying anger that is perceived as deviant (meaning that one has deviated from the normal and/or acceptable mode of behavior). In such cases the angry person is seen as the problem—increasing chances of organizational sanctions against him or her while diverting attention away from the initial anger-provoking incident. In contrast to the two previous scenarios, a higher probability of *positive* outcomes from workplace anger likely will occur when one's expressed anger stays in the *space between* the expression and impropriety thresholds. Here, one expresses anger in a way fellow organizational members find acceptable, prompting exchanges and discussions that may help resolve concerns to the satisfaction of all parties involved.

This space or "zone of expressive tolerance" (Fineman, 1993: 218) varies and can be expanded or reduced as a result of organizational members' reinforcing or altering norms that support anger displays—expanding the space—or suppress them—reducing the space (see Figure 2). Thus, the thresholds and their relative proximity represent emotion display rules, norms, and practices that influence an actor's expressed anger, as well as organizational observers' perceptions and responses to such displays. Thresholds that are closer together will prompt organizational members to view colleagues' anger expressions primarily as deviant acts requiring punitive responses. Many organizations' emotion display rules implicitly or explicitly proscribe exhibition of negative emotions while performing one's job (Diefendorff & Richard, 2003). When thresholds are farther apart, this allows a more generous space for expressing negative emotion with less fear of formal or informal organizational sanctions. In these envi-

FIGURE 2
The Dual Threshold Model of Anger with Reduced Space Between Thresholds

ronments one might find higher levels of anger expression and/or organizational norms that promote supportiveness, compassion, and tolerance for emotional displays.

The model also identifies factors that influence the likelihood organizational member anger will or will not cross either of the two thresholds. These include various individual, situational, and relational characteristics among organizational actors and observers. Those highlighted in the model include felt anger intensity, emotional expressivity, organizational cynicism, message characteristics, observer attributions, group membership, perceived legitimacy, and emotional intelligence.

Finally, the model includes feedback loops within suppressed, expressed, and deviant anger spaces, suggesting these forms of workplace anger may regenerate, becoming cyclic and repetitive. For instance, deviant anger may generate "spirals of incivility" (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), increasing the likelihood of aggression; suppressed anger may foster "spirals of silence" (Perlow & Williams, 2003) that maintain or in-

crease felt anger; and expressed anger may perpetuate ongoing, emotionally animated, or even "hot" exchanges among organizational members (Thompson, Nadler, & Kim, 1999).

Overall, the dual threshold model of organizational anger provides a unique theoretical framework that complements and extends existing models of emotion displays in the workplace. This model, for instance, focuses on outcomes associated with workplace anger, in contrast to existing models that focus primarily on antecedents of anger (Gundlach, Douglas, & Martinko, 2003; Tiedens, 2000). Further, the dual threshold model builds on previous models of general emotion expression (Clore, Gasper, & Garvin, 2001; Côté, 2005; Morris & Keltner, 2000; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989), but refines the focus to reflect specific conditions and considerations associated with the emotion of anger. This allows us to offer more refining detail and to propose more definitive relationships (see Côté, 2005).

In summary, our model offers a theoretical explanation for why some anger expressions

are more likely to engender negative outcomes and others to result in more positive outcomes. We do this by differentiating anger expressions, acknowledging the impact of organizational observers, and introducing a threshold perspective for explaining the impact of emotion display norms on anger expressions. In the following sections we elaborate on the model and distinguish three forms of workplace anger in relation to the two thresholds; identify relevant individual, interpersonal, and organizational outcomes; discuss factors that influence crossing of thresholds; and propose ways of expanding the space of acceptable anger expression.

Suppressed Anger: Not Crossing the Expression Threshold

According to the model, employee anger that does not cross the expression threshold is suppressed so that the full extent of anger is held back or concealed from others, or it is communicated only to those not in a position to help change the situation. Consequently, the various acts of suppression associated with workplace anger are categorized into one of two levels: silent and muted. Silent anger is an *intrapersonal* phenomenon, in which anger is hidden, unspoken, and more fully suppressed. Muted anger is an *interpersonal* phenomenon in which anger is expressed, but not to those who could make a difference.

Silent anger. Silent anger is felt anger intentionally kept quiet and unspoken. Suppression by silencing one's anger is a form of emotion regulation that involves the "conscious inhibition of emotional expressive behavior while emotionally aroused" (Gross & Levenson, 1993: 970). This intrapersonal phenomenon is similar to the notion of "anger-in" in the psychological literature (Funkenstein et al., 1954; Spielberger, Krasner, & Solomon, 1988), and it may promote cycles of rumination (Tice & Baumeister, 1993) in which employees rehearse the anger-provoking event over and over, but only in their minds. Lower-status employees, in particular, appear to be more prone to conceal or mask their anger from potential observers (Conway, DiFazio, & Mayman, 1999; Tiedens, 2000) and may be so inclined especially if a higher-status employee was involved in the initial anger-provoking incident.

In some instances, keeping anger hidden may not be an individual's preferred response but may nevertheless be a job requirement, as in the case of service encounters associated with emotion laborers (Hochschild, 1983; Kruml & Geddes, 2000a,b; Rafaeli, 1989; Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989; Waldron, 1994). Here, organizational members are hired to manage their emotions to create and maintain desirable customer responses as prescribed by management. In situations that may provoke anger, such as when customers are rude, demeaning, and/or inappropriately demanding, employees are required to refrain from exhibiting any of the anger they may be feeling. This form of suppressed anger typically is exacerbated by the added requirement to display organizationally prescribed feelings, such as happiness and enthusiasm, requiring employees to "fake it" or to engage in surface acting during frustrating encounters with clients.

Individuals inclined or required to silence anger often engage in various cognitive "self-manipulations" or "reappraisals" to try to talk themselves out of feeling anger and to focus on more pleasant thoughts (Stearns & Stearns, 1986; Tangney et al., 1996; Tice & Baumeister, 1993). In these situations individuals may simply desire to avoid negative judgments and emotions toward those with whom they associate or toward the organization to which they are financially bound and/or psychologically identified. For example, individuals may attempt to distract themselves away from perceived offenses by reframing the situation, convincing themselves that the problematic event is not particularly significant or that the target of their anger may have just been "having a really bad day." *Transformed* anger (Lively & Heise, 2004)—anger eventually replaced with another emotion and, thus, eliminated through reframing—is also a type of silent anger if the individual's initially felt anger is kept hidden from others.

Outcomes. There may be some immediate benefits associated with silencing one's anger, including the "walking away" effect, which reduces anger's intense physical arousal (see Gross & Levenson, 1993). Organizations might even benefit if frustrated and angry employees throw themselves into their work and resolve to "just do their jobs." Other advantages may include the generation of more pleasant emotions associated with transforming one's anger through cognitive reframing and reappraisal

(Gross & John, 2003). Reframing the provocation by changing one's perceptions regarding the intentions or culpability of the offending individual or situation may completely eliminate this negative emotional response. With situations less critical to organizational well-being or events that appear to be an isolated incident, calming oneself may even be preferable for both oneself and the organization. Keeping silent when angry may reduce the likelihood and concern that one might have to engage in potentially unpleasant exchanges with individuals liked or respected, as well as those who are feared, such as workplace bullies or volatile bosses. To these employees the perceived benefits of silence outweigh the costs of speaking up or challenging others who might not respond favorably.

Research suggests, however, that efforts to hide or mask negative emotion have detrimental cognitive and physiological consequences, such as impaired incidental memory and increased cardiovascular activation (Richards & Gross, 1999). Silent anger also proves to be a less effective emotion management practice in emotion-relevant situations, especially if it is a regular response rather than one of several options one might consider when angry at work (Gross & John, 1998). Pennebaker's (1990) significant work on the benefits of expressing emotion argues that the most important determinant of whether silencing emotional expression is healthy or unhealthy to individuals is their conflict over its expression. He asserts that detrimental outcomes to individuals are more likely when they have a desire to talk about an event but consciously and actively hold back and do not disclose their feelings. This suggests that outcomes may be even more negative when individuals want to express but feel compelled by fear of negative organizational or personal consequences to silence their anger, in contrast to when the silence comes from individuals' own preference or strategic choice.

Further, when angry employees remain silent and responsible parties never learn of a significant and/or ongoing anger-provoking situation, it is unlikely that the circumstances will improve. Consequently, employee anger is more likely to recur and may actually increase in intensity if the individual continues to recall and relive the initial incident (Tice & Baumeister, 1993), if the offending party repeats the provoc-

ative behavior, or if the problematic situation resurfaces. In the case of workplace bullying, for example, remaining silent under constant harassment enables such individuals, allowing their actions to continue and spread unsanctioned, creating toxic work environments and reducing productivity (Ayoko, Callen, & Härtel, 2003; Einarsen, 1999; Salin, 2003; Vega & Comer, 2005). Over time, silent anger is shown to generate feelings of humiliation, resentment (Perlow & Williams, 2003), demoralization (Vega & Comer, 2005), frustration and tension (Callister et al., 2003; Gibson et al., 2002), and emotional pain (Frost, 2003), taking a serious toll on organizational members' work performance and psychological and physical well-being (Begley, 1994; Gross & John, 2003; Julius, Schneider, & Egan, 1985; King & Emmons, 1990).

By silencing one's anger over organizational conflicts, one also prevents necessary discussions and valuable upward information flow (Waldron & Krone, 1991). Thus, the more serious the initial and/or ongoing offense, the more problematic this suppression becomes. Because fellow organizational members remain unaware of this anger, its impact on organizational outcomes may be less obvious. Nevertheless, employees who are repeatedly angered likely contribute to the statistical figures connected with high turnover and absenteeism rates, as well as low employee organizational citizenship behaviors, commitment, morale, and overall organizational productivity.

> *Proposition 1: When organizational members silence felt anger, the probability of more negative than positive outcomes for individuals and the organization increases.*

Muted anger. In contrast to silent anger, which is intrapersonal and hidden, muted anger is interpersonal and considered an *organizationally* silent phenomenon. This means one's anger is hushed or quieted at work so as not to reach the ears of organization members responsible for or able to redress the situation (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003; Perlow & Williams, 2003; Pinder & Harlos, 2001). Such a response to felt anger has been called "displaced dissent" (Kassing & DiCioccio, 2004) and "indirect expression" (Morrill, 1989), since it is not directed toward the source of the anger but emerges, instead, as venting complaints to supportive and

trustworthy individuals who are, nevertheless, unrelated to the situation.

Angry organizational members who seek emotional support engage in what Lively (2000) calls "reciprocal emotion management" and what Fineman refers to as "the social sharing of emotions" (1993: 217). Complaining privately or not so privately to trusted and sympathetic peers, family, or friends allows individuals to vent their anger to those they believe cannot or will not hurt them. Rather than confront the situation or individual who prompted their anger, these employees deal with their anger by venting to those who will likely accept their interpretation of the situation (Gohm & Clore, 2002). Studies confirm the predominance of this strategy, reporting that most individuals prefer to recount their anger-provoking incident publicly (Fitness 2000; Rimé, 1995b; Simon & Nath, 2004), especially in the company of those who sympathize with their cause and feelings (Tice & Baumeister, 1993).

Outcomes. Although some may argue that *ventilating* anger is cathartic for the individual and helps reduce felt anger intensity, scholars increasingly contend that social venting is largely ineffective in eliminating or reducing negative emotion (Tavris, 1982; Tice & Bratslavsky, 2000). From experiments examining the potentially cathartic affects of expressing anger to unrelated others, scholars found that individuals who vented to an interviewer became more hostile toward the cued target after the exit interview (see Tice & Baumeister, 1993). Nevertheless, given the pervasive tendency to share negative emotion—often repeatedly—with individuals who make up our social networks, it is likely that a potential and powerful benefit of muted anger is emotional support (Rimé, 1995a), including ego validation and self-validation and timely reassurance from one's significant others (Burleson, 2003).

Fineman argues that social sharing of emotion is more than a simple venting of frustrations or a gripe session; it can substantially redefine "emotional material" and contribute to the "emotional texture" of the organization (1993: 217). Unforeseen consequences of muted anger for organizations may include transferring one employee's anger to many individuals originally uninvolved or unaware through emotional contagion (Barsade, 2002; Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1992; Neumann & Strack, 2000). This, in turn, may negatively impact the broader work environment, such as reducing productivity among fellow workers as they become distracted from their own tasks, focusing attention and actions in defense of their offended cohort. Further, socially shared anger may generate "repeated reproduction" or the serial transmittal of messages detailing the employee's emotional episode—often contributing to more exaggerated, negative, and dramatic portrayals of the initial anger-provoking incident (Bartlett, 1932; Rimé, 1995b). Interviews with senior executives and employees indicate that "angry gossip" regarding, for example, organizational insensitivity can spread quickly among employees, contributing to heightened and skewed perceptions of an uncaring, unresponsive management and generating high employee turnover (Perlow & Williams, 2003).

> *Proposition 2: When organizational members mute felt anger, the probability of more negative individual outcomes is somewhat reduced because of perceived social support, whereas the probability of more negative than positive organization outcomes increases.*

Advocacy and surrogacy. There is an important caveat to expressing muted anger to supportive colleagues at work. Employees indirectly expressing anger to their coworkers or mentors may at times promote a discussion of ways to resolve the situation and/or to approach an influential party or source of the problem. In this situation supportive confidants are more than a sounding board—they emerge as advisors or coaches to help the individual confront the crisis. Advisors may help the angry person see the situation differently or perhaps take a particular stance in generating a solution or expressing his or her frustration. Low-status employees may particularly benefit from this exchange, since they are less likely than high-status organizational members to directly express anger to a target (see Sloan, 2004). Relatedly, the individual(s) to whom the employee vents anger may choose to act as his or her surrogate and/or advocate in addressing the anger-provoking situation. In other words, he or she (or they) may speak up on behalf of the angered individual to those relevant to the problem.

In these instances we argue that the anger is *not* organizationally silent. It has indeed crossed the expression threshold because it has reached individuals able to help address the problematic situation. Thus, we propose the following.

> *Proposition 3: When individuals express anger to organizational members who act as advisors, advocates, and/or surrogates, the expression threshold is crossed, thereby increasing the probability of more positive than negative outcomes.*

Factors that influence crossing/not crossing the expression threshold. Whether or not individuals silence or express their anger is a function of various individual, relational, and situational conditions. For instance, the "Big 5" approach to personality highlights the centrality of negative affect to neuroticism, neurotics' tendency to experience anger, and their increased likelihood to use anger expression (including hostility) as a coping response (McCrae & Costa, 1987). In contrast, individuals' preference for privacy or a desire to hide the fact that something or someone upset them may be reflected in their decision to remain silent when angry. Fear of repercussions as well may cause individuals to suppress rather than express their anger in an attempt to preserve their job and dignity, or to avoid additional exposure to individuals or circumstances that make them angry and, thus, uncomfortable. Rather than lose their job, face a bully's wrath, or risk damaging a relationship, they endure silently, trying to physically avoid and/or placate those who provoke their anger. Organizational status also influences whether or not an individual crosses the expression threshold such that lower-level employees are more likely to suppress anger than higher-level administrators (Tiedens, 2000). Beyond these and other considerations, however, we offer three specific factors that we believe play key roles in determining whether or not one crosses the expression threshold, including felt anger intensity, emotional expressivity, and organizational cynicism.

Felt anger intensity. Although anger antecedents are outside the purview of our model, we acknowledge that the more critical or important the event that provokes anger (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), the more likely it will move an indi-

vidual to express negative emotions (Rimé, 1995a). Thus, intertwined with the significance of the initial anger-provoking event is the intensity of anger it arouses in the individual (Domagalski & Steelman, 2005). Felt anger, also called "state anger" (Spielberger, Jacobs, Russell, & Crane, 1983), may vary in intensity from minor irritation to intense rage (Banse & Scherer, 1996), based on the additive effects of four classes of variables: concern strength, appraisals, regulation, and individual propensities (Sonnemans & Frijda, 1995).

Concern strength is the relative importance or magnitude of an event as it relates to an individual's goals, desires, or motives. Appraisals are perceptions that a problematic situation is personally relevant and pertinent to an individual's "need and means to deal with the event" (Sonnemans & Frijda, 1995: 486). Regulation refers to an individual's inclination to enact emotion control or regulation activities in anticipation of problematic responses. And individual propensities reflect individual differences in the degree people generally experience a particular emotion, such as anger. Thus, greater concern strength and perceptions of event relevancy, higher propensity to experience emotion, and lower inclinations to control anger produce greater felt anger intensity. We expect felt anger intensity will significantly impact whether or not organizational members cross the expression threshold by expressing their anger, and we offer the following proposition.

> *Proposition 4: Felt anger intensity impacts whether or not an individual's anger crosses the expression threshold such that higher intensity will increase the likelihood anger is expressed while lower intensity will increase the likelihood anger is suppressed.*

Emotional expressivity. Typically cast as an enduring individual trait (Gross & Levenson, 1993), emotional expressivity is defined as the extent to which people will outwardly display their emotions in a social context (Kring, Smith, & Neale, 1994). This individual difference is believed to reflect the relative success individuals have had expressing emotions and, thus, contributes to their confidence and inclination to emerge as "externalizers"—emotionally expressive—versus "internalizers"—emotionally un-

expressive (Gross & John, 1998; Gross & Levenson, 1993). Consequently, emotional expressivity reflects a degree of social learning from emotion display rule encounters and reveals an organizational member's general tendency to express various emotions at work, including anger.

We recognize as well that there may be emotion-specific expression tendencies as a result of certain personality traits. For instance, neuroticism is often linked with hostile expressions of anger, whereas extraversion is seen as promoting positive emotion expressions (McCrae & Costa, 1987; Tellegen, 1985). For our model we do not limit anger expression tendencies to primarily aggressive anger, likely interpreted as deviance, but instead propose the value of examining one's general comfort level with organizational emotion expression. Consequently, we expect that internalizers will naturally be more inclined to silence anger at work while externalizers will be more inclined to express their anger. Thus, in the dual threshold model, we propose the following.

> *Proposition 5: Emotional expressivity impacts whether or not an individual's anger crosses the expression threshold such that an individual classified as an external will be more likely to express anger while an internal will be more likely to suppress anger.*

Organizational cynicism. Employee cynicism is often characterized as individuals' sense of hopelessness and disillusionment (Andersson, 1996). It is also portrayed as an organizational resistance strategy (Fleming & Spicer, 2003). This characteristic of individuals' attitude and/or relationship to their organization helps explain why some employees remain silent rather than cross the expression threshold. For instance, angry, disillusioned employees may believe or even hope that keeping quiet is the best way for organizational parties other than themselves to experience negative outcomes. Given philosophical differences, previous observations, or personal experience, individuals may decide expressing anger is not worth the time, risk, or the effort—especially if management has been unresponsive in the past (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Wanous, Reichers, & Austin, 2000) and employee distrust is high. We anticipate that organizational members with higher levels of cynicism will be less inclined to

speak up when angry, and we propose the following.

> *Proposition 6: Employee cynicism impacts whether or not an individual's anger crosses the expression threshold such that an employee with a lower degree of organizational cynicism will be more likely to express anger while an employee with a higher degree of organizational cynicism will be more likely to suppress anger.*

Expressed Anger: Crossing the Expression and Not the Impropriety Threshold

When individuals cross the expression threshold and communicate their anger to organizational members who are able to take appropriate action and help resolve the problematic situation, we refer to this action in the dual threshold model simply as *expressed anger*. Our model suggests that in the space between the expression and impropriety thresholds one's anger is apparent to organizational observers but communicated in a way perceived as legitimate or socially acceptable; in other words, it does not cross organizational boundaries of propriety. Within this frame we propose that expressed anger emerges as an emotion-based form of *employee voice*.

Although conceptualizations of voice in the management literature have varied considerably over the years to include such acts as grievance filing, participation in decision making, complaining, and external protests (Premeaux & Bedian, 2003), our view of expressed or "voiced" anger is consistent with Hirschman's classic definition as an expression of dissatisfaction that "attempt[s] to change, rather than escape from, an objectionable state of affairs" (1970: 30; see also Farrell, 1983). It is also compatible with definitions that characterize voice as a *challenging*, proactive, extrarole behavior in which issues and ideas are brought up with the intention of promoting positive organizational change (Van Dyne, Cummings, & McLean Parks, 1995; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Further, we also see expressed anger as a manifestation of *organizational dissent* (Graham, 1986; Kassing, 1997; Kassing & Armstrong, 2002) in which a triggering event sufficiently moves an employee to express disagreement with or challenge existing organizational policies or practices.

Most research examining voice's impact on organizational outcomes does not assess or acknowledge any emotional component or dimension. Further, research on voice as a way to challenge and change problems at work is somewhat limited, although generally linked with positive results associated with organizational citizenship behavior (Deckop, Cirka, & Andersson, 2003; Stamper & Van Dyne, 2001; Van Dyne & Pierce, 2004). The most extensive empirical studies of employee voice can be found among organizational justice scholars, who see this construct as input into salient decision making and problem resolution—again without specifying the relative emotionality of these employee contributions. However, their studies confirm that opportunities to express one's opinion are generally associated with enhanced perceptions of interpersonal, procedural, and distributive justice, group status, and instrumental participation in decision making, as well as improved relationships with management (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001; Lind, Kanfer, & Earley, 1990; Van den Bos, 1999). Research on upward organizational dissent—in which employee expressions more obviously reflect dissatisfaction and negative affect— reports its connection to higher-quality relationships with supervisors, along with enhanced employee satisfaction and organizational identification (Kassing, 2000a,b, 2001). While organizations may be less tolerant of employee voice or principled dissent expressed as anger, if such expressions do not cross the impropriety threshold, the dual threshold model proposes that the probability of more positive (versus negative) results will increase for both the individual and the organization.

> *Proposition 7: When organizational members' anger expressions are viewed as appropriate such that they remain between the expression and impropriety thresholds, the probability of more positive than negative outcomes for the individual and the organization increases.*

While there are many possible factors that determine organizational observers' views of acceptable anger expression, in this section we identify three message characteristics that we believe impact whether or not the anger expression remains in the space between the two thresholds. Specifically, we propose that expressed anger intensity, frequency, and focus of accounts impact the likelihood expressed anger will not cross the impropriety threshold and, thus, lead to more favorable outcomes. We acknowledge their collective impact in Figure 1 as "Message characteristics."

Expressed anger intensity. A relatively neglected area of study (Jones, 2001; Laukka, Juslin, & Bresin, 2005), emotional intensity is perhaps the most salient and managed dimension associated with anger expression. In our model we necessarily differentiate between expressed anger intensity and felt anger intensity (see also Spielberger et al., 1985). As noted previously, significant events that provoke anger will likely enhance felt anger and may ultimately influence the degree of expressed anger. However, in social and organizational settings, expressed anger intensity is often reduced from what is felt (Frijda, Ortony, Sonnemans, & Clore, 1992; Pruitt, Parker, & Mikolic, 1997; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989) in an effort to conform to organizationally prescribed norms. We argue that anger expressions that are not judged as "too intense" stay in the space between thresholds, where more productive exchanges and dialogues are possible.

Scholars assert that for a negative emotion such as anger to function in positive, adaptive ways, its intensity needs to be controlled so as to reflect genuine emotion, without being so excessive it interferes with receptivity of the message (Holt, 1970; Parrott, 2002). Angry individuals reflect and control the intensity of their anger primarily through vocal and facial markers (Banse & Scherer, 1996; Planalp, Defrancisco, & Rutherford, 1996). Nonverbal cues are seen as particularly helpful in identifying emotion intensity (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002a), including paralinguistics—pitch, rate of speech, and volume— and oculesics—eye contact and facial expression (Laukka et al., 2005). Indirect verbal cues (i.e., words or verbal statements that do not directly state the emotion, such as swearing and ranting), body movements and positioning (i.e., tense posture, stomping, jerking limbs), and physiological cues (e.g., crying, flushing, rapid breathing) are also noted by observers (Planalp et al., 1996).

Although research on the implications of anger intensity and outcomes is limited, recent studies show that intense and more physical nonverbal displays, such as slamming doors

and pounding tables, increase the likelihood of more negative outcomes, in contrast to more verbal, less physical, and less intense anger expressions (Gibson et al., 2002). While it appears that reducing intensity promotes more positive outcomes, maintaining some degree of anger intensity may prove to be an asset. For instance, individuals making a serious complaint, pointing out an organizational injustice, or reprimanding a poorly performing subordinate will likely "lose their desired effect if [such actions are] performed with good humor or casual indifference" (Tice & Baumeister, 1993: 402). Thus, displaying a limited amount of intensity cues will likely produce more favorable outcomes, whereas the absence or overabundance of intensity cues will be less effective—the latter condition likely being perceived as crossing the impropriety threshold.

> *Proposition 8: Expressed anger that exhibits lower levels of intensity will be more likely to remain between the thresholds and increase the likelihood of more positive outcomes than higher levels of intensity.*

Frequency. Although workplaces are among the most interpersonally frustrating contexts for people (Fitness, 2000), anger expressions typically appear as an occasional experience rather than a frequent occurrence (Averill, 1982). With increased frequency of individual anger expression, however, observers may respond in different ways. Observers may find the frequency of anger expression increasingly intolerable such that they will ultimately perceive the individual as having crossed the impropriety threshold. Observers may also believe the high frequency of expressed anger by fellow employees is characteristic of their personality—for example, proneness to experience anger (Spielberger et al., 1985)—rather than a marker of serious organizational concerns. When expressed anger is relatively infrequent, observers will more likely attribute such expressions to a problematic situation, rather than personality traits. Tavris recommends that "each of us must find our own compromise between talking too much—expressing every little thing that irritates, and not talking at all, passively accepting the injustices we feel" (1982: 134). Researchers report that frequent anger expression correlates with poor individual health (Keinan, Ben-Zur, Zilka, & Carel,

1992); however, we assert it also negatively impacts one's standing and acceptance at work. Thus, when anger is expressed infrequently, the expresser's message is likely given more credibility among organizational members.

> *Proposition 9: Anger expressed less frequently will more likely remain between thresholds and increase the likelihood of more positive outcomes than frequently expressed anger.*

Focus of accounts. When expressing anger, organizational members may provide an explanation or "account" of their anger. *Accounts* are "discursive constructions of reality that provide organizational members with ordered representations of previously unordered external cues" (Maitlis, 2005: 23), and *causal* accounts, in particular, are explanations for behavior (Antaki, 1994; Bies, 1989; Sitkin & Bies, 1993). Research shows that accounts explaining one's decision or behavior mitigate potentially negative responses by others (Bies, Shapiro, & Cummings, 1988; Weiner, Amirkhan, Folkes, & Verette, 1987; Zillman, Cantor, & Day, 1976), and *good* accounts or explanations are better than weak or no accounts. In the context of the dual threshold model, we suggest that when expressing anger, what will most distinguish a good from a weak (or no) account is the apparent focus of its content—whether it is primarily *alter-centric* or *egocentric*.

Anger-based accounts with an alter-centric focus imply a concern for others, including the organization as a whole. We expect that casual accounts of anger expressions that involve an alter-centric (or more altruistic) focus will include concerns relevant to the organization's mission or values, such as failures in customer service or safety, wasted materials, illegal or unethical conduct by organizational members, and the production of poor-quality products. In contrast, accounts with an egocentric focus reflect primarily personal concerns, such as inconvenience, preventing the accomplishment of personal goals, or blocking professional advancement.

When anger expressions occur with egocentric accounts, we expect the expresser more likely will be seen as self-centered—someone primarily concerned with furthering his or her own interests, career, and well-being—which may influence observers to respond negatively.

When anger expressions are accompanied by alter-centric accounts, we expect that the expresser will be seen in a more positive light, possibly as a team player and protector of others or the organization. Therefore, we expect organizational observers to respond more positively to anger expressions associated with an alter-centric account.

> *Proposition 10: Expressed anger with a greater alter-centric than egocentric focus will more likely remain between thresholds and increase the likelihood of more positive outcomes.*

In summary, expressed anger that remains between the thresholds is more likely to reflect characteristics of employee voice or dissent, rather than employee aggression. We anticipate that when the messages angry individuals transmit to organizational observers contain lower levels of intensity, are relatively infrequent, and reflect an alter-centric focus, the probability of positive outcomes increases for both the individual and the organization.

Deviant Anger: Crossing the Impropriety Threshold

According to the dual threshold model, expressed anger viewed as inappropriate, damaging, and/or unacceptable given the circumstances—in other words, anger displays that *deviate* from organizational norms—crosses not only the expression threshold but also the impropriety threshold. Crossing both thresholds will occur simultaneously whenever the expression intensity or particular anger display is beyond the bounds of perceived propriety. For instance, anger-driven acts considered unacceptable by organizational members or society, in general, such as violence or covert aggression (e.g., sabotage or character assassination), fall into this category. Crossing both thresholds may occur also as a result of progressive or episodic expressions of anger. For instance, what starts as an animated and assertive discussion regarding a problematic situation at work may eventually escalate to inappropriate expressions, such as screaming, foul language, throwing objects, or threatening words and actions.

"Crossing the line" is synonymous with *deviance,* meaning that one has deviated from the normal and/or acceptable mode of behavior. Thus, *deviant* anger exceeds or moves past a socially constructed threshold or standard. Deviant behavior at work, in general, has increasingly received scholars' attention, generating a substantial constellation of undesirable employee activities. The broadest constructs reflecting this research include "counterproductive work behavior" (Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001; Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000) and "deviant workplace behavior" (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Robinson & Bennett, 1995).

However, in calling any behavior deviant, Warren (2003) argues that one must ask, "Deviant compared to what?" According to the dual threshold model, deviant anger or expressed anger that crosses the impropriety threshold may involve actions as seemingly benign as raising one's voice, giving someone the silent treatment, or sending an all-caps email. Such acts typically will not fall under traditional definitions and pursuits of workplace deviance. Thus, in order to better understand what organizational members would consider deviant anger, we need to specify two related factors: the reference group and the standard of comparison or norm, since norms "summarize the behavior of the reference group" (Warren, 2003: 624).

Organizational observers and norms. Numerous reference groups—what we call "organizational observers"—exist within the workplace, each with respective norms regarding appropriate emotional displays. Observers may include, for example, targets of the expressed anger, the workgroup or team, immediate and higher-level supervisors and managers, and members of the department or division, as well as overall organization membership. These organizational observers are also influenced by norms established in broader contexts that include unique cultural, societal, and industry groups. Salient emotion display norms of organizational observers are represented symbolically in our model by the thresholds. Their placement influences anger expression and impacts how these expressions are perceived and judged by organizational members.

We argue that organizational observers' operating value systems and subsequent formal or informal norms significantly impact the ways emotions are experienced, expressed, judged, and managed in the workplace (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Mesquita, 2001). Informal norms

are practiced behaviors, or those regularly exhibited in the workplace, whereas formal norms are expected behaviors that correspond with organizational rules, policies, procedures, and codes of conduct (Warren, 2003). When organizational norms forbid or severely limit anger displays, we argue the dual thresholds are spaced more closely (see Figure 2), whereas if anger displays are more tolerated or accepted by a particular group, the thresholds are spaced farther apart (see Figure 1). Thus, according to our model, the placement of the impropriety threshold in relation to the expression threshold symbolizes emotion display norms or rules and, thus, reflects the degree of tolerance afforded anger displays at work.

If an individual's expressed anger crosses the line of impropriety and is found to be deviant by organizational observers, we believe that more negative than positive outcomes will emerge. In some cases an individual who expresses excessive or deviant anger will later experience feelings of shame or guilt, characterized as "meta-emotions" (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997), which generate further distress and/or cause personal embarrassment. In addition, unacceptable anger displays often result in angry responses (Friedman et al., 2004; Tavris, 1982), where others are more inclined to strike back at the individual expressing anger. An angry individual whose expressions are considered improper is more likely to be labeled as volatile, out of control, aggressive, or unprofessional, thus damaging his or her reputation and perhaps his or her ability to function effectively at work. Once the impropriety threshold is crossed, attention and effort may be directed toward controlling and reprimanding the angry individual and away from issues that may have produced the employee's ire. This response, in turn, increases the likelihood that the initial problem will remain unaddressed and unresolved.

> *Proposition 11: When the impropriety threshold is crossed, the probability of more negative than positive outcomes increases.*

Factors that influence crossing/not crossing the impropriety threshold. Certain individuals who express anger may be given more leniency by organizational observers who perceive and judge the appropriateness of their emotional display. These include those whose anger displays are attributed more to external circumstances than internal traits, fellow reference group members, and individuals with perceived legitimacy owing to formal or informal status. In other words, we propose that these factors will influence whether or not individuals' expressed anger is perceived as crossing the line of impropriety. In addition, while our model emphasizes the important role organizational observers play in determining whether or not expressed anger crosses the impropriety threshold, we also acknowledge organizational actors' role in regulating anger and managing its expression (Mastenbroek, 2000; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989), and we discuss how an actor's emotional intelligence (Mayer et al., 2004) impacts the likelihood expressed anger will cross both thresholds.

Observer attributions. When organizational members witness unexpected or undesirable behavior by others, such as displays of intense anger, attribution theory suggests that they look for ways to explain such conduct (Bradfield & Aquino, 1999; Struthers, Eaton, Czyznielewski, & Dupuis, 2005; Struthers, Miller, Boudens, & Briggs, 2001; Wong & Weiner, 1981). Unique biases exist in determining the cause of some event, depending on whether an individual is the actor or observer in the incident. In the dual threshold model, reference group members act as observers of expressed anger. Research shows causality attributions by observers typically focus on the actor's disposition (Heerwagen, Beach, & Mitchell, 1985; Jones & Nisbett, 1972; Ross, 1977). Actors, in contrast, tend to exhibit a self-serving bias, taking personal credit for successes or positive events and blaming negative behaviors on situational or external factors outside their control (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999; Larson, 1977; Tyler & Devinitz, 1977). Research suggests observers' initial inclinations will be to focus on actors' individual traits for explanations of untoward behavior, in which case individuals are more likely to be perceived as having crossed the impropriety threshold unless other factors help counter this tendency.

> *Proposition 12: Expressed anger that organizational observers attribute to individual traits or dispositions more likely will be seen as crossing the impropriety threshold than expressed*

anger attributed to situational or external factors.

Group membership. Empirical findings tied to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985) show a consistent ingroup bias toward individuals in one's own social group. This reflects a basic motivational mechanism among group members to positively evaluate actions of a valued social group in an effort to enhance their own self-concept (Bettencourt, Dorr, Charlton, & Hume, 2001). Ingroup favoritism and outgroup disapproval are common and create perceptions that another's communication style is comparatively dysfunctional to one's own reference group (Dunkerley & Robinson, 2002). Thus, group membership may promote an enhanced sense of comfort with one's own communication practices (Gallois, 1994), as well as a greater acceptance of expression tendencies by fellow group members. In the dual threshold model we propose that an observer's judgments of whether or not someone has expressed anger inappropriately will be influenced by group affiliation. In other words, when observers consider angry individuals their fellow group members, these individuals will be afforded more leniency when expressing anger at work.

> *Proposition 13: Anger expressed by outgroup members more likely will be seen as crossing the impropriety threshold than anger expressed by fellow or ingroup members.*

Perceived legitimacy. Other factors that might prevent organizational members' expressed anger from being judged as deviant and unacceptable include their character and "likableness" (Bradfield & Aquino, 1999), perceived competence (Tiedens, 2000), unique value to the workplace (Hollander, 1985), and, in particular, their formal or informal standing (i.e., status) in the organization or group (Conway et al., 1999; Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, & Benton, 1992; Lewis, 2000; Lovaglia & Houser, 1996; Sloan, 2004; Tiedens et al., 2000). All such social recognitions (Averill, 1997) help generate credibility, or what we refer to as *perceived legitimacy* (see Suchman, 1995). Thus, when employees are given legitimacy within an organization or social group through reputation, contribution, competence, and/or status, it is more likely that, when they express anger, observers will attribute

their emotional outbursts to significant situational provocations. As a result, these individuals are much less likely to experience the penalties commonly associated with violating emotion display rules. In contrast, those who have not established some degree of legitimacy within the organization (e.g., are new to the organization, disliked, or seen as incompetent or having low status) will not have this benefit, and their anger expressions more likely will be judged as deviant emotional displays.

> *Proposition 14: Anger expressed by organizational members with less perceived legitimacy more likely will be seen as crossing the impropriety threshold than anger expressed by those with a greater degree of perceived legitimacy.*

Emotional intelligence. Whether or not angry organizational members cross both thresholds is a function of their own actions in response to felt anger, as well as the previously discussed observer perceptions. Emotion management is considered a special case of self-regulation or self-control in that an angry individual overrides initial impulses, learned behaviors, and/or innate tendencies by substituting another, often more socially desirable response (Tice & Bratslavsky, 2000). Socially appropriate management of emotions when communicating is increasingly discussed in relation to an individual's *emotional intelligence* (Goleman, 1998; Salovey, Hsee, & Mayer, 2001; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Although scholars of emotional intelligence continue to debate whether this construct reflects an ability (i.e., a set of emotion-processing skills) or a set of traits, competencies, and personality, emotional intelligence is often differentiated according to how well individuals (1) perceive emotions in themselves and others; (2) generate, use, and feel emotion to communicate feelings or facilitate thought; (3) understand emotional information and interpret its meaning; and (4) manage emotions in ways that promote understanding and growth (Salovey & Pizzaro, 2003: 264). This last characteristic is considered the pinnacle of a hierarchy of emotional intelligence characteristics and is seen as an attempt to regulate and express emotion in prosocial ways (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2001; Salovey & Pizarro, 2003).

Empirical evidence continues to emerge regarding emotional intelligence's favorable consequences for both individuals and organizations (Jordan, Ashkanasy, & Härtel, 2003), although some argue more research is needed to overcome an abundance of hyperbole associated with this theoretical framework (Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2004). Recent studies, however, suggest a negative association between emotional intelligence and displaying strong negative emotion. For instance, high emotional intelligence correlates with lower levels of violence and other deviant behaviors (Cobb & Mayer, 2000; Mayer, 2001), whereas lower emotional intelligence is associated with more negative emotional reactions when individuals respond to environmental demands and pressures (Jordan et al., 2003; Matthews, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2002). With regard to the dual threshold model, we propose that individuals who manage and display anger for the purpose of promoting understanding and growth—the highest level of emotional intelligence—are more likely to express anger in a way that remains between thresholds (i.e., does not cross the impropriety threshold).

> *Proposition 15: Emotional intelligence impacts whether or not an individual's anger crosses the impropriety threshold such that higher emotional intelligence will increase the probability that expressed anger will remain between thresholds while lower emotional intelligence will increase the probability that expressed anger will cross the impropriety threshold.*

Observer responses to deviant anger. When an individual's anger expression is classified as deviant organizational behavior, it is more often deemed harmful and/or destructive than helpful and/or constructive to the organization and its members (Warren, 2003). Actions characterized as deviant are often challenged and actors punished in an attempt to reestablish order, behavioral standard compliance, and the status quo. Consequently, individuals whose anger is viewed as crossing the impropriety threshold may have various formal or informal sanctions imposed by organizational observers who consider their anger expression deviant. However, since various organizational observers perceive and judge an angry colleague's anger expres-

sion differently, we expect that sanctions against angry employees will be imposed only by those interpreting their emotional expression as deviance.

Both formal and informal sanctions may result when organizational members' anger expression crosses the impropriety threshold. Formal sanctions, imposed by organizational administrators, might range from oral warnings, written warnings, probation, and suspension to dismissal (O'Reilly & Weitz, 1980). Other examples of formally imposed sanctions may consist of alterations to organizational status, placement, or responsibility, such as demotions, transfers, alteration of job duties, and other punitive actions. We propose, however, that formal sanctions will follow an individual's expressed anger only when organizational members of higher status believe that such actions have crossed the impropriety threshold.

> *Proposition 16: Formal sanctions will be imposed more frequently following organizational members' anger expression when higher-status observers deem the expression crosses the impropriety threshold.*

Organizational observers unable or unwilling to formally sanction deviant anger expression may nevertheless respond with informal sanctions against the individual. Informal or social sanctioning (Goss, 2005), from either managers or fellow employees, emerges in the form of obvious disapproval, avoidance, withdrawal, unflattering gossip, and various disrespectful or aggressive behaviors (Geddes & Baron, 1997). Although many of these may not appear as serious as formal sanctions, such responses to individuals who display unacceptable anger can irreparably harm their ability to function effectively at work. For instance, managers can reassign employees to undesirable projects or eliminate previously available resources (Morrill, 1989). In some cases individuals may be unaware of either the sanctions or the damage to their reputation and/or their ability to function effectively; in other instances it may be painfully apparent.

> *Proposition 17: Informal sanctions will be imposed more frequently following organizational members' anger expression when observers deem the ex-*

pression crosses the impropriety threshold.

We have argued that anger is *not* synonymous with hostility, and, thus, people can express even intense anger without a hostile or malevolent intent as a way to challenge some aspect of organizational life they found offensive (Averill, 1982; Mikulincer, 1998). In such cases this deviant anger may ultimately prove constructive in implementing necessary changes in company personnel, practices, or policy (Huy, 1999; Warren, 2003). However, deviant forms of anger expression can, in fact, be aggressive or, worse, physically violent—meant primarily to be harmful and destructive to the organization and/or its members. Thus, we expect that anger expression seen as aggressive or violent will most likely produce both formal and informal sanctions. Aggression and violence in the workplace are typically condemned by both organizational and societal norms; consequently, targets and other observers likely will be more unified in denouncing such acts. Aggressive anger should not only increase the likelihood the angry individual will receive sanctions but also the sanctions' severity. The common "zero tolerance" policy toward aggressive and especially violent acts of anger typically will produce the most severe outcomes for violators, including ostracism by colleagues and/or termination from the company.

> *Proposition 18: Both the likelihood and severity of formal and informal sanctions will increase toward individuals who express anger that observers find aggressive or violent.*

Organizational observers may not always choose to sanction an individual who crosses both thresholds. They may, in fact, fail to react—perhaps in the hope that the situation will resolve itself and the person's anger will subside. Observers, however, may choose instead to actively respond to the angry employee, but with a supportive rather than sanctioning strategy. A supportive response would essentially entail actions and comments that attempt to bring the discussion back into the space between thresholds—to diffuse the anger to the point that more meaningful dialogue may ensue (Gibb, 1961; Gordon, 1988; Redding, 1972). Thus, supportive responses to anger expressions bring the emo-

tional communication away from deviance, helping produce more positive results for the individual and the organization.

> *Proposition 19: More supportive responses to deviant anger by organizational observers help bring anger expression back into the space between thresholds, increasing the probability of more positive than negative outcomes.*

In summary, our model's dual thresholds help distinguish three forms of organizational anger—namely, suppressed, expressed, and deviant. The placement of the expression and impropriety thresholds determines the relative space or tolerance afforded expressions of employee anger and reflects organizational emotion display norms. With greater space between the thresholds, there is more opportunity for individuals to express anger without the label of deviance, which reduces the possibility of organizational sanctions. Although responses to employees' anger expression that crosses both thresholds can include formal or informal sanctions, observers may choose to respond supportively and retrieve rather than ostracize them or ignore their angry outbursts. In the following section we build on this notion and discuss ways organizational members may generate or alter existing norms to increase the space in which anger expression at work is tolerated.

REPOSITIONING THE EXPRESSION AND IMPROPRIETY THRESHOLDS: EXPANDING THE SPACE BETWEEN

The dual threshold model suggests that organizational emotion display norms can change such that the positions of the two thresholds may shift and the space between them expand. Whether an organization starts with thresholds close together, as illustrated in Figure 2, or more moderately spaced, as in Figure 1, the model proposes that the thresholds can still move farther apart. This phenomenon might actually increase anger expressions, since fewer would be seen as inappropriate (or punishable) by organizational observers. Thus, there are potential risks associated with expanding this space, including the possibility that expressed anger will generate reciprocal responses and increase negative felt and displayed emotion among em-

ployees and workgroups. Nevertheless, we propose that the potential benefits of supporting anger expression make these risks more tenable. For example, an increase in organizational knowledge (Argote, McEvily, & Reagans, 2003; Nonaka et al., 2001) and enhanced organizational learning capabilities (Argote, 1999; Argyris & Schön, 1978) may result from norms that encourage listening to anger expressions and allow angry employees the opportunity to share potentially valuable information about problematic organizational policies, practices, or structures. This could ultimately reduce the likelihood anger-provoking incidents will continue. Such favorable outcomes are much more likely in environments that promote the expression, rather than the silencing or sanctioning, of organizationally generated employee anger. Therefore, we suggest specific ways organizations and their members might influence the space between thresholds.

Norms of Compassion

Organizations are likely to benefit more from expanding the space between thresholds when they develop norms that include compassion for distressed and angry individuals. Compassionate responses may include listening empathically, encouraging honest expression, and/or reframing anger messages from employees before passing them on to intended recipients so as to reduce the possibility of retaliatory actions (Frost & Robinson, 1999). These compassionate acts can potentially defuse anger while enhancing its beneficial effects. Organizational scholars increasingly write about how compassionate responses—actions that reflect empathy and a will to ease an individual's anguish or make it more tolerable—prove beneficial for both individuals and organizations (Frost, 1999; Frost, Dutton, Worline, & Wilson, 2000; Kanov et al., 2004).

Nevertheless, not all anger episodes will benefit the organization, and compassionate responses to anger can drain emotional energy resources (Frost, 1999) as responders try to inhibit a common inclination to respond angrily to anger (Friedman et al., 2004), and to prevent cycles of incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999) or negative emotional contagion (Barsade, 2002). Frost (2003) refers to these responders as *toxic handlers* and cautions that they may be at risk

for burnout and serious health consequences if frequently called on to respond to anger (Frost & Robinson, 1999). Therefore, it is more desirable for organizations to promote and encourage norms of responding compassionately among their entire membership. The collective compassionate responding suggested by Kanov and colleagues (2004) refers to a coordinated behavioral response to emotions within an organization so that feelings of concern are more widely shared. This tendency to respond with compassion toward others can be enhanced as individuals develop stronger feelings of connectedness among coworkers and fellow organizational members (Kanov et al., 2004).

> *Proposition 20: Responses to anger that more frequently include compassion alter norms and expand the space between thresholds, increasing the probability of more positive outcomes when anger is expressed.*

Cultures of Connection

We suggest that the theory of bounded emotionality (Mumby & Putnam, 1992) outlines characteristics of organizational cultures that enable strong connections among their members, furthering the opportunity to express honest emotion in a supportive environment. This theory emphasizes concepts traditionally associated with emotional/feminine characteristics (versus rational/masculine traits), including "nurturance, caring, community, supportiveness, and interrelatedness" (Mumby & Putnam, 1992: 474). We propose that norms generated from this orientation will help expand the space between the expression and impropriety thresholds.

Bounded emotionality norms reflect components such as *intersubjective limitations*, in which organizational members commonly exercise emotional constraint (but not silence) out of a commitment to others and a concern for their subjective well-being. Such constraints emerge from a sense of individual responsibility, not because of managerial dictates. Higher levels of *ambiguity tolerance* allow for recognition of diverse viewpoints and perspectives among organizational members (Martin et al., 1998) and are likely to reduce negative reactions when differing opinions are expressed—even if those view-

points are expressed with anger. In organizational settings that encourage naturally *emerging feelings*, organizational members manage anger expression on the basis of needs (both their own and others) in the relational context, rather than as a result of their occupational status or identity.

These factors collectively contribute to a stronger sense of community (Mumby & Putnam, 1992) so that when individuals express anger, more attempts will be made to understand and empathize with them, rather than to coordinate efforts to sanction or silence them. These attempts to understand may provide favorable outcomes for the anger expresser and the organization, including a higher level of employee camaraderie and organizational commitment.

> *Proposition 21: Organizations that build community and show commitment to the well-being of others by supporting emergent feelings, exercising emotional constraint, and tolerating diversity of perspectives among their members will expand the space between thresholds and increase the probability of more positive outcomes when anger is expressed.*

RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The dual threshold model emerges as an alternative to the antisocial, aggression, and actor emphasis reflected in the majority of the literature on anger expression. That is, we feel the model's robust yet parsimonious framework will help generate a more balanced understanding of organizational anger, incorporating both its antisocial and prosocial potential and illustrating when anger is and is not aggressive or deviant and whether anger expression is potentially constructive or destructive. The model adds organizational observers into the discussion of social responsibility surrounding anger displays, moving beyond a focus on individuals charged with displaying an appropriate emotion to those who judge and sanction their displays. It also answers requests for more contextualized research on emotion, especially anger (Fitness, 2000). Both thresholds and their relative placement symbolize emotion display rules and norms that establish socially constructed

spaces or environments that prevent, permit, or punish employee anger expression. The positioning of these thresholds and resulting size of the space of allowable anger expression may prove useful for categorizing organizations and cultures, ranging from expansive to restrictive, with regard to emotion displays. This feature of the model also may be useful in studying other specific emotions in the social context of organizations. For instance, the model may help explain when fear, envy, pride, happiness, or sadness is suppressed versus expressed, supported versus sanctioned, and helpful versus harmful to the organization.

Overall, we offer the dual threshold model to stimulate empirical research and enhance understanding of workplace anger. For instance, the model helps differentiate three types of workplace anger—suppressed, expressed, and deviant—that could also be viewed and researched as stages or sequences of anger episodes. Scholars could examine the consequences when anger expression transitions to other forms of expression—when suppressed anger escalates to deviant anger, deviant anger becomes suppressed anger, deviant anger subsequently is expressed appropriately, and expressed anger escalates to deviant anger. These anger expression transitions are likely to have different triggers and outcomes, all of which could be investigated. Research could also further examine the effects of formal and informal sanctions and could uncover possible benefits that may result when tolerance and compassion are shown to those whose expressions cross established boundaries of appropriate organizational behavior.

Future research could focus on the role of anger, as well as other emotions, in prompting communication in the organization. For instance, it would be interesting to determine what proportion of unsolicited upward communication is emotion based or what percentage of manager-employee interaction is motivated by anger. Relatedly, to what degree does anger and emotion-based communication actually promote organizational change? Fineman has proposed that examining the differences in zones of emotion expression among organizations and reference groups could help scholars "discover how people come to know they've hit a boundary, what happens when the socially constructed boundaries are breached, and what

happens to the breacher" (1993: 219). We believe that the model described here can facilitate this type of empirical research and redress the tendency of organizations to judge anger (especially anger expressed deviantly) as something problematic about the individual rather than as a signal of an objectionable organizational situation and/or an opportunity to acquire valuable information and perspective.

The dual threshold model is built on available empirical studies of emotion expression largely conducted in North America and Western countries. Nevertheless, we believe it will prove equally beneficial to cross-cultural research on work-centered emotional episodes in countries around the world, as well as in multinational organizations operating globally. Classic studies by Ekman (1973, 1982) and Harré (1986), respectively, established the universality of anger, as well as the role culture and socialization practices play in its relative frequency, intensity, expression, and social desirability (Mesquita & Frijda, 1992; Tavris, 1982). Significant empirical research verifies high cross-cultural accuracy in recognition of anger (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002b) and shows that felt anger intensity remains somewhat constant across countries, whereas reported anger frequency, expression, and acceptance vary significantly (Eid & Diener, 2001; Fischer, Mosquera, van Vianen, & Manstead, 2004). These cross-cultural differences are often attributed to display and decoding rules (Ekman & Friesen, 1971; Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002b; Matsumoto, 1993; Matsumoto & Kupperbusch, 2001) and reflect culture-specific appraisal propensities, regulation processes, and anger behavior repertoires (Mesquita & Frijda, 1992; Matsumoto & Kupperbusch, 2001).

Our model should prove useful in examining such cultural display norms and the comparative "restrictiveness" influencing expressed, suppressed, and deviant anger. Researchers considering culture's impact on generating relatively narrow or expansive spaces for socially acceptable displays of anger could explore similarities and differences in both the quantity and quality of culture-specific anger expressions. For instance, studies of East-West communication styles at work found that anger "indirectness"—messages with content discrepant from the speaker's intentions (Grice, 1968)—occurred less among Americans than Koreans or Chinese (Sanchez-Burks et al., 2003). This raises interest-ing empirical questions about whether cultures inclined or skilled in manipulating anger expressions for cultural purposes, such as face saving or social harmony preservation, may have lower instances of anger episodes classified by organizational observers as deviant—or whether this effect is negated in those cultures that also score high in power distance (Hofstede, 2001), which can allow high-status managers to express extreme anger without sanctions.

Individualism/collectivism remains the most widely used theoretical dimension to explain differences in interpersonal behavior cross-culturally and should prove useful in research adopting this model (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). However, other cultural dimensions could be investigated further to explain cross-cultural differences in emotional expression tendencies and social desirability norms, including uncertainty avoidance and power distance (Hofstede, 2001) and emotionality versus neutrality (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). Future research applying this model also could examine how status within an individual's culture impacts the frequency and consequences of the organizational member's anger expression (see Rafaeli, Fiegenbaum, Foo, & Hoon, 2004) and could explore how cultural differences in the construal of self may lead to more compassionate versus punitive responses to anger that crosses the line of impropriety (see Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The necessity to interact at work has risen dramatically with the increase in team-based projects, matrix and decentralized organizational structures, enhanced customer service expectations, expanded job requirements, and participative management afforded many organizational members. Ironically, a recent analysis of job characteristics and anger shows a significant correlation between the amount of time spent interacting with others at work and the frequency with which individuals experience anger (Sloan, 2004; see also Fitness, 2000).

The dual threshold model provides a useful tool organizations can use to better orient and socialize employees, enhance management training and development, and establish policy regarding emotion expression, including anger,

at work. First, many organizations rely on informal socialization of newcomers to transfer emotion display norms (Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998; Scott & Myers, 2005). If employees learn early, both through formal orientations and informal socialization, that their organization will accept emotion and passion directed toward organizational issues and problems (Meyerson, 2000), they may be more inclined to express concerns quickly and honestly, provide useful upward feedback, participate actively in meaningful dialogues, and respect their associates by exercising appropriate emotion management and supportive responses.

Second, effective management training and development in an increasingly informal and emotional work environment (Mastenbroek, 2000) could help reframe management perceptions of subordinate anger displays. Specifically, managers can be taught that anger may signal organizational changes are needed—that anger may not necessarily be a sign of disrespect. Managers also need to understand that their role and status give them emotional *privileges* (Averill, 1997) that lower-status employees are not often afforded. Minimizing sanctions against employees who express their anger about organizational problems, even if extreme at times, and addressing concerns regarding the anger-provoking situation might not only lead to a fairer distribution of *emotional privilege* (Averill, 1982) but might also demonstrate a willingness to accept and act on employee concerns. This may increase employee trust and reduce cynicism (and silence) toward management.

Third, the dual threshold model proposes that there is potential value in establishing or altering emotion policies and standards (e.g., grievance procedures, codes of conduct, ethics codes, civility statements, etc.) that expand the space between the expression and impropriety thresholds. Although a zero tolerance policy for certain types of anger expression (e.g., violence) is likely appropriate, we suggest that even deviant anger displays may ultimately promote prosocial change (see Huy, 1999, and Warren, 2003). Promoting cultures of connection and compassion further enhances the possibility of positive outcomes for both individuals and organizations.

In conclusion, we assert through our explanation of the dual threshold model that when organizational members are afforded sufficient space to express their felt anger without fear of sanctions by colleagues or management, opportunities may emerge for productive and prosocial outcomes, including the possibility of meaningful dialogue, necessary change, increased organizational learning and knowledge, and mutual respect and understanding. Anger and compassion may ultimately prove to be complementary mechanisms promoting positive organizational outcomes.

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