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**MORAL THREAT OR MORAL ELEVATION?  
A REGULATORY FOCUS PERSPECTIVE ON OBSERVER REACTIONS TO  
ETHICAL VOICE**

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## ABSTRACT

Despite the importance of ethical voice for promoting organizational integrity and social responsibility, employees who consider speaking up about ethical issues are fearful of potential negative reactions from colleagues and managers. A small body of research on limited types of ethical voice (i.e., whistle-blowing, peer reporting of unethical behavior, and moral objection) has traditionally emphasized negative observer reactions to ethical voice. Yet, anecdotes and research on moral psychology imply potential positive reactions to ethical voice. To add clarity to the literature, I offer a definition of ethical voice, distinguish it from related constructs, and develop a model of observer reactions to colleague ethical voice behavior. Integrating regulatory focus theory with research on social cognition and moral emotions, I argue that characteristics of ethical voice (framing, emotional expression, and delivery) serve as situational cues that activate more strongly either the prevention moral system or the promotion system in observers, eliciting either moral threat or moral elevation and hence favorable or unfavorable observer reactions to ethical voicers (support, liking, and status evaluation). I further propose moderators of the effects including context characteristics and observer characteristics. Results of a critical incident survey with a working adult sample largely supported the effects of ethical voice characteristics on observer reactions via moral elevation and threat but results did not support the hypothesized moderations. Research implications and practical implications were discussed.

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## INTRODUCTION

*“We were less enthusiastic about reaching out to JT for things and less social in general towards JT, perhaps out of fear.”*

*“KR received many accolades from our company. KR was seen as a hero to other coworkers afterwards.”*

–Participants in a pilot study

The two quotes above demonstrate two contrasting sets of reactions to colleagues who engage in *ethical voice* behavior, communicating concerns, opinions, ideas, or suggestions regarding ethical decisions and issues in the workplace. Although organizational members who engage in ethical voice can play a critical part in promoting ethical decision-making in organizations (Chen, Treviño, Humphrey, 2020; Mayer, Ong, Sonenshein, & Ashford, 2019), we know very little about how observers respond to ethical voicers and why. Research on ethical voice has largely focused on antecedents of ethical voice (Mesmer-Magnus, & Viswesvaran, 2005) and organizational or managerial responses to ethical voice: Whether the organization or managers pay more attention to and take actions on the ethical issues raised (Mayer et al., 2019; Miceli & Near, 2002) and whether they reward or punish the voicers (Miceli & Near, 1994; Near & Miceli, 1986). Only a few studies have examined coworker-observers' responses to ethical voice (Cortina & Magley, 2003; Park, Bjorkelo, & Blenkinsopp, 2018; Wellman, Mayer, Ong, & DeRue, 2016; Treviño & Victor, 1992) and different relevant literatures have offered mixed expectations regarding observer reactions to ethical voicers, parallel to the two examples above.

A small body of research focusing on limited types of ethical voice (i.e., whistle-blowing, peer reporting of unethical behavior, moral objection in groups) has traditionally offered a pessimistic view of reactions to ethical voice. This literature suggests that observers (especially the wrongdoers) may dislike, silence, and retaliate against the voicer (Cortina & Magley, 2003;



Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003; Miceli, Rehg, Near, & Ryan, 1999; Near and Miceli 1986; Treviño & Victor, 1992). Organizational members also hold implicit beliefs about and are fearful of potential negative reactions from colleagues and managers to voice of any kind (Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Milliken et al., 2003). Yet, the reported percentage of negative reactions in the form of retaliation against whistleblowers ranges widely from 6%-40% according to Miceli, Near, and Dworkin (2008). Moreover, it is unclear that other types of ethical voice would actually lead to these negative outcomes.

In contrast, an emerging body of research in moral psychology provides a counterpoint to these negative expectations by suggesting that ethical voice may lead to positive observer reactions. Research has linked an individual's moral character and ethical behavior to not only positive observer social evaluations such as increased liking of (Hartley et al., 2016) and respect for the actor (Bai, 2017) but also observer prosocial behaviors such as increased helping and volunteerism (Cox, 2010; Schnall, Roper, & Fessler, 2010).

Observer reaction to ethical voicers is important to consider because it influences the voicers' professional, psychological, and physical wellbeing (Cortina & Magley, 2003). In addition, observers can potentially serve as allies of the voicer, helping to increase credibility and legitimacy of the issue and affect managers' and organizations' attention to and resource investment in the issue (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Rehg, Miceli, Near, & Van Scotter, 2008). Moreover, according to learning and social learning theories (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Treviño, 1992), observers' favorable or unfavorable responses can encourage or discourage the voicers' and others' future ethical voice behavior, potentially having longer-term and substantial impacts on group ethical decision-making, organizational reputation, and stakeholder welfare. Without a fuller understanding of observer responses to ethical voice, our knowledge and theories about

consequences of ethical voice are incomplete and we are unable to offer practical advice for would-be voicers and for managers who aim to encourage ethical voice.

Given the aforementioned mixed expectations and the importance of ethical voice, it is critical to examine when and why ethical voice leads to unfavorable vs. favorable observer interpersonal (i.e., liking and status conferral) and behavioral reactions (i.e., support for the ethical voice). I developed a framework to address this question, based on regulatory focus theory and its recent extension to the moral domain (Higgins, 1997). I primarily focused on individual observers inside the ethical voicer's work unit or department (i.e., coworkers) because they interact with the ethical voicer frequently. As a result, their attitudes and behavior toward the ethical voicer can influence important outcomes for the voicer. More specifically, I distinguished the prevention regulatory system and the promotion regulatory system in the moral domain and proposed key factors that determine whether the promotion or prevention system dominates and therefore the extent to which favorable or unfavorable reactions are elicited in observers. I conducted an empirical study to test a part of this framework, using the critical incident survey technique.

The remainder of the dissertation unfolds as follows. I first offer an overview of ethical voice (including differentiating it from traditional voice) and previous research that falls under this umbrella. I then review research on reactions to ethical voice and introduce my research question. Next, I introduce regulatory focus theory and its recent extension in the moral domain and develop my hypotheses. Finally, I report an empirical study to test them and discuss results of the study and the theoretical and practical implications.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Ethical Voice

#### Ethical Voice and Voice

Ethical voice can be viewed as a subtype of the broader construct prosocial voice behavior. Morrison (2014) defines prosocial voice behavior as “informal and discretionary communication by employee of ideas, suggestions, concerns, information about problems, or opinions about work-related issues to persons who might be able to take appropriate action, with the intent to bring about improvement or change.” Morrison (2014) noted that the different voice behaviors can be intended to protect interests of different stakeholders, including one’s workgroup, organization, or other stakeholders such as customers, community, etc. This definition implies that speaking up about ethical issues (i.e., issues affecting welfare of stakeholders or the society beyond the workgroup or the organization) is one particular type of prosocial voice behavior.

Although ethical voice can be viewed as one type of prosocial voice behavior as broadly construed by Morrison (2014), the voice literature has traditionally focused on voice regarding routine, operational issues, ones related to workgroup or organizational efficiency or effectiveness, while paying almost no attention to voice regarding ethical issues. This is reflected in earlier definitions of voice (e.g., Morrison (2011) that emphasized “the intent to improve organizational or unit functioning”) and operationalization of voice (e.g., LePine & Van Dyne’s (1998) measure that emphasized “ideas for new projects or changes in procedures”; Maynes & Podsakoff’s (2014) measure that highlighted “ideas for new or more effective work methods”). Therefore, it is important to distinguish ethical voice from what has been traditionally focused on in the voice literature (i.e., what I label *traditional* voice).

An important distinction between traditional voice and ethical voice is the underlying motives involved. As emphasized in its definition, traditional voice is aimed at improving unit or organizational functioning (Morison, 2011). Its intent is pro-group or pro-organizational. This pro-group or pro-organizational emphasis can be traced back to Van Dyne and colleagues' initial conceptualization of voice behavior as a type of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), which is grounded in the civic citizenship literature in political philosophy (Van Dyne, Graham, & Dienesch, 1994). According to the civic citizenship literature, citizenship behavior is based on the high-quality, communal relationship between individuals and the group or the organization, characterized by open-ended commitment, mutual trust, and identification. Individuals in a high-quality relationship with their organizations are intrinsically motivated to contribute to the organization. The quality of the relationship between individuals and their organizations (e.g., justice, social exchange, attachment to organization, engagement) has been identified as an important antecedent of OCBs, including traditional voice behavior (Burriss, Detert, Chiaburu, 2008; LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Van Dyne, Kamdar, & Joireman, 2008).

Although traditional voice behavior aims to benefit the group or the organization, it does not necessarily aim to uphold ethical principles (Warren, 2003). As Liang, Farh and Farh noted, "voice...is born out of a desire to help one's organization...rather than out of... personal moral norms or legal principles" (2012, p. 76). In contrast, ethical voice is intended to uphold ethical principles or values that are commonly adopted by the greater society, or to protect the welfare of stakeholders or the society as a whole, rather than the organization or the work unit. Although the label 'ethical voice' has rarely been used (see Huang & Paterson, 2017), the idea of speaking up or standing up for ethical principles or the greater good has been addressed in multiple literatures including bystander intervention (Darley & Latané, 1968), whistle-blowing (Near &

Miceli, 1985), principled organizational dissent (Graham, 1986), moral objection (Monin, Sawyer, & Marquez, 2008; Wellman et al., 2016), third-party reactions to injustice (Skarlicki & Kulik, 2004), tempered radicals (Meyerson & Scully, 1995), moral courage (Detert & Bruno, 2017; Sekerka & Bagozzi, 2007) and heroism (Allison & Goethals, 2011; Franco, Blau, & Zimbardo, 2011). See Table 1 for definitions of selective constructs, theories used, and relationships between these constructs and ethical voice. The fundamental commonality across these literatures is the emphasis on moral motives and ethical decision-making processes. For example, the idea of speaking up for ethical principles seems to have first appeared in theoretical reviews on whistle-blowing (Dozier & Miceli, 1985) and principled organizational dissent (Graham, 1986). In both literatures, authors proposed that the behaviors involved are driven by deep concerns for ethical values and principles and both literatures ground their theoretical models in ethical decision-making research, highlighting the importance of ethical awareness (or perceived seriousness of a wrongful act) and ethical judgment as antecedents of the behavior. As shown in Table 1, other literatures similarly emphasize cognitive and/or affective moral motives as driving forces of the behaviors. For example, moral emotions such as moral outrage are emphasized in the third-party reaction to injustice literature (Folger, 2001), while identification with ethical values or worthy ‘causes’ is emphasized in the tempered radicals (Meyerson & Scully, 1995), and issue selling literatures.

Unlike traditional voice, ethical voice may or may not be based on a desire to do what is in the best interest of the organization or work unit or to help improve organizational or work unit efficiency (Spretizer & Sonenshein, 2004). As Dozier and Miceli (1985) pointed out, whistle-blowers often experience a conflict between loyalty to the group or organization, and their responsibility to society. Speaking up about ethical issues often requires prioritizing

responsibility to other stakeholders or society over obedience and loyalty to the group or organization. Ethical voice may only be considered ‘pro-organizational’ or ‘pro-group’ when the organization’s or group’s norms or benefits are aligned with hypernorms—universally held, fundamental values or ethical principles (Donaldson & Dunfee, 1999; Warren, 2003).

These distinctions between ethical voice and traditional voice imply that they may engage different psychological mechanisms in the audience and have differential consequences for the actors. Because traditional voice concerns group or organization functioning and efficiency, it tends to trigger evaluative processes in observers concerning whether the ethical voice is constructive for the group or organization (Burriss, 2012; Whiting, Maynes, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2012). Given that ethical voice concerns fundamental values and ethical principles and that morality plays a central role in one’s self-concept and evaluation (Aquino & Reed, 2002), ethical voice may not only involve group- or organization-focused evaluative processes but also involve self-related psychological processes in observers and hence trigger more intense observer reactions. Therefore, it is important to examine the unique reactions toward ethical voice and the psychological mechanisms underlying reactions to the voice and the voicer.

### **Domain of Ethical Voice**

Integrating the multiple existing constructs and incorporating both deontological (which emphasizes norms, standards, and values) and consequentialist (which emphasizes consequences – harms and benefits) definitions of ethical conduct, I define ethical voice as “*communication by an organizational member of suggestions or concerns about ethical issues in the workplace to uphold societal ethical standards or promote the welfare either of the greater society or of stakeholders beyond the workgroup or organization.*” Ethical voice can be directed to colleagues, supervisors, senior management, or a third-party outside of the organization such as

the media or government agencies that can potentially take actions regarding the issue. This definition encompasses the existing narrower constructs, including not only communication about concerns and information about unethical behavior (i.e., whistle-blowing, principled organizational dissent, third-party reaction to injustice) but also communication about new ideas and suggestions to do something good (i.e., selling ethical issues, tempered radicalism).

Although I have argued that ethical voice is primarily driven by a moral motive, other motives such as benefiting oneself and benefiting the group or organization may also motivate ethical voice behavior. For example, a single mother advocating for an on-site daycare may be focused not only on benefiting other single mothers in the company but also on benefiting herself. In a highly competitive setting, ethical voice might also be driven by a darker motive to advance oneself by putting down competitors. However, this might be a rare case, because ethical voice itself is also risky, potentially damaging the voicer's own image and social standing. Sometimes, ethical voicers may want to protect or advance organizational image and reputation. For example, a manager advocating for waste reduction may not only hope to protect the environment but also hope to boost organizational image.

Therefore, although the voicers communicate ethical issues, the label ethical voice does not imply the behavior is ethical in the eyes of observers. Although researchers consider ethical voice to be extraordinary ethical behavior—behavior that goes beyond society's moral minima (Treviño, den Nieuwenboer, & Kish-Gephart, 2014), I argue that the nature of ethical voice is more complex. When ethical voice is required by organizations for certain roles (e.g., auditors are required to report organizational accounting frauds; teachers are required to report child abuse), ethical voice might also be routine ethical behavior according to Treviño et al.'s (2014) definition—behavior that meets the minimum moral standards of society. In this latter case,

choosing not to engage in ethical voice (silence) should be considered as unethical behavior—behavior contrary to minimal moral standards (Treviño et al., 2014). Moreover, observers may use a different set of criteria other than societal moral norms to judge the voicer's behavior. They may use local moral norms (group or organizational norms regarding ethical voice behavior) rather than societal standards to judge ethical voice. They may also judge the ethical voice behavior based on the perceived motives and intentions of the voicer—whether the voicer is perceived to be self-interested or other-oriented. Therefore, ethical voice is not necessarily perceived to be an ethical behavior by observers.

### **Observers' Reactions to Ethical Voice**

It is critical to accurately understand how observers react to ethical voice because potential voicers often hold pessimistic beliefs about ethical voice outcomes including concerns about risks to their image, relationships with colleagues and career outcomes (Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Milliken et al., 2003). Therefore, they are reluctant to engage in any type of voice (Kish-Gephart, Detert, Treviño, & Edmondson, 2009). However, lay theories might be biased or mistaken as research findings show that voice is not always related to negative outcomes and is sometimes even related to positive ones (Chamberlin, Newton, & Lepine, 2017; Chen et al., 2020). If lay theories about the reactions associated with *ethical* voice are also wrong, it may allay the fear felt by potential ethical voicers and empower them to act upon their ethical inclinations, contributing to societal welfare. Thus, it is important to examine how work unit observers actually react to the ethical voice and voicer.

### **Typical Focus on Negative Observer Reactions to Voice**

Our current understanding of others' reactions is limited almost exclusively to research on whistle-blowing, moral objection, and confrontation of discrimination and prejudice. In the



whistle blowing literature, Miceli and Near (1992) proposed that whistle-blowers can either be treated the same as before, rewarded, or retaliated against. Yet, negative reactions (as opposed to neutral or positive ones) have been the primary focus in whistle-blowing research and many employees expect that they will face retaliation (Miceli et al., 2008). Both managers' and coworkers' reactions have been studied empirically (Cortina & Magley, 2003; Miceli et al., 2008). Management and supervisors' reactions are usually work-related, more formal, tangible actions against whistle-blowers, whereas coworker reactions are often informal social sanctions, including attitudes and verbal or non-verbal behaviors such as dislike, harassment, threat, ostracism, or the "cold shoulder" treatment (Miceli et al., 2008).

Whistle-blowing researchers have drawn on several theoretical perspectives to explain why and when whistleblowers are reacted to negatively. The most highly cited perspective is the power perspective (French & Raven, & Cartwright, 1959; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). According to this perspective, when whistle-blowers possess less power (e.g., resource, expertise and skill, referent power) than the wrongdoer(s) or when organizations depend more on the wrongdoers or the wrongdoing for important resources, whistle-blowers are especially likely to suffer adverse consequences. Another emphasized perspective is group norm enforcement (e.g., Treviño & Victor, 1992). Loyalty is generally considered to be an important norm in groups or organizations (Fiske, 1992). Groups tend to enforce this norm by sanctioning disloyal members, ostracizing them or expelling them from the group (Feldman, 1984). Therefore, 'disloyal' whistle-blowers who report coworker misconduct outside the group to upper management or third-parties are likely to be socially punished by coworkers.

Complementing whistle-blowing research, the moral objection (dissent) and confrontation of discrimination literatures build on a threat perspective to study negative

reactions to moral objectors (Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006; Monin, 2007; Monin et al., 2008; Wellman et al., 2016). Researchers propose that the moral objection or confrontation behavior (implicitly) questions observers' moral self-regard and makes them feel morally inferior in comparison to the dissenter or confronter. To reduce this self-threat, individuals tend to derogate the actor. Supporting this view, researchers have found that moral dissenters who objected to an ethically questionable request tend to be liked less and rated as less warm by participants who went along with the unethical behavior (Monin et al., 2008).

Research reviewed so far seems to support the pessimistic lay beliefs about ethical voice suggesting that others react negatively to ethical voice. However, given the limited set of ethical voice behaviors studied thus far, it is not appropriate to generalize the conclusion to all kinds of ethical voice. In addition, many studies reviewed here focus on reactions of individuals who are themselves wrongdoers or are affiliated with wrongdoers. For example, the retaliation studied in whistle-blowing research is primarily enacted by wrongdoers or people affiliated with them (Miceli and Near, 1992). Participants in moral objection research are primed and incentivized to comply with an unethical research request (writing a discriminatory essay based on instructions) (Monin et al., 2008). Participants in studies on confrontation of prejudice and discrimination are mostly members of dominant social groups (e.g., white, male, heterosexual) (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Czopp et al., 2006; Martinez, Hebl, Smith, & Sabat, 2017). Therefore, their attitudes and reactions toward the voicers do not necessarily represent how other, non-implicated observers perceive and react to ethical voice.

### **A Focus on Positive Reactions**

In fact, anecdotal evidence and recent research suggest that ethical voicers do not always suffer. They may sometimes even benefit from standing up for what is right, gaining admiration

and respect from observers and being regarded as leaders in the group or organization. For example, Elizabeth Whalen, an intern at Columbia Forest Products, the largest manufacturer of hardwood veneer and hardwood plywood in U.S., advocated for replacing the widely used yet toxic plywood glue with a newly discovered non-toxic alternative. Despite initial resistance from the company and the industry, she persisted because she did not want to “see more people die.” She eventually succeeded in gaining upper management support and introduced its non-toxic products into the marketplace, which also led to a successful career for her. In another example, Darcy Winslow, an exercise physiologist at Nike’s research lab, concerned by male parochialism in the company’s sports design and development processes, spent years ‘selling’ inclusion initiatives to management. Despite initial resistance, management eventually endorsed her idea and tasked her to lead the new successful division of Global Women’s Fitness, putting her in charge of changing how the company sells to, designs for, and communicates with women. She inspired many colleagues and subordinates to join the change effort.

In addition to those anecdotes, research on person perception and moral psychology suggest that ethical voice may bring beneficial consequences for the ethical actor, increasing observers’ liking of and respect for the actor. The person perception literature finds that morality, “*an individual’s characteristic patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior associated with moral/ethical and immoral/unethical behavior*” (Cohen, Panter, Turan, Morse, & Kim, 2014, p. 944), is the most important driver of perceptions of others, distinct from competence and warmth (Goodwin, 2015; Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014; Landy, Piazza, & Goodwin, 2016; Leach, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2007; Stellar & Willer, 2018; see Goodwin, 2015 for a review). Perceived morality predicts overall impressions of and affective responses to (e.g., attraction, liking, respect) friends and acquaintances (Hartley et al., 2016), strangers (Landy et al., 2016), group

members (Leach et al., 2007), organizational leaders (Pagliaro, Brambilla, Sacchi, D'Angelo, Ellemers, 2012), and political leaders (Pancer, Brown, Barr, 1999). Research also shows that moral virtues lead to status conferral of the actor (Bai, 2017; Bai, Ho, Yan, 2020). Thus, ethical voice that signals voicer moral virtues, may lead to those positive observer reactions.

Furthermore, this body of research suggests ethical voice may not only lead to positive interpersonal reactions but it may also change observer behavior in a positive way. Recent research shows that observing another's extraordinary ethical behavior can motivate observers to engage in prosocial behavior in the future (Freeman, Aquino, McFerran, 2009; Schnall & Roper, 2012; Schnall et al., 2010). Research on moral emotions shows that individuals experience moral elevation after witnessing acts of ethical excellence (e.g., generosity, benevolence, bravery, justice, forgiveness), a positive discrete emotion in observers, characterized by feeling moved, inspired, or "elevated" in some way, admiring and respecting the actor, and desiring to become better persons themselves (Haidt, 2003). This suggests that ethical voice may positively impact observers, motivating prosocial behaviors in observers and potentially having profound impacts on the organization and society.

## **THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **Current Research**

Those potential positive effects of ethical voice contrast sharply with lay theories of ethical voice and past research findings on whistle-blowing, moral objection and confrontation. Given these mixed expectations, it is critical to understand when observers are likely to react more or less favorably to ethical voice, why observers react differently, and what causes these differential reactions. Examining those questions will not only add more clarity to the ethical voice literature but will also contribute to better integration of the different literatures related to ethical voice. Furthermore, examining these research questions has important practical implications for potential ethical voicers and organizations hoping to encourage more ethical voice behavior.

As we can see, research that associates negative consequences with ethical voice tends to emphasize ethical voice as a threat (i.e., providing negative feedback about morality of observers and their groups). In contrast, research that associates positive consequences with ethical behavior would consider ethical voice to be a manifestation of moral virtue. Integrating these two seemingly conflicting perspectives, I argue that the extent to which a given act of ethical voice is perceived to represent a threat or a virtuous act is likely to determine the nature of observer reactions. Below, I propose a framework to understand when and why ethical voice is perceived and reacted to favorably or unfavorably. Specifically, I focus on two sets of reactions based on my review of related literatures: Interpersonal reactions to the voicer (i.e., liking, status conferral) and behavioral reactions to the act of ethical voice (i.e., support for the ethical voice).

I argue that the threat vs. virtue perceptions of ethical voice are rooted in the distinction between prevention-based and promotion-based morality. Prevention-based morality has been

long emphasized in the behavioral ethics literature. This is evidenced in major ethical decision-making theories that emphasize obeying rules, and adhering to principles and norms (e.g., Jones, 1991; Haidt, 2001). This emphasis implicitly presumes that morality is an ‘ought’-based system inhibiting wrong behavior and obliging right behavior. Yet, those literatures have largely missed promotion-based morality that strives for virtue and moral excellence. These two systems of morality have long been recognized by moral philosophers. For example, Rawls (1971) noted the distinction between ‘the Good’ and ‘the Right.’ Taylor (2007) also differentiated ‘what an agent ought to do’ and an ethics of virtue. The dual systems of morality have also been discussed by a motivation psychologist (Higgins, 1987, 1997) and recently have been revisited by moral psychologists (Cornwell & Higgins, 2015; Janoff-Bulman et al., 2009; Wiltermuth, Monin, & Chow, 2010). Because the two systems are largely rooted in Higgins’ (1997) regulatory focus theory, I draw from the original regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997) as well as its recent extension to behavioral ethics (Cornwell & Higgins, 2015) to explain how ethical voice is likely to be perceived and how observers will react. Further, I build my arguments by connecting regulatory focus theory with relevant literatures such as social cognition (Fiske & Taylor, 2013), moral emotions, moral identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Blasi, 1983), and self-concept maintenance (Sedikides & Strube, 1997; Tesser, 1988). My proposed model is presented in Figure 1.

### **Overview of the Model**

Drawing on regulatory focus theory, I argue that ethical voice has the potential to activate observers’ prevention regulatory system or promotion regulatory system in the moral domain. On one hand, ethical voice can be driven by a desire to change the unsatisfactory status quo. Therefore, ethical voice may remind observers of unfulfilled moral duties and obligations and

activate the prevention regulatory system, triggering negative affective states such as moral threat. On the other hand, ethical voice is highly discretionary and challenging, often requiring the voicer to go the extra mile to stand up for ethical principles and societal welfare. Therefore, ethical voice can be viewed as a highly virtuous behavior. This in turn activates observers' promotion regulatory system and triggers positive emotions such as moral elevation. I argue that the dominance of either the prevention or the promotion system and the nature of emotions triggered is jointly determined by characteristics of the voice behavior, context, and the observer.

Finally, I argue that the two different affective states lead to inhibition and approach responses in observers respectively. Moral threat is less likely to motivate observers to actively support the ethical voicer in voicing the issue but moral elevation is more likely to motivate supportive behavior. Moral threat likely leads to defensive reactions to maintain observers' self-concepts, reducing their liking for and status evaluation of the voicer. In contrast, moral elevation likely results in interpersonal approach behavior, where observers admire and praise the voicer and increase liking and status evaluation of the voicer.

Below, I first introduce regulatory focus theory and its extension to the moral domain, and explain the different affective states associated with the two moral regulatory systems. I then discuss factors that influence dominance of the systems and how they shape observer affects. Finally, I explain how affective states are likely to influence interpersonal reactions to the ethical voicer (liking and status evaluation) and behavioral reaction to ethical voice (support).

### **Regulatory Focus Theory, Observer Affective States, and Reactions**

The central tenet of regulatory focus theory proposes that two motivation systems (or foci) regulate individual behavior. The two regulatory systems are associated with different motivations and desired end-states and are sensitive to different situational cues. The first

system– the *promotion* system is concerned with approaching better outcomes and advancing ideals, hopes, aspirations (i.e., what one would *ideally* like to achieve). This system is sensitive to the (presence and absence of) positive outcomes or gains. It motivates individuals to eagerly *approach* a better, more ideal state than the status quo. The second system–the *prevention* system is concerned with meeting duties and obligations (i.e., what one ought to do or should do). This system is sensitive to (absence and presence of) negative outcomes or losses. It motivates individuals to vigilantly maintain a satisfactory status quo and *avoid* an undesirable state. Applied to the moral domain, Cornwell and Higgins (2015) proposed that the promotion system focuses on moral ideals or virtues and motivates ‘good deeds’ that go beyond current moral standards. This system is more desire-based and discretionary. The motivated good deeds are not mandated by laws or moral principles. In contrast, the prevention system deals with moral oughts (obligations and rules) and motivates behavior preventing moral transgressions or harm to others. This system is more duty-based and mandatory. The motivated behaviors are prescribed by laws (e.g., anti-bribery, anti-discrimination) or moral standards (e.g., fairness, no harm).

Those two systems can be activated by situational cues that contain information about promotion-related goals and outcomes and prevention-related goals and outcomes respectively (Higgins, 1997). In the workplace, such information can be communicated through feedback from colleagues and supervisors (language and symbols), assignment instructions, and formal and informal aspects of organizational culture. (Brockner & Higgins, 2001). I argue that ethical voice serves as a situational cue, with the potential to more strongly activate either of the systems in observers and elicit either negative or positive affective states and reactions.

### **Prevention System and Moral Threat**

Ethical voice can activate the prevention system because it may signal to the observers



that they or their group is deviating or has deviated from moral standards. Voicers engage in voice behavior often because the status quo falls below their expectations (Morrison, 2011). For example, advocates of gender equity initiatives are motivated to act because the organization or group has failed to act in accordance with the universal ethical principle of fairness. Signaling failure of the observer or their group members to meet minimal moral standards, ethical voice may lead to negative affective states in observers such as felt moral threat—fear of anticipated negative evaluations and disapproval from others (Higgins, 1987). By calling out the ethical issue, the ethical voicer implicitly questions the morality of others who have not done so. The ethical voicer may make the silent observers feel badly in comparison (Monin, 2007). Even if the ethical voicer does not intend to criticize the observers, observers may infer negative judgment and moral reproach from the voicer (Monin, 2007). In addition to self-based moral threat, group-based moral threat can arise. Due to the social nature of human beings, the self includes not only one's personal self but also social aspects of the self (one's relationship with others and the social groups to which one belongs) (Brewer, 1991). Therefore, negative evaluations of the group or some group members also reflect on oneself. This means that threat can also arise when one anticipates negative evaluations of closely related others or the group (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). Ethical voice, aimed at changing the unsatisfactory status quo, may cast doubt on behaviors of some group members or the entire group and implies their responsibility, likely making the group as a whole appear to be unethical. Therefore, observers who are associated with the group are likely to feel more threatened.

### **Promotion System and Moral Elevation**

Yet, ethical voice also has the potential to activate the promotion motivation system in observers. Going out of their way to advocate for societal or stakeholder welfare, ethical voicers

essentially demonstrate humanity's 'higher' or 'better' nature that observers would ideally like to possess. This excellent moral act likely reminds observers of their own potential to improve their moral self and approach moral ideals, activating observers' promotion regulatory system.

Higgins has noted briefly that the *prospect* of or the *potential* for achieving an ideal goal leads to positive affective states such as eagerness and hope (Higgins, 1997). I argue that observers of ethical voice may experience moral elevation (Haidt, 2003) in particular, a self-transcendent emotion triggered upon witnessing others' strong moral acts that benefit others such as charitable, self-sacrificing behavior (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Haidt, 2003). It involves a unique pattern of affective experience, physical reactions, cognitions, and motivations. The affective experiences include feeling moved, inspired, or "elevated" in some way and having warm, open, and pleasant feelings in the chest. The cognitions involve recognition and awareness of moral ideals ("The world is full of kindness and generosity," "The actions of people are admirable," Aquino, McFerran, & Laven, 2011) and the motivations involve desire to approach the moral ideal goals ("I want to become a better person," "I want to be more like the person," Aquino et al., 2011; Schnall & Roper, 2012). I argue that ethical voicers who are seen to go out of their way to advocate for societal or stakeholder welfare will be associated with moral elevation in observers.

### **Dominance of the Moral Regulatory Systems**

Although ethical voice has the potential to trigger the two systems and hence two sets of affective states, the extent to which the promotion system or the prevention system predominates may vary substantially between acts of ethical voice, observers, and contexts. Because the two systems are sensitive to moral promotion or prevention information respectively, I argue that the dominant regulatory focus and hence the resulting emotions are influenced by the extent to

which the ethical voice is perceived to emphasize moral prevention information (past or ongoing ethical transgressions and the obligation to avoid transgressions) vs. moral promotion information (benefits for society or stakeholders and opportunities to achieve moral ideals). Whereas ethical voice seen to highlight the former alerts observers to their moral failures and is therefore more likely to activate their prevention system and elicit moral threat, ethical voice seen to emphasize the latter reminds the observer of moral ideal goals and is therefore more likely to activate their promotion system and elicit moral elevation.

Although past research on traditional voice has treated prevention and promotion as being mutually exclusive (e.g., Liang, Farh, & Farh, 2012) and has categorized voice behaviors into either prohibitive voice or promotive voice, a clear boundary between the two may not always exist for ethical voice. One could argue that whistle-blowing, principled organizational dissent, and reactions to third-party injustice are primarily aimed at stopping unethical behavior and hence can be seen to highlight prevention information, whereas tempered radicalism and selling ethical issues are about raising ideas with the goal of making positive social impacts and hence can be deemed to be signaling promotion information. Yet, often ethical voice is aimed at challenging an ethically questionable status quo *and* simultaneously advancing the welfare of stakeholders. In fact, even ethical issue selling (e.g., go-green activism, advocating for gender equity policies and initiatives) is often motivated by dissatisfaction with the problematic status quo (e.g., we haven't done enough to protect the environment or we should not treat different genders differently) (Andersson & Bateman, 2000; Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, & Dutton, 1998; Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Wickert & De Bakker, 2018). In those cases, it is not clear whether an act of ethical voice should be considered prohibitive or promotive ethical voice and whether it activates the prevention or promotion moral focus in a specific observer. Instead of using the

prohibitive-promotive dichotomy, I adopt a person-situation interaction perspective on ethical decision making (Treviño, 1986) and argue that the extent to which ethical voice signals prevention or promotion information is a *subjective perception*, jointly shaped by characteristics of ethical voice, observers, and context.

### ***Characteristics of ethical voice***

Voicers act as ‘meaning makers,’ constructing moral meaning (whether and to what extent a behavior or situation is morally good or bad), especially when situations are ambiguous (Sonenshein, 2007). The meaning of ethical voice may depend on how voicers present and deliver their messages (i.e., voiced content, framing, emotional expressions, channel of delivery; Chen et al., 2020; Dutton & Ashford, 1993). I argue that voicers can present and deliver their messages to selectively signal either prevention or promotion information. First, voicers can shape meaning by framing, selectively presenting the message to highlight certain aspects of the situation over others (Entman, 1993). The most relevant framing dimension is prevention vs. promotion framing: Ethical voice can emphasize either what one *ought not* do (prevention framing) or what one *could do* better to benefit stakeholders (promotion framing). For example, when opposing potentially harmful new products, one could argue that the company should *not harm* customers by selling them dangerous products. Alternatively, one could argue that the company *could* be more caring to customers by selling them healthier products. The prevention system is more sensitive to negative moral feedback whereas the promotion system is more sensitive to the potential to benefit others (Higgins, 1997). Therefore, prevention framing is more likely to activate the prevention system, causing moral threat whereas promotion framing is more likely to activate the promotion system, leading to moral elevation.

*Hypothesis 1a: Prevention framing is positively related to observer moral threat.*

*Hypothesis 1b: Promotion framing is positively related to observer moral elevation.*

In addition, voicers can convey meaning by expressing emotions. Emotions are considered to be an important source of social information (Van Kleef, 2009). Because each discrete emotion is associated with a unique set of eliciting situations and cognitive appraisals, emotions can convey information about the situation and the expresser's cognitions and judgments to the audience (Van Kleef, 2009). Prior research has shown that when raising ethical issues, ethical voicers may express either 'other-condemning' emotions such as moral anger or 'other-suffering' emotions such as compassion (Chen et al., 2020).

First, ethical voice is often motivated by other-condemning emotions (e.g., anger, contempt, disgust; Folger, 2001) and voicers sometimes explicitly express those emotions (Grant, 2013). Those 'other-condemning' moral emotions are elicited by ethical violations and imply the expresser's disapproval of those responsible (Haidt, 2003). Voicers may even express those emotions when they attempt to emphasize ideas for improvement. For example, Amazon employees expressed anger when they were advocating for initiatives to cope with climate change. By expressing those moral emotions, the voicers make the ethical violations salient to observers, suggesting a strong disapproval of the behavior. This should in turn activate the prevention system and elicit feelings of threat. In contrast, voicers may also express other-suffering emotions such as compassion and sympathy (Haidt, 2003). Those emotions are elicited by witnessing or expecting another's suffering and imply the voicer's intention to help others and care for others' welfare (Goetz, Keltner, Simon-Thomas, 2011). In contrast to other-condemning emotions that imply blame and disapproval, compassion and sympathy center around the needs of stakeholders and voicers' intention to improve things for them. Whereas other-condemning emotions signal that the observers or the group are the wrongdoers, other-suffering emotions point out that the observers or the group are potential helpers. Therefore, expressing compassion

and sympathy would make salient the virtuous nature of the advocated idea, likely activating the promotion system in the audience and eliciting feelings of elevation.

*Hypothesis 1c: Expressing other-condemning emotions is positively related to observer moral threat.*

*Hypothesis 1d: Expressing other-suffering emotions is positively related to observer moral elevation.*

Moreover, voicers can shape the meaning of ethical voice by selecting the recipient of their communication (Bowes-Sperry & O’Leary-Kelley, 2005). Voicers either communicate ethical issues to third-party ‘judges’ outside of the circle where the ethical issue takes place or keep it within the group. For example, one could report a coworker’s unethical behavior to someone outside the group (e.g., supervisor, management, HR) or discuss the issue directly with the coworker within the group; one could report misconduct in the organization to external authorities or speak up about the issue within the organization. External delivery opens the group to moral judgment and scrutiny from third parties and possibly a wider audience, signaling strongly that the behavior deviates from moral standards and demands attention, likely increasing observer felt threat. In contrast, internal delivery may suggest the voicer’s genuine intention to address the issue in a constructive and timely manner. The focus is more on effectively solving the issue rather than attributing responsibility, likely activating the promotion system and eliciting moral elevation.

*Hypothesis 1e: Delivery of ethical voice to an external audience is positively related to observer moral threat.*

*Hypothesis 1f: Delivery of ethical voice to an internal audience is positively related to observer moral elevation.*

### **Contextual factors**

In addition to characteristics of voice, contextual factors may further shape perception of voice and influence observer affective states. Social cognitive theory (Fiske, 1980) suggests that

due to the multitude of stimuli in work environments, the degree to which particular characteristics of ethical voice are attended to and processed by individuals and the degree to which they affect individuals' cognitions and emotions may depend on whether the voice behavior is salient (i.e., standing out from the background; Fiske & Taylor, 2013). Salience is a *relative* construct, depending on whether the object is uncommon or novel relative to the context where it is embedded (Fiske & Taylor, 2013). The context or background of a specific act of ethical voice consists of both the actor and the larger context (i.e. the group with which the observer is associated) (Taylor & Fiske, 1978). Group members generally have prior knowledge or expectations about the actor and the group: They understand whether and to what extent ethical voice is typical for the actor and for the group. A particular act of ethical voice becomes salient when ethical voice is uncommon for a given group or for a given actor.

For a work group where ethical voice is rare, a given act of ethical voice should attract more attention. Thus, people focus more on specific features of voice (i.e., prevention information vs. promotion information signaled by voice characteristics) and are likely to experience stronger emotions as a result. In contrast, salience is weakened when ethical voice is more common for a given group. Group members may take a particular act of ethical voice for granted and the affective experiences may be attenuated. Group voice norms are shaped by voice climate, shared beliefs about voice safety (vs. danger) and efficacy (vs. futility) in the organization or group (Morrison, Wheeler-Smith, & Kamdar, 2011). A group with a favorable voice climate is open to voice and group members may frequently voice issues. In contrast, a group with an unfavorable voice climate is less receptive to voice and group members may rarely speak up. Therefore, I argue that compared to groups with more favorable ethical voice climates, voice characteristics are more salient to observers in groups with less favorable voice climates

where ethical voice is rare. In such groups, observers are likely to attend more to the voice characteristics and experience more threat or elevation as a result.

*Hypothesis 2: The effects of voice characteristics on a) observer moral threat, and b) moral elevation are stronger when the ethical voice climate is less favorable.*

Similarly, when individuals do not expect a given actor to engage in ethical voice, a given act of ethical voice attracts more attention. Thus, people focus more on the characteristics of the voice and they are more likely to feel threatened or elevated as a result. In contrast, an act of ethical voice is less salient when ethical voice is typically expected for a given actor. Group members may take a particular act of ethical voice for granted and are less likely to experience strong emotions. In organizational and group settings, because the voicers perform certain roles or hold certain positions, particular norms or expectations emerged regarding the actor's behaviors in the roles or social positions (Biddle, 1986). The roles can be job-related (e.g., ethics and compliance officer, CSR staff) or structure-related (e.g., leader vs. follower in a group), designated to serve certain functions in the groups or organizations. According to role theory (Biddle, 1986), roles are associated with a set of normative expectations and scripts (understood by all) that prescribe behavior and attitudes of the role performers. Certain behaviors are considered part of the role performer's duty. For example, ethical voice might be expected for certain jobs that are designated to facilitate ethical decision-making in organizations, such as gender and diversity staff, CSR staff, ethics and compliance officers or auditors. Ethical voice might also be expected more for certain positions such as leaders who are expected to act in an assertive and decisive manner, taking more initiative and leading decision-making (Lord, Harvey, Brown, & Hall, 2001). For those role performers, observers are more likely to attribute ethical voice to role expectations and pay less attention to how ethical voice is presented and delivered. In contrast, when ethical voice is not part of the voicers' role expectations, ethical



voice stands out and observers attend more to the particular act of ethical voice. Therefore, observers are influenced more strongly by the characteristics of ethical voice.

*Hypothesis 3: To the extent that ethical voice is thought to be beyond the voicer's role expectation, the effects of voice characteristics on a) observer moral threat, and b) moral elevation are stronger.*

### ***Characteristics of the observer***

Because regulatory focus theory is about *self*-evaluation and regulation, an implicit assumption of the theory is that the act of ethical voice needs to be relevant to observers' self-concept in order to affect whether observers perceive the ethical voice as a threat or an act of virtue. This resonates with an important precondition of emotions – that situational cues need to be relevant to important goals of the self to be meaningful and trigger emotions (Lazarus, 1991). Self-relevance represents the extent to which a given object is central to one's self-concept (Bargh, 1982), or the degree to which a given object matters to oneself. When an object is highly relevant, it automatically attracts more attention and tends to be processed more deeply and carry more psychological weight (Bargh, 1982). When an object is less relevant to the self, it draws little attention and is less likely to elicit cognitive and affective reactions. Therefore, self-relevance may interact with voice characteristics to influence observer affective states. When the information is highly important to the self, voice characteristics carry more weight and lead to stronger affective experiences. When the information is of little concern to the self, voice characteristics carry less psychological weight and result in attenuated affective experiences.

Therefore, I considered two factors shaping observer self-relevance of the act of ethical voice: the degree to which the voiced issue matters to the observer personally (i.e., self-interest or vested interest in the issue) and the degree to which the moral domain in general is important to the observer (i.e., moral identity centrality).

**Observer vested interest in the issue.** First, I considered whether and how the specific voiced issue matters to the observer personally. Although I have argued that voice characteristics largely determine the dominance of the regulatory focus, it can also be shaped by observers' own vested interest in the issue (Sivacek & Crano, 1982). Vested interest refers to the relevance of an object to outcomes of an individual (Lehman & Crano, 2002) and implies that an object has consequences for the individual's daily life. Observers might be affected by ethical voice that has the potential to change the status quo in different ways. They may either be implicated and hence harmed by ethical voice or benefit from ethical voice.

When the observer is involved in some way with the problematic status quo, ethical voice may implicate the observer and therefore be seen as a negative personal feedback to the observer (i.e., signaling prevention information), regardless of how it is presented and delivered. Even if observers are not the wrongdoers, they might be indirectly responsible for the problematic status quo. For example, a senior manager is not involved in the company's financial fraud but chooses not to interfere (as the fraud helps boost his or her annual bonus); A male employee is not the main contributor to a hostile work environment for women but takes it for granted. In the above examples, individuals passively support the maintenance of the status quo because personal interests or group interests would be harmed otherwise. In these cases, the observer likely considers him or herself targeted or implicated by the ethical voice and sees ethical voice as a prevention cue, regardless of how it is communicated. As a result, the observer might be concerned about potential negative moral judgment and reproach by the voicer and others and hence feel more threatened. In contrast, when the observer is not responsible for (or is even harmed by) the status quo, the ethical voice does not constitute *personal* feedback on observer morality and is less likely to cause moral threat. Therefore, I propose a main effect of the

observer being implicated by ethical voice on moral threat, regardless of the nature of ethical voice.

*Hypothesis 4: The extent to which the observer is implicated by ethical voice is positively related to moral threat.*

As noted earlier, self-relevant information receives more attention and carries more psychological weight. Therefore, when observers are implicated, the prevention cues (i.e., prevention framing, other-condemning emotional expression, and external delivery) that signal ethical violations should have greater impact on observers. As a result, observers should experience higher levels of moral threat. In contrast, for those observers not implicated, those voice characteristics carry less weight and are less likely to cause moral threat.

*Hypothesis 5: The extent to which the observer is implicated by the ethical voice strengthens the effects of voice characteristics on moral threat.*

However, some observers may have nothing to gain from the status quo and they may even be adversely affected by the status quo. For example, an employee might be ostracized because he or she is not willing to go along with the unethical behavior of some group members. Employees might also be victims of discrimination, harassment, and other unfair or abusive treatment that is the target of the ethical voice.

Such observers are unlikely to view ethical voice as negative personal feedback. On the contrary, they may view ethical voice in a positive light. This is because individuals' own motives and goals automatically bias moral judgment or intuitions (Haidt, 2001). Individuals give greater moral credit to those behaviors that benefit themselves and closely related others whereas they assign more blame to behaviors that harm themselves and closely related others (Jones, 1991). Therefore, for those observers who do not gain from the unethical status quo and could benefit if the situation changes, they are more likely to view the ethical voice as highly

virtuous behavior. This leads to dominance of the promotion system and results in moral elevation. Therefore, I propose a main effect of observer benefiting from the ethical voice on moral elevation, regardless of the nature of the ethical voice.

*Hypothesis 6: The extent to which the observer benefits from the ethical voice is positively related to moral elevation.*

In addition, I argue that when observers potentially benefit from the ethical voice, the effects of promotion cues (i.e., promotion framing, other-suffering emotional expression, internal delivery) on moral elevation will be stronger. As noted earlier, self-relevant information receives more attention and carries more psychological weight. Therefore, when the observer potentially benefits from changes in the status quo, the promotion cues that signal the opportunities to improve the status quo should carry more weight to the observers and elicit stronger moral elevation. In contrast, for those observers who could be adversely affected by the ethical voice, they may not appreciate the ethical voice, regardless of how it is presented and delivered.

*Hypothesis 7: The extent to which an observer benefits from the ethical voice strengthens the effects of voice characteristics on moral elevation.*

**Observer moral identity centrality.** Second, it is important to consider how relevant the domain of morality is to one's self-concept. Although observer vested interest in the issue determines whether ethical voice is viewed as negative personal feedback or a virtuous act and hence the nature of affective states, relevance of the moral domain to the observer's self-concept may further shape the nature and intensity of moral emotions.

Although morality is generally an important aspect of individuals' self-concept, its centrality also varies between individuals (Aquino & Reed, 2002), as captured by the construct moral identity centrality. Moral identity centrality represents the importance of moral values, goals, traits, and behaviors to an individual's overall self-conception or evaluation (Aquino &

Reed, 2002). When morality is central to the self-concept, acting in accordance with or beyond moral principles and being viewed as a moral person becomes an important goal for the self. The goal is likely to be salient across a wide range of situations. Therefore, one is more sensitive to deviations from moral principles and rules and feels more discomfort as a result of negative feedback about one's (un)ethical behavior. In contrast, when something else other than morality (e.g., power, achievement, performance) is more central to one's self-concept, meeting moral duties and being viewed as a moral person becomes secondary. As a result, one is more likely to dismiss external feedback about one's morality and should feel less discomfort as a result.

Therefore, I argue that high moral identity centrality strengthens the relationship between the observer being implicated and their felt moral threat. For observers who are implicated—playing a part in causing the ethically questionable status quo—ethical voice essentially reminds them of their ethical violations. This reminder matters to them more and makes them more threatened, when moral identity is central to their self-concept. In contrast, this reminder matters less to them and is less likely to elicit strong emotions when morality is less important to their self-concept. Therefore, I expect observer moral identity centrality to interact with observer being implicated by the ethical issue to influence the strength of moral threat.

*Hypothesis 8: Observer moral identity centrality strengthens the effect of observer being implicated by ethical voice on observer moral threat.*

I have also argued that when an observer is implicated, it strengthens the positive effects of the voice characteristics (prevention framing, other-condemning emotions, external delivery) on observer moral threat. This effect can be further shaped by moral identity centrality. When moral identity is central to those implicated observers, those voice characteristics highlighting prevention information likely have a greater impact on the implicated observers and cause more threat. In contrast, when morality is not important to those implicated observers, those voice

characteristics highlighting prevention information (i.e., ethical violations) are less meaningful for those observers and are less likely to result in threat.

*Hypothesis 9: To the extent that the observer is implicated by ethical voice, observer moral identity centrality strengthens the effects of the voice characteristics on observer moral threat.*

Similarly, when moral identity is more central to the self, the goal of achieving moral ideals is also more significant to the self. Research shows that moral identity centrality affects how individuals process and act on ethics-related information (Aquino et al., 2011). For those who view morality as a central part of self-concept, they are more attentive to and assign greater psychological weight to acts of moral excellence (Aquino et al., 2011). They are also more likely to link those acts of moral excellence to themselves, viewing the acts as inspiration for them to become a better person, progressing toward their own moral ideal goal. Therefore, when moral identity is more central to observers' self-concept, observers are more likely to value the act of ethical voice and see the potential for themselves to advance toward the important goal of being a better person. As a result, they should feel more elevated.

Yet, as noted earlier, an important determinant of moral elevation is vested interest. Moral elevation is more likely when the observer could benefit from the ethical voice but it is less likely when the observer is implicated. Therefore, moral identity centrality may lead to more elevation for those benefiting from ethical voice. When morality is central to those potential beneficiaries, they are more likely to relate the virtuous act of ethical voice to themselves and see the act as a personal inspiration to achieve moral ideals (Aquino et al., 2011). They are more likely to experience elevation as a result. In contrast, when being a moral person matters less to those observers, they are less likely to appreciate acts of moral excellence and less likely to experience moral elevation. Therefore, I expect observer moral identity centrality to interact with

observer benefiting from ethical voice to influence the strength of moral elevation.

*Hypothesis 10: Observer moral identity centrality strengthens the effect of the observer benefiting from the ethical voice on observer moral elevation.*

I have also argued that when an observer benefits from the ethical voice, it strengthens the positive effects of the voice characteristics highlighting promotion information on observer elevation. This effect can be further shaped by moral identity centrality. When observers could potentially benefit from the ethical voice behavior, they view the act of ethical voice as a good deed. When moral identity is more central to those potential beneficiaries, those voice characteristics highlighting promotion information (moral excellence and the potential to achieve moral excellence) likely inspire them even more. In contrast, when morality is less central to those observers' identities, those voice characteristics highlighting moral excellence matter less to them and they are less likely to experience elevation.

*Hypothesis 11: To the extent that the observer benefits from the ethical voice, observer moral identity centrality strengthens the effects of the voice characteristics on observer moral elevation.*

### **Affective States and Observer Reactions to Ethical Voice**

The different affective states associated with the prevention and promotion systems serve different functions and are associated with different action tendencies. More specifically, I argue that moral threat may yield observer avoidant behavior within the moral domain and defensive behavior toward the information source (i.e., the ethical voicer). Because individuals are fundamentally motivated to maintain and promote a positive self-concept (Sedikides & Strube, 1997; Tesser, 1988), moral threat (i.e., fear of others' negative evaluation of one's morality) motivates behavior to protect oneself from potential negative evaluations. To protect oneself from threats and maintain a positive self-concept, individuals often change the way they view the situation or the source of threats, instead of changing their own behaviors (Monin et al., 2008;

Shalvi, Gino, Barkan, & Ayal, 2015). Individuals do so by downplaying the ethical issue (Bandura, 1999) or disengaging themselves from the targeted domain (i.e., the moral domain) to avoid being evaluated negatively (Bandura, 1999; Tesser, 1988). By downplaying the importance of the ethical issue and attributing the issue to external factors, observers distance themselves from the targeted moral domain and excuse themselves from the moral obligations (Bandura, 1999). By dismissing the issue or shifting responsibility, individuals also avoid being evaluated on the moral domain (Tesser, 1988). Therefore, I argue that threatened observers are likely to defend themselves by downplaying the issue or remaining silent in the ethical voice episode. They are unlikely to speak up to support the voicer for raising the ethical issue.

*Hypothesis 12: Observer moral threat is negatively related to support for the ethical voice.*

Because I have proposed that voice characteristics highlighting prevention information and observer being implicated by the ethical voice lead to moral threat, I further argue that:

*Hypothesis 13: Observer moral threat mediates a) the relationship between voice characteristics and support and b) the relationship between the observer being implicated and their support for the ethical voice.*

To cope with moral threat, individuals may also distance themselves from the *source* of threat and distort their evaluation of the source to maintain a positive moral self-concept (Tesser, 1988). Observers may keep their distance from the cause of the emotions and negative self-evaluations (i.e., ethical voicer) and reject the messenger. One form of such rejection is avoidance. They might avoid social contacts with the voicer, who could remind them of their ethical violations and make them feel morally inferior in comparison. Therefore, I argue that feelings of moral threat will lead to reduced interpersonal closeness and attraction.

*Hypothesis 14: Observer moral threat is negatively related to likeability of the voicer.*

I further argue that:



*Hypothesis 15: Observer moral threat mediates a) the relationship between voice characteristics and likeability of the voicer and b) the relationship between the observer being implicated and likeability of the voicer.*

Another form of interpersonal rejection is derogation. Observers are likely to derogate the ethical voicer who threatens their selves and make defensive attributions about the voicer's intentions and character (Alicke, 2000). They may question the true intentions, ascribe ulterior motives to the ethical voicer (Monin, 2007) and minimize the credibility of the ethical voicer by questioning the voicer's competence and warmth (Monin, 2007; Wellman et al., 2016). Negative attributions about the ethical voicer's character may lower their evaluation of voicer status in the group because social status, the extent to which an individual is respected or admired by others in the social group (Magee & Galinsky, 2008), is conferred by group members based on the apparent value individuals provide to the group (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009). When the voicer is disparaged as being less warm and competent, the voicer is likely deemed less valuable to the group and will be assigned lower status.

*Hypothesis 16: Observer moral threat is negatively related to the observer's evaluation of the status of the ethical voicer.*

I further argue that:

*Hypothesis 17: Observer moral threat mediates a) the relationship between voice characteristics and status evaluation of the ethical voicer and b) the relationship between the observer being implicated and status evaluation of the ethical voicer.*

In contrast, moral elevation may yield observer approach behavior in the moral domain and positive interpersonal behavior toward the ethical voicer. As noted earlier, maintaining a positive self-concept is a fundamental human motive. This not only implies that individuals tend to protect themselves from negative self-evaluation but also suggests that individuals genuinely improve themselves when presented with the opportunity (Sedikides & Strube, 1997). An important cognitive state of moral elevation is heightened awareness of opportunities for

betterment and intensified motivation to approach the better state (Shiota, Thrash, Danvers, & Dombrowski., 2014). Therefore, elevation opens observers up to possibilities of promoting societal welfare and motivates observers to actualize the possibilities (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). Empirical research on moral elevation shows that elevated individuals tend to offer more help to strangers (Schnall et al., 2010), donate more to charities (Aquino et al., 2009), and show more positive attitudes to diversity initiatives (Freeman et al., 2009). Elevated individuals are especially likely to engage in an ethical behavior that is in the same domain as the witnessed act of moral excellence. For example, research found that college students later engaged in volunteerism in the very domain in which they felt elevation (rather than general volunteerism) (Cox, 2010). I argue that a morally elevated observer is likely to view the ethical voicer's idea as an opportunity for him or herself to contribute to society and improve the moral self. The elevated observer is especially likely to follow the voicer's example by joining the voicer to support the particular ethical issue.

*Hypothesis 18: Observer moral elevation is positively related to support for the ethical voice.*

Because I have proposed that voice characteristics highlighting promotion information and the observer benefiting from the ethical voice lead to moral elevation, I further argue that:

*Hypothesis 19: Observer moral elevation mediates a) the relationship between voice characteristics and support for the voice and b) the relationship between observer benefiting from the ethical voice and support.*

Individuals may promote their self-concepts not only by engaging in ethical behavior, but also by approaching and associating with the voicer and holding them in high regard (Tesser, 1988). Elevation facilitates social interactions in general and social bonding with the voicer in particular (e.g., admiring and respecting the actor, praising the actor to others, and affiliating with the actor; Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Shiota et al., 2014). I therefore argue that observers who

feel elevated will enhance their bonds with the ethical voicer.

*Hypothesis 20: Observer moral elevation is positively related to likeability of the ethical voicer.*

I further argue that:

*Hypothesis 21: Observer moral elevation mediates a) the relationship between voice characteristics and likeability of the ethical voicer and b) the relationship between observer benefiting from the ethical voice and likeability of ethical voicer.*

In addition, the observer who experiences moral elevation is likely to confer higher social status on the voicer. As noted earlier, group members tend to allocate status to members possessing characteristics valuable to the group. Recent research suggests that moral excellence may be an important basis of status (Bai, 2017) because as a social species, humans value morality (or good intentions toward others) as it functions to coordinate healthy interdependent relationships in groups. Moral elevation helps identify individuals who prioritize others' interests, and points observers' attention toward those individuals. Therefore, moral elevation guides status conferral. Algoe and Haidt (2009) found that moral elevation involves admiration and gained respect for the actor as well as the tendency to promote the actor and do things for the actor.

*Hypothesis 22: Observer moral elevation is positively related to the observer's evaluation of the status of the ethical voicer.*

I further argue that:

*Hypothesis 23: Observer moral elevation mediates a) the relationship between voice characteristics and status evaluation of the ethical voicer and b) the relationship between the observer benefiting from the ethical voice and status evaluation of ethical voicer.*

## METHOD

I have proposed that characteristics of ethical voice play an important role in shaping observer reactions. To effectively capture how the nature of a specific act of ethical voice impacts observer cognitions, emotions, and reactions, I conducted a survey using the critical incident technique. The critical incident technique involves asking participants to recall a specific event that fits the description provided by researchers and therefore it is capable of obtaining highly contextualized data that reflects individuals' idiosyncratic responses to a specific situation (Flanagan, 1954). This technique is often used as a qualitative exploratory tool to collect rich behavioral descriptions of events or uncover important factors and mechanisms explaining how and why individuals engage in certain behavior (Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, & Maglio, 2005). Management researchers recently have successfully combined this technique with a survey approach to examine affective and behavioral reactions to low-frequency events such as mistreatment, injustice, resistance, and social issue selling in the workplace (e.g., Priesemuth & Schminke, 2017; Mitchell, Vogel, & Folger, 2015; Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006; Dang, Umphress, & Mitchell, 2018; Mayer et al., 2019). This approach not only ensures that the data is highly contextualized but also allows researchers to formally test their theory.

To reduce common method variance and demand characteristics (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012), I measured predictors and outcomes separately over two time periods. At Time 1, I asked participants to describe an ethical behavior they witnessed and complete measures of moral identity centrality, characteristics of the ethical voice behavior and work unit, control variables, and demographics. At Time 2 (about two weeks after Time 1), I presented each participant's own response at Time 1 to them and asked participants to complete measures of

affective experiences (threat and elevation) and their reactions (i.e., change in liking and status evaluation of the voicer, their support for the voice behavior).

### **Participants**

U.S. citizens with full time employment status were recruited from Prolific Academic online panel to complete the two surveys. Prolific Academic offers customized pre-screening options where different filters can be applied to select eligible participants. A total of 2,136 U.S. citizens who are employed full time, work as part of a group (rather than independently), have college or higher degrees, are currently not students, and have an approval rate of 99% and higher, were eligible to participate. I administered 1000 pre-screening surveys (with a payment of \$0.2) to ask whether individuals have witnessed coworker ethical voice in the past year and asked them to provide a brief description of the event (see Appendix A for details). 556 individuals indicated that they had witnessed such an event. Among those, 269 individuals provided detailed accounts of an event that matched my definition of ethical voice (see Appendix A for inclusion and exclusion criteria) and were invited to participate in the Time 1 survey. 219 among the 269 individuals completed the Time 1 survey and received a payment of \$3 in exchange for their participation. The incidents of ethical voice occurred 15 weeks on average prior to the pre-screening survey ( $SD = 19$  weeks) and participants generally reported that it was easy (4 out of 5 on a Likert scale) for them to recall the incident ( $SD = 0.8$ ). At the beginning of the Time 2 survey, participants were presented the Time 1 open-ended responses associated with their prolific ID and were asked to verify their response. 182 participants confirmed and completed the Time 2 survey. They received an additional payment of \$4 in exchange for their participation.

## **Characteristics of the Incidents**

The incidents reported by participants involved a variety of ethical issues raised by the ethical voicers. As shown in Table 2, 54% of the ethical issues centered around welfare of external stakeholders including customers, the local community, and the general public; 39% of the issues concerned employees; 3% of the issues were about proper use of organizational property and resources; 4% of the issues were about protecting the voicer's own rights and welfare. 69% of the incidents involved ethical voice about specific unethical behaviors or practices in the workplace (e.g., coworker overbilling a client, manager abusing coworkers, the company not paying overtime) while the rest of the incidents involved voice about general ethical concerns and suggestions (e.g., hiring more minorities, engaging in more community service, better recycling policies). 62% of the incidents occurred in formal meetings of the department, group, or sub-group, while 38% of the incidents occurred in informal conversations.

## **Measures**

### **Promotion and Prevention Framing**

I assessed the degree to which the voicer used promotion and prevention framing respectively, based on participants' self-reports. I developed three items to measure prevention framing and three items to measure promotion framing, specifically for this study. The wording was based on Cornwell and Higgins's (2015) conceptual piece on promotion and prevention moral regulatory systems and an existing dictionary developed by management scholars (Gamache, McNamara, Mannor, & Johnson, 2015) based on regulatory focus theory. An example item for promotion framing is "*How much did the coworker emphasize that we (or someone) have the potential to improve the situation?*" An example item for prevention framing

is “*How much did the coworker emphasize that we (or someone) did something wrong?*” See Appendix B. Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .88$  for promotion framing and  $\alpha = .83$  for prevention framing.

### **Emotional Expression**

To assess the extent to which the voicer expressed other-condemning emotions, I asked the participants to indicate on Likert scales from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Extremely) how much the coworker appeared in each of the following ways when he or she expressed his or her opinion: *Angry, contemptuous, disgusted*. Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .85$ . To assess the extent to which the voicer expressed other-suffering emotions, I asked the participants to indicate how much the coworker appeared in each of the following ways when he or she expressed his or her opinion:

*Compassionate and sympathetic*. Correlation between the two items  $r = .78$ .

### **External vs. Internal Delivery**

In order to assess to whom the voicer spoke up about the ethical issue, I asked an open-ended question: To whom did the colleague communicate the ethical concern (idea)? I then coded the open-ended responses. “*Internal delivery*” was assigned if the voicer directly spoke to individuals responsible for the ethical issue or spoke to a group of people, including those who were responsible; “*external delivery*” was assigned if the voicer spoke up about the issue to someone external to the group where the ethical issue occurred (e.g., the manager, HR, etc).

### **Moral Identity Centrality**

I measured the internalization aspect of moral identity centrality using the 5-item scale developed by Aquino & Reed (2002). Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .78$ . An example item is “*Being someone who has these characteristics is an important part of who I am.*”

### **Observer Being Implicated by or Benefiting From the Ethical Voice**

I used two items (see Appendix B) to assess the extent to which observers were implicated on Likert scales from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely). A sample item: *“How much did you feel the coworker’s claim implicated you?”* However, the correlation between the two items was somewhat low:  $r = .31$ . Therefore, I used the aforementioned sample item (which better captured “implication” than the other item) as a measure of being implicated. I used two items to assess the extent to which observers would benefit from ethical voice behavior. A sample *“If the situation is changed in the way the colleague advocated for, how much would it benefit you in any way.”* Correlation between the two items  $r = .93$ .

### **Group Ethical Voice Climate**

I measured group ethical voice climate using six items adapted from Morrison et al. (2011). The participants were asked to rate the extent to which members in the unit feel they are capable of engaging in ethical voice and the extent to which it is safe to do so (see Appendix B for items). Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .94$ .

### **Voicer Role Expectation**

Because most of the participants (and the voicers they recalled) in the sample were in the same functional unit/department, role expectation based on functions (e.g., HR, the ethics and compliance office) is less relevant. Expectation based on whether the voicer had a leader/supervisor (vs. a peer or subordinate) role is a more relevant dimension to consider. Individuals generally share leadership and follower schema, having common, implicit expectations about what leaders and followers do and what they are like. Leaders are expected to have agentic characteristics (i.e., being decisive, forceful, and dominant, Lord et al., 2001), whereas followers are expected to have more communal characteristics such as being reliable,



loyal, and team players (Sy, 2010). Therefore, ethical voice behavior that often involves dissenting from other group members and signals agency, is consistent with people's expectation for leaders but beyond people's expectation for followers and peers. Therefore, I asked the participants to indicate the relationship between themselves and the voicer: Whether they were the leader/supervisor, peers, or the subordinate of the voicer when the incident happened. "*Within role expectation*" was assigned if the participant indicated that he or she was the subordinate of the voicer; "*beyond role expectation*" was assigned otherwise.

### **Threat and Elevation**

I assessed the affective aspects of threat and elevation. I asked the participants to indicate the extent to which they felt in each of the following ways at the time when the colleague spoke on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all, 5 = Extremely): (for threat, 5 items adapted from Turner, Pratkanis, Probasco, Leve, 1992 and Higgins, Bond, Klein, & Strauman, 1986, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .92$ ) *uncomfortable, nervous, tense, worried, and apprehensive*; (for elevation, 4 items adapted from Algoré & Haidt (2009), Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ ) *moved, inspired, respectful, and admiring*, embedded in items for other emotions including angry, irritated, ashamed, hopeful, optimistic, proud.

### **Supporting the Ethical Voicer**

At Time 2, I asked the participants to indicate on 5-point Likert scales whether they voiced support for the voicer in the event using three items adapted from Burriss' (2012) voice endorsement scale (see Appendix B for items). An example item is "*I spoke up in the same conversation/meeting to voice my support for the coworker's comments.*" Cronbach's  $\alpha = .92$ .

### **(Change in) Liking of the Voicer**

At Time 2, I asked the participants to indicate on a 5-point Likert scale whether they liked the colleague more or less after the voice event using three items adapted from (Schmitt, Pulakos, Nason, & Whitney, 1996). For example, “*After this occurred, did you like the coworker more or less?*” See Appendix B for items. Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .83$ .

### **(Change in) Status Evaluation of the Voicer**

At Time 2, I assessed status gain (or loss) of the voicer using three items based on Djurdjevic et al.’s (2017) measure and Anderson, Ames, & Gosling’s (2008) measure. I did not include items containing “respect” and “admire” because those were confounded with the measure of moral elevation. I added words such as ‘gain’ or ‘lose’ to reflect status change. For example, “*After this occurred, did this coworker gain or lose status in your work group?*” See Appendix B for items. Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .88$

### **Controls**

At Time 1, I measured the following constructs.

#### ***Observer chronic prevention and promotion focus***

Chronic regulatory focus may impact individuals’ sensitivity to promotion or prevention aspects of ethical voice and therefore influence their retrieval of the ethical voice event, their affective states, and reactions. I measured this using Lockwood, Jordan, & Kunda (2002) 18-item scale. An example item for prevention chronic focus is “*In general, I am focused on preventing negative events in my life.*” An example item for promotion chronic focus is “*I frequently imagine how I will achieve my hopes and aspirations.*” Cronbach’s  $\alpha s = .89$  for prevention chronic focus and  $.87$  for promotion chronic focus.

***Social desirability***

I also measured social desirability bias (a 9-item shortened version of impression management subscale of BIRD-6 (Paulhus, 1991) based on Pauls & Stemmler's (2003) factor analysis) at Time 1. An example item is "*I always obey laws, even if I'm unlikely to get caught.*"

Cronbach's  $\alpha = .73$

***Prior status of the voicer***

Because prior status of the observer may affect credibility of the voice and therefore the extent to which the observer actively supports the voicer and evaluates the voicer favorably, I assessed prior status of the observer using the 2-item status measure by Anderson et al. (2008) on Likert scales from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Very much) : "*Before this happened, how much status (i.e., respect, prominence) did the coworker have among people in your unit,*" "*before this happened, how much power and influence did the coworker have among coworkers in your unit.*"

Cronbach's  $\alpha = .81$ .

## RESULTS

Descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, and correlations are shown in Table 3. As expected, promotion framing ( $r = .27, p < .001$ ), other-suffering emotional expression ( $r = .30, p < .001$ ), and observer benefiting from voice ( $r = .18, p = .02$ ) were significantly and positively correlated with elevation, which was in turn significantly and positively correlated with likeability ( $r = .51, p < .001$ ), status ( $r = .24, p = .001$ ), and support for the voicer ( $r = .19, p = .01$ ). Prevention framing ( $r = .32, p < .001$ ), other-condemning emotional expression ( $r = .41, p < .001$ ), and observer implicated by voice ( $r = .18, p < .001$ ) were significantly and negatively correlated with threat, which was in turn significantly and negatively correlated with status ( $r = -.24, p = .001$ ) and support ( $r = -.22, p = .003$ ) but not significantly correlated with likeability ( $r = .03, p = .66$ ). External delivery was not significantly related to elevation ( $r = -.14, p = .06$ ) or threat ( $r = .13, p = .08$ ). These results provided preliminary support for most of the hypothesized main effects.

I conducted multiple linear regression and bootstrapping to test the hypotheses, Hypothesis testing results (summarized in Table 4) are presented below in the following order: I first present results for hypotheses regarding the effects of voice characteristics on threat and moral elevation (H1a-H1f). I then present the moderating effects of context (ethical voice climate H2a-H2b and voicer role expectation H3a-H3b), followed by the effects of observer characteristics—observer being implicated by or benefiting from ethical voice (H4-H7) and observer moral identity (H8-H11). Finally, I present results for the effects of moral threat on outcomes and the indirect effects of voice characteristics and observer implicated by ethical voice on outcomes via moral threat (H12-H17), followed by the effects of moral elevation on

outcomes and the indirect effects of voice characteristics and observer benefiting from ethical voice on outcomes via moral elevation (H18-H23).

After testing the hypotheses, I conducted additional analyses to compare relative effects of different voice characteristics and observer being implicated by or benefiting from voice on threat and elevation, compared relative effects of threat and elevation on outcomes, and examined total effects of voice characteristics on outcomes and residual direct effects of voice characteristics on outcomes. These additional analyses provided a deeper understanding of observer reactions to ethical voice.

### **Effects of Voice Characteristics on Threat and Elevation**

#### **Threat**

I ran separate regressions on voice characteristics to test their effects on threat. The results are shown in Table 5 (Model1-5). Supporting H1a and H1c, prevention framing ( $B = .28$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and other-condemning emotional expression ( $B = .38$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were significantly and positively related to threat. External delivery was not significantly related to threat ( $B = .39$ ,  $p = .06$ ), providing no support for H1e.

Although I did not hypothesize effects of promotion framing and other-suffering emotional expression on threat, I explored those relationships. As shown in Table 5, promotion framing was significantly and negatively related to threat ( $B = -.17$ ,  $p = .02$ ). See Model1.

#### **Elevation**

I ran separate regressions (Model9-13) on voice characteristics to test their effects on elevation. Results are shown in Table 6. Supporting H1b and H1d, promotion framing ( $B = .24$ ,  $p = .001$ ) and other-suffering emotional expression ( $B = .24$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were significantly and

positively related to elevation. External delivery was not significantly related to elevation ( $B = -.40, p = .054$ ), providing no support for H1f.

Although I did not hypothesize effects of prevention framing and other-condemning emotional expression on moral elevation, I explored those relationships. Unexpectedly, I found a significant and positive effect of prevention framing on elevation ( $B = .14, p = .04$ ). See Model10 result in Table 6.

### **Moderating Effects of Context (Ethical Voice Climate and Role Expectation)**

#### **Ethical Voice Climate**

In Hypothesis H2a, I proposed interactions between ethical voice climate and voice characteristics (prevention framing, other-condemning emotional expression, and external delivery) such that the effects of voice characteristics on threat are stronger when the ethical voice climate is less favorable and weaker when the ethical voice climate is more favorable. I ran separate regressions for the predictors (Model18, 20, 21) and results were shown in Table 7. Results provided no support for H2a: the interaction of prevention framing and ethical voice climate was not significant ( $B = -.04, p = .65$ ) and the interaction of other-condemning emotional expression and ethical voice climate was not significant ( $B = .02, p = .77$ ).

Contrary to H2a, there was a significant and positive interaction between external delivery and ethical voice climate ( $B = .65, p = .01$ ). I examined simple slopes for the interaction effect. As shown in Figure 2, the effect of external delivery on threat was not significant ( $B = -.21, p = .52$ ) when the ethical voice climate is less favorable (1 SD below the mean); external delivery was significantly and positively related to threat ( $B = .99, p = .001$ ) when the ethical voice climate is more favorable (1 SD below the mean). This may be because, in a more favorable ethical voice climate, the norm is to openly discuss the ethical issues in groups instead

of reporting the issues to authorities outside the group. Therefore, employees prefer voice within the unit and feel threatened when the voicer does not do so.

Although not part of my hypotheses, there was a significant and positive interaction between promotion framing and ethical voice climate on threat ( $B = .16, p = .03$ ) (Model17). As shown in Figure 3, the negative effect of promotion framing on threat was significant ( $B = -.27, p = .003$ ) when the ethical voice climate is less favorable; promotion framing was not significantly related to threat ( $B = .03, p = .75$ ), when the ethical voice climate is favorable. This is likely because in a less favorable voice climate, any type of voice is perceived to be more threatening.

In Hypothesis H2b, I proposed interactions between ethical voice climate and voice characteristics (promotion framing, other-suffering emotional expression, and external delivery) such that the effects of voice characteristics on elevation are stronger when the ethical voice climate is less favorable and weaker when the ethical voice climate is more favorable. As shown in Table 8 (Model 22, 24, 26), none of the interaction effects was significant, providing no support for H2b.

### **Voicer Role Expectation**

In Hypothesis 3a, I proposed interactions between role expectation and voice characteristics (prevention framing, other-condemning emotional expression, and external delivery) such that the effects of voice characteristics on threat are stronger when ethical voice is beyond the voicer's role expectation and weaker when the ethical voice is expected based on the voicer's role. I ran separate regressions for the predictors (Model28, 30, 31) and results were shown in Table 9. Results provided no support for H3a. None of the interaction effects was significant except that the interaction between prevention framing and voicer leadership role was significantly positive ( $B = .61, p = .03$ ), which was contrary to H3a. As shown in Figure 4, the

positive effect of prevention framing on threat was stronger when the voicer had a leader role ( $B = .86, p < .001$ ) than when the voicer was not a leader ( $B = .25, p < .001$ ). This may be because when a leader uses prevention framing, it feels more threatening to the employee observers.

In Hypothesis 3b, I proposed interactions between role expectation and voice characteristics (promotion framing, other-suffering emotional expression, and external delivery) such that the effects of voice characteristics on elevation are stronger when ethical voice is beyond the voicer's role expectation and weaker when ethical voice is expected based on the voicer's role. As shown in Table 10 (Model 32, 34, 36), none of the interaction effects was significant, providing no support for H3b.

### **Effects of Observer Characteristics**

#### **Observer Being Implicated by or Benefiting from Voice**

I have hypothesized a positive relationship between observer being implicated by voice and threat (H4). As shown in Table 5 (Model 7), this was supported given that observer implicated ( $B = .28, p < .001$ ) was significantly and positively related to threat. In addition, I have hypothesized positive interactions between the observer being implicated by voice and voice characteristics (prevention framing, other-condemning emotional expression, and external delivery) such that the effects of voice characteristics are stronger when the observer is implicated by voice behavior than when the observer is not (H5). As shown in Table 11 (Model 38, 40, 31), most of the interaction effects were not significant and the interaction between the observer being implicated and other-condemning emotional expression is significant and negative ( $B = -.15, p = .04$ ) (Model 40), providing no support for H5.

I further explored the negative interaction between observer being implicated and other-condemning emotion. As shown in Figure 5, the positive effect of other-condemning emotional



expression of the voicer on threat was stronger when the voicer is not so much implicated ( $B = .47, p < .001$ ) than when the voicer was strongly implicated ( $B = .19, p = .04$ ). This may be because being implicated is a strong situation that feels threatening to the observer regardless of the voicer's emotional expression.

I have hypothesized a positive relationship between observer benefiting from voice and elevation (H6). As shown in Table 6 (Model14), this was supported given that observer benefiting from voice ( $B = .13, p = .02$ ) was significantly and positively related to elevation. I have also hypothesized positive interactions of the observer benefiting from the voice and voice characteristics (promotion framing, other-suffering emotional expression, and external delivery) such that the effects of voice characteristics on elevation are stronger when the observer benefits from ethical voice than when the observer does not benefit (H7). As shown in Table 12 (Model42, 44, 46), none of the interaction effects was significant, showing no support for H7.

### **Interaction Effects of Observer Moral Identity and Implicated by or Benefiting from Voice**

I have hypothesized that moral identity strengthens the relationship between observer implicated by voice and threat (H8). This was not supported given that the interaction was not significant ( $B = -.24, p = .10$ ). I also proposed a three-way interaction among moral identity, observer implicated by voice, and voice characteristics (H9): To the extent that the observer is implicated by ethical voice, observer moral identity centrality strengthens the effect of the voice characteristics on observer moral threat. Results did not support H9. As shown in Table 13 (Model48, 50, 51), the three-way interaction was not significant for prevention framing ( $B = -.09, p = .46$ ) or for external delivery ( $B = -.23, p = .09$ ) or for other-condemning emotional expression ( $B = -.74, p = .06$ ).

I have also hypothesized that moral identity strengthens the relationship between observer benefiting from voice and moral elevation (H10). This was not supported given that the interaction was not significant ( $B = -.03, p = .78$ ). I further proposed a three-way interaction among moral identity, observer benefiting from voice and voice characteristics (H11): To the extent that the observer benefits from ethical voice, observer moral identity centrality strengthens the effect of the voice characteristics on observer moral elevation. As shown in Table 14 (Model 52, 54, 56), none of the three-way interactions was significant, providing no support for H11.

### **Effects of Threat on Outcomes and Indirect Effects via Threat on Outcomes**

I first regressed each dependent variable on threat to test the effects of threat on observer reactions. As shown in Table 15, supporting H12 and H16, threat was significantly and negatively related to support ( $B = -.32, p = .001$ ) (Model 58) and status ( $B = -.11, p = .01$ ) (Model 63). However, threat was not significantly related to likeability ( $B = .01, p = .84$ ) (Model 61), providing no support for H14. This further disconfirmed the indirect effects of voice characteristics on likeability via threat (H15). I then conducted separate mediation analyses using bootstrapping method with  $N = 5000$  samples (MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004) for each predictor, with threat as a mediator, controlling for elevation. Results were in Table 16.

### **Indirect Effects of Voice Characteristics and Observer Implicated by Ethical Voice on Support via Threat**

Bootstrapping results provided full support for H13a and 13b: the indirect effect of prevention framing via threat on support was significant and negative (bootstrapping estimate =  $-.09, SE = .04, 95\% CI [-.18, -.03]$ ); the indirect effect of other-condemning emotional expression via threat on support was significant and negative (estimate =  $-.14, SE = .05, 95\% CI$

[-.25, -.06]); the indirect effect of external delivery via threat on support was significant and negative (estimate = -.12, SE = .07, 95% CI [-.30, -.02]); the indirect effect of observer implicated by voice via threat on support was significant and negative (estimate = -.10, SE = .04, 95% CI [-.20, -.04]).

Although not part of the hypotheses, I also found a significant and positive indirect effect of promotion framing via threat on support (estimate = .05, SE = .03, 95% CI [.01, .12]) and a significant and positive indirect effect of other-suffering emotion via threat on support (estimate = .03, SE = .02, 95% CI [.00, .09]), suggesting that promotion framing increases support by reducing observer threat.

### **Indirect Effects of Voice Characteristics and Observer Implicated by Ethical Voice on Status via Threat**

Bootstrapping results provided no support for H17a: the indirect effect of prevention framing via threat on status was significant and negative (estimate = -.03, SE = .02, 95% CI [-.07, .00]); the indirect effect of other-condemning emotional expression via threat on status was not significant (estimate = -.02, SE = .02, 95% CI [-.08, .02]); the indirect effect of external delivery via threat on status was not significant (estimate = -.04, SE = .03, 95% CI [-.14, .00]). Bootstrapping results supported H17b: the indirect effect of observer implicated by voice via threat on status was significant and negative (estimate = -.03, SE = .02, 95% CI [-.08, -.00]).

### **Effects of Moral Elevation on Outcomes and Indirect Effects via Moral Elevation on Outcomes**

I first regressed each dependent variable on moral elevation to test the effects of threat on outcomes. As shown in Table 15, supporting H18, H20, and H22, elevation was significantly and positively related to support ( $B = .24, p = .02$ ) (Model57), likeability ( $B = .37, p < .001$ )

(Model60), status ( $B = .16, p < .001$ ) (Model62), after accounting for the controls. I then conducted separate mediation analyses using the bootstrapping method for each predictor, with moral elevation as a mediator, controlling for moral threat. Results were shown in Table 16.

### **Indirect Effects of Voice Characteristics and Observer Benefiting from Ethical Voice on Support via Moral Elevation**

Bootstrapping results provided partial support for H19a: the indirect effect of promotion framing via elevation on support was not significant (estimate = .04, SE = .03, 95% CI [-.00, .12]); the indirect effect of external delivery via elevation on support was not significant (estimate = -.08, SE = .07, 95% CI [-.28, .00]); the indirect effect of other-suffering emotional expression via elevation on support was significant and positive (estimate = .05, SE = .03, 95% CI [.00, .13]). Bootstrapping results did not support H19b: the indirect effect of observer benefiting from voice via elevation on voice was not significant (estimate = .02, SE = .02, 95% CI [-.00, .07]).

### **Indirect Effects of Voice Characteristics on Likeability via Moral Elevation**

Bootstrapping results provided partial support for H21a: the indirect effect of promotion framing via elevation on likeability was significant and positive (estimate = .09, SE = .04, 95% CI [.03, .17]); the indirect effect of other-suffering emotional expression via elevation on likeability was significantly positive (estimate = .09, SE = .03, 95% CI [.04, .16]); the indirect effect of external delivery via elevation on likeability was not significant (estimate = -.15, SE = .09, 95% CI [-.36, .01]). Results supported H21b: the indirect effect of observer benefiting from voice via elevation on likeability was significant and positive (estimate = .05, SE = .02, 95% CI [.01, .09]).

Although not part of the hypotheses, bootstrapping results show that the indirect effect of prevention framing via elevation on likeability was significant and positive (estimate = .05, SE = .03, 95% CI [.00, .11]), suggesting prevention framing increases likeability by increasing elevation.

### **Indirect Effects of Voice Characteristics on Status via Moral Elevation**

Bootstrapping results provided partial support for H23a: the indirect effect of promotion framing via elevation on status was significant and positive (estimate = .03, SE = .02, 95% CI [.01, .07]); the indirect effect of other-suffering emotional expression via elevation on status was significant and positive (estimate = .03, SE = .02, 95% CI [.01, .07]); the indirect effect of external delivery via elevation on status was not significant (estimate = -.06, SE = .05, 95% CI [-.18, .00]). Results supported H23b: the indirect effect of observer benefiting from voice via elevation on status was significant and positive (estimate = .02, SE = .01, 95% CI [.00, .05]).

Although not part of the hypotheses, bootstrapping results show that the indirect effect of prevention framing via elevation on status was significant and positive (estimate = .02, SE = .01, 95% CI [.00, .05]), suggesting prevention framing increases status by increasing elevation.

## **Additional Results**

### **Incremental Contribution of Different Predictors in Predicting Threat and Elevation**

I have proposed multiple predictors of threat, including prevention framing, other-condemning emotional expression, external delivery, and observer being implicated by ethical voice, and found a predictor not hypothesized—promotion framing. To determine whether each of them has an incremental contribution in predicting threat when the rest of the predictors are included, I regressed threat on all those predictors. As shown in Table 5 (Model 8), when predictors were entered simultaneously, the effects of promotion framing ( $B = -.15, p = .04$ ),

other-condemning emotion ( $B = .26, p = .001$ ), observer being implicated ( $B = .25, p < .001$ ) still remained significant, whereas other predictors' explanatory power was diminished, suggesting that promotion framing, other-condemning emotion and observer being implicated explained variance of threat above and beyond the other predictors.

I have proposed multiple predictors of moral elevation, including promotion framing, other-suffering emotional expression, external delivery, and observer benefiting from ethical voice, and found a predictor not hypothesized—prevention framing. To determine whether each of them has an incremental contribution in predicting threat while the rest of the predictors are included, I regressed elevation on all the predictors. As shown in Table 6 (Model16), when predictors were entered simultaneously, the effects of prevention framing ( $B = .20, p = .01$ ) and other-suffering emotional expression ( $B = .23, p = .001$ ) still remained significant, whereas other predictors' effects were diminished, suggesting that prevention framing and other-suffering emotion explained the variance of elevation above and beyond the other predictors.

### **Incremental Contribution of Elevation and Threat in Predicting Outcomes**

I have proposed both elevation and threat as predictors of support, voicer status evaluation, and likeability. Because threat was not significantly related to likeability, it is clear that elevation was the better predictor for likeability. To determine elevation and threat's relative power to predict support and voicer status evaluation, I regressed each dependent variable on both elevation and threat. As shown in Table 15 (Model60), when elevation and threat were entered simultaneously, the effects of both elevation ( $B = .20, p = .04$ ) and threat ( $B = -.30, p = .002$ ) on support remained significant, suggesting they both explained unique variance for support but the effect of threat was stronger. As shown in Table 15 (Model64), the effects of

both elevation ( $B = .15, p = .001$ ) and threat ( $B = -.10, p = .03$ ) on status remained significant, suggesting they both explain unique variance for status but the effect of elevation was stronger.

### **Total and Residual Direct Effects of Voicer Characteristics on Outcomes**

Although I did not hypothesize direct relationships between predictors and the outcomes, I explored those relationships by regressing each dependent variable on each predictor and the controls. When there was a significant total direct effect, I then examined whether the relationship was fully explained by the hypothesized mediators, by examining the residual direct effect after accounting for the hypothesized mediators. If the residual direct is not significant, it suggests that the effect is fully explained by the hypothesized mediators. If the residual direct effect is significant, it implies that additional mediators need to be explored in the future to explain the effect.

#### ***Direct effects on support***

As shown in Table 17 (Model65-71), promotion framing was significantly and positively related to support ( $B = .27, p = .007$ ), whereas other predictors did not have significant direct effects on support. To examine relative explanatory power of predictors, I entered all the predictors simultaneously and Model72 showed that the only significant effect on support was promotion framing ( $B = .26, p = .02$ ). This suggests that promotion framing was a better predictor of support.

Because promotion framing had a significant direct effect on support, I examined the residual direct effect after controlling for threat and elevation. The effect of promotion framing on support was no longer significant ( $B = .18, p = .07$ ) after accounting for elevation and threat.

### ***Direct effects on likeability***

As shown in Table 18 (Model73-79), the observer benefiting from the voice was significantly and positively related to likeability ( $B = .16, p < .001$ ) whereas other predictors were not significantly related to likeability. To examine relative explanatory power of predictors, I entered all the predictors simultaneously and Model 80 showed that the effects of the observer benefiting from voice ( $B = .15, p < .001$ ) on likeability remained significant.

Because observer benefiting from ethical voice had significant direct effects on likeability, I examined the residual direct effect after entering elevation and threat. The direct effect of benefiting from voice on likeability still remained significant ( $B = .12, p = .001$ ) after accounting for elevation and threat, suggesting additional mechanisms that have not been accounted for.

### ***Direct effects on status***

As shown in Table 19 (Model81-87), promotion framing ( $B = .12, p = .01$ ) and other-suffering emotion ( $B = .10, p = .01$ ) were significantly and positively related to status; other-condemning emotional expression was significantly and negatively related to status ( $B = -.10, p = .02$ ). To examine incremental contributions of predictors, I entered all the predictors simultaneously (Model 88) and found that none of the effects was significant. This may be due to multi-collinearity of the data.

Because promotion framing, other-suffering emotional expression and other-condemning emotional expression had significant direct effects on status, I examined the residual direct effects after entering elevation and threat. All the residual direct effects were no longer significant after accounting for elevation and threat, suggesting full mediation.



## DISCUSSION

Prior research has offered mixed expectations regarding how observers react to coworkers who speak up about ethical issues in their work group or unit. Drawing on regulatory focus theory, I proposed a model to understand when and why observers react more or less favorably to ethical voicers through their evaluation of the voicer and their support (or lack of support) for the voicer's efforts. I argued that ethical voice has the potential to lead to the dominance of either the moral promotion system or the moral prevention system and therefore felt moral elevation or moral threat. I proposed that those two affective states would subsequently affect observers' interpersonal evaluation of (likeability and status) and their behavioral response to the voicer (speaking up to support the voicer). I also proposed and examined key factors influencing dominance of the systems, including characteristics of the ethical voice (framing, emotional expression, delivery), characteristics of the observer (vested interest, moral identity), and context (group ethical voice climate, voicer's role).

As summarized in Table 4, results of a critical incident survey largely supported the effects of ethical voice characteristics and observer vested interest on moral elevation and threat, the effects of moral elevation and threat on observer reactions, as well as the indirect effects of ethical voice characteristics via elevation and threat on observer reactions. These findings support the general regulatory focus approach: characteristics of ethical voice serve as situational cues that activate the promotion moral system or the prevention system, giving rise to different observer affective states, evaluation of the voicer, and behavioral responses to the ethical voice.

However, I found no support for the hypothesized moderation effects of observer characteristics (vested interest and moral identity) or moderation effects of context (group ethical

voice climate and voicer's role expectations). Analysis also revealed relationships that went beyond what would be expected from regulatory focus theory. Below, I discuss key findings.

The most surprising finding is that prevention framing was not only positively related to threat (as I hypothesized) but it was also positively related to elevation. Because it was related to both threat and elevation, the total effects of prevention framing on the outcomes (support, likeability, and status) were not significant. Participants' open-ended responses suggest that they had mixed feelings toward voicers who used prevention framing: "*I was proud of her, and maybe a bit envious,*" "*I felt uneasy but happy that someone else spoke up,*" "*I was impressed and in awe that she brought it up in a public setting and knowing that doing so would subject herself to possible acts of retribution.*" Based on those responses, a plausible explanation for the positive relationship between prevention framing and elevation is that prevention framing makes the act of ethical voice seem riskier and therefore observers may attribute moral virtues such as courage and bravery to the voicer and hence feel more elevated. This was supported by preliminary results: Although not part of the hypotheses, I measured perceived riskiness of the ethical voice and found that prevention framing was significantly and positively correlated with risk perception ( $r = .32, p < .001$ ) but promotion framing was not significantly correlated with risk perception ( $r = -.04, p = .62$ ). This attribution of courage might be different from the attributions observers make about the voicers who use promotion framing: Promotion framing emphasizes doing good rather than preventing harm and therefore the observers may attribute benevolence-related moral virtues to the voicer. This was also supported by preliminary results: I measured perceived benevolence of the ethical voicer (warm, nice, pleasant) and found that promotion framing was significantly and positively correlated with perceived benevolence of the voicer ( $r = .18, p = .01$ ) but prevention framing was marginally significantly and negatively correlated

with benevolence ( $r = -.14, p = .06$ ). The finding of mixed reactions to prevention-framed ethical voice goes beyond regulatory focus theory's focus on a single emotion that is associated with a single, predominant regulatory focus. The current finding suggests that certain situational cues can simultaneously activate both regulatory foci and elicit mixed emotions and reactions. This finding also goes beyond extant research on moral elevation that considers moral elevation to arise from witnessed benevolent ethical behavior (e.g., helping others), by suggesting that moral elevation can be also triggered by risky, brave ethical behavior such as speaking up to stop ethical violations. Future research can further explore these different possible mechanisms underlying moral elevation.

Results also show different patterns of predictors and mediators for observer behavioral response to (support for the voicer) and interpersonal evaluations of the voicer (liking and status). For behavioral response, the effect of elevation is no longer significant after accounting for threat. This suggests that threat is a more powerful predictor than elevation for the observer's verbal support for the voicer. This finding is consistent with research on voice showing that inhibitory affective and cognitive mechanisms such as fear, perceived risk and safety play a key role in predicting voice behavior (Kish-Gephart et al., 2009; Liang et al., 2012). Echoing the widely supported negativity bias (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; Rozin & Royzman, 2001), these results suggest that negative, avoidance affective states (threat) have a stronger effect on voice behavior compared to positive, approach affective states (elevation). This also implies that in order to gain allies in voicing ethical issues in their groups, the ethical voicers not only need to inspire and elevate the potential allies but also (and perhaps more importantly) they need to reduce the moral threat experienced by potential allies.

In addition, affective predictors and processes play a relatively small role in explaining support for the voicer. When predictors were entered simultaneously to predict support, the effect of promotion framing was the strongest and still significant whereas the effects of emotional expressions diminished. It is also worth noting that affective processes (i.e., elevation and threat) explained only 8% of the variance for support (as shown in Table 15), suggesting that other important mechanisms have not been accounted for in this study. Given that the voice and ethical voice literatures consider voice behavior to be a highly discretionary behavior that involves intentional calculation of benefits and risks (Morrison, 2014), future research should investigate additional cognitive processes such as perceived importance of issues and perceived riskiness of voice. Future research should take into account those deliberate, cognitive mechanisms and assess the relative importance of affective vs. cognitive processes.

In contrast to support where more variance was explained by threat than by elevation, interpersonal reactions to the voicer (likeability and status) were better predicted by elevation: Elevation but not threat was significantly related to likeability; elevation, compared to threat, was more strongly related to positive change in status. In addition, compared to support for the voicer, the total variance explained in the study for interpersonal reactions was also higher. As shown in Table 15, for likeability, 25% of the variance was explained by the predictors and 15% of the variance was explained by elevation and threat; for status, 9% of the variance was explained by the predictors and 9% of the variance was explained by elevation and threat. This proportion is much higher than that explained for support. This suggests that ethical voice characteristics (how voice is delivered) and affective processes may have a bigger impact on how observers evaluate the voicer interpersonally than on how observers respond behaviorally to the voice behavior. This is important for voicer impression management and it suggests that ethical

voicers need to pay attention to the way they present and deliver their message and consider how they can elicit observer moral elevation to maintain a positive image and social standing in their groups.

It is also worth noting that I found very few significant direct relationships between ethical voice characteristics and outcomes, despite the fact that most of those characteristics had significant indirect effects on outcomes via threat and elevation. This suggests that the relationship between ethical voice characteristics and outcomes is not as straightforward as I hypothesized. Voice characteristics may interact with other factors that have not been examined (e.g., characteristics of the voicer) to influence observer support and interpersonal evaluations. In addition, the variances explained for the outcomes were also small, suggesting that other predictors, moderators, and mediators need to be considered and examined in future research.

Although I found support for most of the main effects hypothesized, I found very little support for the moderating effects hypothesized. Restriction of range for several moderators is a plausible explanation for many of the null findings. For voicer role expectation, “beyond role expectation” was assigned to the majority of cases because most voicers were peers of the observers, whereas “within role expectation” was rarely assigned as only a few voicers were leaders of the observers. This may have resulted from my instruction to participants to recall ethical voice by coworkers in the unit. For voicer implicated by voice, the mean was relatively low (1.95 out of 5), possibly because observers selectively recalled incidents that did not implicate themselves due to social desirability concerns. Similarly, due to social desirability, the mean of moral identity centrality was extremely high (4.65) and the standard deviation was small (.46). Although this is not uncommon compared to past research on moral identity, it did limit the chance of detecting significant interaction effects.

Additionally, there were a few unexpected interaction effects. First, there was an interaction of external reporting and ethical voice climate on threat. Results suggest that when the ethical voice climate was less favorable, individuals were similarly threatened regardless of whether the voicer chose to deliver the message within or outside the group; when the ethical voice climate was more favorable, individuals experienced much lower levels of threat when ethical voice occurred inside the group but they were more threatened when ethical voice occurred outside the group. This suggests researchers should take a closer look at the implications of ethical voice climate for reactions to ethical voice. Ethical voice climate may favor ethical voicers who share ethical concerns within the work group but inflict penalties on those who report ethical issues to people outside the group. This implies a potential downside of favorable ethical voice climate: It could backfire when the ethical voicer deems it necessary to go outside of the group to voice issues unable to be addressed within the group (e.g., ethical issues involving group members or group leaders).

Results also show a negative interaction between observer being implicated and other-condemning emotional expression that was not consistent with expectations. I hypothesized that the observer being implicated by voice would strengthen the positive relationship between other-condemning emotional expression and threat. However, the results suggest a different story: Voicer other-condemning emotional expression had a stronger effect on threat when the observers did not report being implicated. This suggests that observers being implicated by ethical voice may represent a strong situation wherein observers will experience threat regardless of how voice is delivered.

Finally, although observer chronic regulatory focus was included as a control, the pattern of results for observer chronic regulatory focus also provided some support for the regulatory

focus approach. More specifically, observer prevention focus was positively related to threat ( $B = .25, p < .01$ ) and it had significant and negative indirect effects via threat on support (bootstrapping estimate =  $-.08$ ,  $SE = .04$ , 95% CI  $[-.18, -.02]$ ) and status (bootstrapping estimate =  $-.03$ ,  $SE = .02$ , 95% CI  $[-.08, -.00]$ ), although the total effects of observer prevention focus on outcomes were mostly not significant, except for the total effect on support ( $B = -.15, p < .05$ ). Observer promotion focus was positively related to elevation ( $B = .32, p < .01$ ) and it had significant and positive indirect effects via elevation on support (bootstrapping estimate =  $.08$ ,  $SE = .05$ , 95% CI  $[.01, .21]$ ), likeability (bootstrapping estimate =  $.13$ ,  $SE = .05$ , 95% CI  $[.04, .24]$ ), and status (bootstrapping estimate =  $.06$ ,  $SE = .03$ , 95% CI  $[.02, .13]$ ), although none of the total effects of observer promotion focus on outcomes was significant. Along with the results for voice characteristics, these support a regulatory focus view for understanding observer responses to ethical voice. That is, the extent to which the observers support, like, and look up to the voicer is determined by their perception of the ethical voice behavior: Whether observers are led by voice presentation and delivery and their chronic regulatory focus to view the ethical voice behavior as a moral threat or a virtuous act. Table 5 and Table 6 further show that situational cues of promotion or prevention morality (i.e., voice characteristics) and observer chronic regulatory focus each play unique roles in shaping observer affective states and responses, given that their respective effects on elevation and threat remained significant when they were entered simultaneously to predict elevation and threat.

### **Research Implications**

This research contributes to multiple literatures. First, I offered a definition of ethical voice, distinguishing ethical voice from (traditional) voice and defining the domain of ethical voice. In doing so, I also connected and integrated multiple bodies of research related to ethical

voice that have been separate in the past (e.g., whistle-blowing, peer reporting, moral objection, ethical issue selling, confronting third-party injustice) and contributed to theoretical parsimony. My findings further suggest that ethical voice can and should be conceptualized separately because the mediating processes that explain outcomes appear to differ, at least in part from those studied in the traditional voice literature. I found in this study that observer responses to ethical voice were explained by ethics-related affective mechanisms—elevation and threat due to the ethical behavior of the voicer. In contrast, studies on coworkers' and managerial responses to traditional voice have revealed mechanisms centering around observers' self-interest or the organization's interest—whether the voicer was viewed as challenging the observers' status and power in the organization (Burris, 2012) or advancing the organization/group's productivity and performance (Burris, 2012; Whiting et al., 2012). This provides deeper insights into how ethical voice differs from traditional voice and offers an avenue for future research.

Second, I apply the regulatory focus lens to ethical voice, providing a theoretically deeper and clearer understanding of observer reactions to ethical voice, including the underlying mechanisms and triggering conditions. This theory helps to integrate seemingly contradictory views regarding reactions to ethical voice and adds clarity to the literature. Prior research on ethical voice (whistle-blowing, moral objection, confronting discrimination and injustice) has primarily taken a pessimistic view, showing that others (especially wrongdoers) tend to respond unfavorably to ethical voicers (due to threat). In contrast, some anecdotes and a recent emergent positive view of morality in the moral psychology literature suggest that others may respond favorably to highly moral actors such as ethical voicers. I used the dual moral systems highlighted in regulatory focus theory—prevention morality and promotion morality to explain and reconcile these contradicting views. I hypothesized and found that voicer (promotion vs.



prevention) framing, (other-suffering vs. other-condemning) emotional expression, and (external vs. internal) delivery, as well as observer vested interest in the ethical issue (being implicated by or benefiting from the issue) serve as important cues of promotion or prevention morality, leading to different observer affective experiences (threat vs. moral elevation) and reactions (support, likeability and status evaluation of the voicer). Additional analysis further shows that characteristics of ethical voice explained unique variance in support, likeability, and status evaluation above and beyond what can be explained by observer vested interest. Specifically, voicer promotion framing remained a significant predictor of support for ethical voice, voicer other-suffering emotion remained a significant predictor of likeability of the voicer, and voicer other-condemning emotion remained a significant predictor of status evaluation of the voicer, after accounting for the effects of observer benefiting from or being implicated by ethical voice. This goes beyond prior research on whistle-blowing and moral objection that primarily focuses on implicated observers' retaliation against and derogation of the ethical voicer, by expanding the scope of research on triggers of observer reactions to ethical voice to focus on *how* ethical voice is delivered (e.g., framing of ethical voice messages and voicer emotional expression).

Third, this research empirically extends regulatory focus theory to the moral domain, and in particular, to ethical voice. Cornwell and Higgins (2015) distinguished the ought-based prevention moral system and the ideal-based promotion moral system but have not examined them empirically. By demonstrating that different situational cues trigger the affective and behavioral reactions implied by the two regulatory foci, this research largely supported Cornwell and Higgins's (2015) theoretical extension as it applies to ethical voice. However, my findings also show that certain situational cues (i.e., ethical voice framed in prevention terms) activate the prevention system and the promotion system simultaneously, eliciting mixed emotions (elevation

and threat) and reactions in observers. This provides a more complex view of how observers react to ethical voice, going beyond regulatory focus theory and the extant literature on ethical voice, wherein observers have been assumed to react *either* favorably *or* unfavorably to the ethical voicer. Future research should further examine observer mixed emotions and reactions toward ethical voice and better understand when this occurs and what implications this has.

Fourth, this research advances research on moral elevation by introducing regulatory focus theory as a theoretical lens to study moral elevation and by proposing and examining antecedents and consequences of moral elevation. Given the relatively short history of the moral elevation construct (since Haidt introduced it in 2000), research has been limited to one particular consequence of moral elevation—observer helping behavior (e.g., Freeman et al., 2009; Schnall & Roper, 2012; Schnall et al., 2010). We know very little about other potential consequences (e.g., increased likability and status of the actor, support for the voice) and conditions giving rise to moral elevation (e.g., Aquino et al., 2011). Drawing on regulatory focus theory, this research offers a theory-based understanding of antecedents and consequences of moral elevation. Further, the finding that prevention framing is positively related to moral elevation goes beyond extant research on moral elevation that considers moral elevation to arise from witnessing benevolent ethical behavior (e.g., helping others), suggesting that moral elevation can be also triggered by risky, brave ethical behavior such as speaking up to stop ethical violations. This suggests the need to expand theory and empirical research on eliciting conditions of moral elevation, to consider both benevolent moral acts such as helping and agentic moral acts such as speaking up against unethical behavior and consider whether the nature of moral elevation varies as a result of different eliciting conditions.

### **Practical Implications**

This study has important implications for employees who consider voicing ethical issues and managers who hope to encourage ethical voice behavior in organizations. First, results of this study show that presentation and delivery of ethical voice clearly affects coworkers' reactions to ethical voicers. This suggests that potential voicers should pay attention to how they present their messages, especially how they frame the issue and what emotions they express, and to whom they voice the ethical issues. Specifically, they should use promotion terms in their messages, appealing to moral ideals (advancing stakeholder welfare) and the potential to achieve ideal goals, as this promotion-oriented approach helps to elicit more support and positive interpersonal evaluations from coworkers. Meanwhile, they should avoid using prevention terms that emphasize the need to stop ethical violations, because prevention framing induces threat in observers and suppresses coworker support. In addition, voicers should also consider expressing other-suffering emotions such as sympathy and compassion for stakeholders as this helps to increase coworkers' liking and status evaluation of them. In contrast, they should avoid expressing other-condemning emotions such as anger, contempt, and disgust (which are often experienced by voicers) as doing so may threaten the observers and result in status loss. Moreover, they should consider communicating the ethical issue to group members and direct supervisors first if group members are responsible and can do something to address the issue, before going to a third-party outside the group, as the latter may lead to threat in coworkers and negative reactions. Managers and ethics and compliance officers aiming to encourage ethical voice behavior should also consider educating employees on the aforementioned effective ways of presenting and delivering ethical voice messages.

Moreover, results also show that observers' perception of and reaction to ethical voice are largely shaped by their own interest. Observers who are potential beneficiaries of ethical voice are more likely to support the voicer, like the voicer more, and assign higher status to the voicer, whereas observers who are implicated by the concern being expressed in the ethical voice tend to dislike the voicer more and provide lower status evaluations of the voicer. This suggests that potential voicers need to carefully select their audience: They should investigate whether their intended audience (team members, managers, HR department, etc.) have a stake in the situation before speaking to them about the ethical issue. Speaking up might not be effective and hurt voicers' social standing in the group when the audience has contributed directly or indirectly to the problematic status quo.

### **Strengths, Limitations and Future Directions**

I relied on a critical incident survey to test the hypotheses. Despite the fact that ethical voice is a low-base rate phenomenon in organizations, this method enabled me to collect data on highly concrete ethical voice incidents experienced by individuals employed in different industries, helping strengthen the external validity of the findings. In addition, the data collected involved a wide range of ethical issues impacting different stakeholders (i.e., employees, customers, local community, environment, the public), which helped strengthen generalizability of the findings. However, this methodology also limited the study in several ways. First and most important, the relationships revealed in this study are correlational. I cannot rule out the possibility of reversed causality and common methods variance. Although theory suggests that characteristics of ethical voice (framing, emotional expressions, delivery) should influence elevation and threat and subsequently affect observer reactions, it is also possible that observers' liking, respect, and support for the voicer have biased their memory of the situation (e.g., their

own emotional experience and how the voice is presented) and caused them to recall more positive information (Safer, Levine, & Drapalski, 2002). The opposite would be true if they disliked the voicer. In addition, the independent variables, mediators, and dependent variables were reported by the observers themselves. The seemingly significant relationships could be driven by a third, unmeasured variable (Crampton & Wagner, 1994): For example, observers with certain individual differences might view the world through a more positive lens whereas others may see everything through a negative lens. To minimize those concerns, I have controlled for voicer prior status and observer chronic promotion and prevention foci (which may affect whether observers see things in a promotion or a prevention lens) and still found significant effects after accounting for those controls. Yet, future research should use experimental design to further rule out reverse causality and common variance to strengthen the validity of the findings.

The second limitation of using the critical incident technique is that it may have resulted in oversampling of favorable reactions to ethical voice and under-sampling of unfavorable reactions to ethical voice: Due to social desirability, people might not be willing to recall an incident in which they felt threatened by the ethical voice or an incident that implicated them. Indeed, the mean of observer implicated in the voice was quite low (1.95 out of 5). The effects on threat would likely have been stronger if the sample were more balanced. Future research can address this concern by experimentally manipulating whether observers are implicated by ethical voice.

Third, the mechanisms proposed in this study (moral elevation and threat) explain a relatively small percentage of variance in coworker support for ethical voice (8%). This suggests that future research should explore additional mediators and moderators of the relationship

between ethical voice and coworker support for ethical voice. Coworker support for ethical voice is an act of ethical voice by definition. According to the literature, employees tend to believe that voice is risky and futile (Detert & Edmondson, 2011). Therefore they often make judgments about the safety and efficacy of ethical voice before deciding whether to engage in the behavior (Morrison, 2014). This suggests that future research should take into account the cognitive calculus (e.g., perceived safety, riskiness, audience receptivity) alongside the affective mechanisms I proposed and examine how characteristics of ethical voice, observers, and context influence these cognitive processes and coworker subsequent support for ethical voice.

In addition, the ethical issues recalled also varied considerably across participants and this may have confounded the effect of framing on elevation and outcomes. There are “promotion” issues wherein the voicer intends to advance stakeholders’ welfare in the absence of any wrongdoing (e.g., community service, recycling program) and there are “prevention” issues wherein the voicer intends to stop ongoing wrongdoing (e.g., confronting or reporting sexual harassment, overbilling, inflating work hours). The type of framing the voicer chose to use might be partly related to the type of issue. Indeed, examination of participants’ open-ended responses reveals that participants with high prevention framing ratings (mean + 1SD) but low promotion framing ratings (mean – 1SD) (N = 9) all reported “prevention issues” where there was an ongoing wrongdoing; most of the participants with high promotion framing ratings but low prevention framing ratings (N = 12) reported “promotion issues” where they offered ideas to advance stakeholder welfare. Therefore, it is not clear whether the type of issue or the framing caused the effects. Future research can use experimental designs to separate the effects of issue type and the effect of framing.

It is worth noting that the correlation between promotion framing and prevention framing was nearly zero ( $r = -.02$ ), meaning that they are not mutually exclusive. Voicers may rely on either one of the frames or use both of them. It makes intuitive sense that many voicers would highlight both the ethically questionable situation and the need to do good things to varying degrees. Given that both promotion and prevention framing lead to elevation, is a combination of promotion and prevention framing more effective in generating observer support? Due to the small number of participants with both promotion and prevention framing ratings one standard deviation above the means in this sample ( $N = 12$ ), I could not fully explore this question in the current study. Using an experimental design with manipulation of framing would help answer this question.

Last, given the number of hypotheses and the effect size of some predictors (e.g., partial R-square explained for elevation by external delivery is about .02, suggesting a small effect size), the sample size is relatively small. I calculated in G\*Power 3.1 the sample size needed to achieve a power of .80 to detect significant effects ( $\alpha = .05$ ) for external delivery, using the effect size found in the current study ( $f^2 = .02$ ). Results suggest that at least 395 participants would have been needed. In addition, power for detecting the hypothesized moderation effects was likely attenuated by range restriction in the independent variables and moderators. Therefore, small sample size may have further limited my ability to find significant interaction effects. Future research can re-examine those relationships with a larger sample size.

## CONCLUSION

Observer reactions to coworkers who speak up about ethical issues have important implications for group and organizational ethical-decision making, reputation, and stakeholder well-being. However, extant research on ethical voice and the moral psychology literature have offered contradicting expectations regarding whether observers respond favorably or unfavorably to ethical voicers. Drawing on regulatory focus theory, I proposed and tested a model explaining when and why observers react favorably or unfavorably to ethical voicers. Results from a critical incident survey with a working adult sample show that voicer presentation and delivery of ethical voice and the observer's vested interest in the ethical issue determine observer affective states and subsequent reactions. More specifically, when the voicer frames messages in promotion terms, expresses sympathy and compassion, and delivers the voice message inside the work group and when the observer could benefit from the ethical voice, the observer experiences moral elevation and hence verbally supports the voicer and evaluates the voicer favorably in terms of likeability and status. When the voicer frames messages in prevention terms, expresses anger, and delivers the message outside the work group and when the observer could be harmed by the ethical voice, the observer experiences threat and is hence unsupportive and evaluates the voicer unfavorably in terms of status. These findings suggest that ethical voicers need to carefully present and deliver their messages and select their audience, in order to gain support for their ethical voice and avoid social costs.



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Table 1 Relevant Constructs, Definitions, and Theories Cited

Constructs	Definition	Theories or literatures cited	Relationship to ethical voice
Traditional voice	discretionary communication of ideas, suggestions, concerns, or opinions about work-related issues with the intent to improve organizational or unit functioning (Morrison, 2011)	social exchange, psychological contract	Different voiced content, primarily focusing on work procedures and arrangements; different intent, primarily focusing on improving organizational or unit operation efficiency and effectiveness
Ethical voice	verbal or written communication by an organization member of ideas, suggestions, concerns, or opinions about ethical issues in the workplace that concern upholding societal ethical standards or promoting the welfare either of the greater society or stakeholders beyond the workgroup or organization	-	
Whistle-blowing	'organization members . . . who disclose illegal, immoral or illegitimate practices under the control of their employer to persons or organizations who may be able to effect action" (1985, p.6)	Ethical decision-making (Rest, 1986; Kolburg & Hersh, 1977) bystander intervention(Darley & Latané, 1968)	A subset of ethical voice. Narrower in that it focuses on preventing or stopping unethical behavior.
Tempered radicalism	the changes effected by “individuals who are committed to a cause, community, or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds with the dominant culture of their organization”. (Meyerson & Scully, 1995, p. 586)	social movement, framing	A subset of ethical voice. Narrower in that it focuses on promoting societal or stakeholder welfare.

Third-party reaction to injustice/mistreatment	“Ways a third party may behave upon witnessing or learning about an act of injustice” (O’Reilly & Aquino, 2011)	Deontic justice models – moral outrage (Folger, 2001); intuitive ethical decision-making (Haidt, 2001); bystander intervention (Darley & Latané, 1968)	Narrower in that it focuses on preventing or stopping interpersonal unethical behavior. Broader in that it includes not just communication, but also behaviors including punishment in the forms of ostracism, negative performance evaluation, etc.
Social issue selling	“social issue supporters”—individuals who identify with a social issue and desire to support it (Sonenshein, DeCelles, & Dutton, 2014)	issue selling; identity; values	A subset of ethical voice. Narrower in that it focuses on promoting societal welfare.

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Table 2 Characteristics of Ethical Issues Raised

Stakeholders affected	%	Issues	Examples
External (e.g., customers, community)	54	Pricing fairness, diversity and inclusion, safety, privacy, environment, community service, etc.	Overbilling clients; Securing customer data; Making restrooms more inclusive for transgender patrons;
Employees	39	Fairness, diversity and inclusion, safety	Better security measures at the office building; Hiring and promoting minorities; Paying employees for overtime
Organization	3	Use of organizational property and resources	Submitting adequate documentation for reimbursement; Coworker stealing office supplies
Voicer	4	Fairness, diversity and inclusion	Abusive supervision, discriminatory practices

Table 3 Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1. Social desirability	3.21	0.69																		
2. Voicer status	3.14	0.83	.04																	
3. Observer promotion focus	3.96	0.62	.19**	-.03																
4. Observer prevention focus	3.15	0.90	-.36**	-.03	-.17*															
5. Promotion framing	3.69	1.04	.14†	.07	.14†	-.03														
6. Prevention framing	3.48	1.10	-.03	.01	.05	.10	-.02													
7. Other-suffering emotional expression	2.48	1.18	.05	.09	.12	.05	.29**	-.19**												
8. Other-condemning emotional expression	2.14	1.10	-.09	-.03	-.06	.06	-.13†	.53**	-.38**											
9. External delivery	0.16	0.37	-.01	-.09	.07	-.03	-.19**	.16*	-.25**	.13†										
10. Observer benefiting from voice	2.74	1.34	-.04	.15*	-.01	.04	.17*	.11	.01	.07	-.11									
11. Observer implicated	1.60	0.91	-.03	.11	-.03	.01	.06	.05	.05	.19*	-.14†	.21**								
12. Moral identity	4.65	0.50	.23**	.12	.29**	-.07	.09	.07	-.04	-.04	-.05	-.05	-.16*							
13. Ethical voice climate	2.14	1.10	.24**	.12	.10	-.34**	.15*	-.25**	.22**	-.28**	.01	-.12	-.05	.23**						
14. Voicer leadership role	0.07	0.26	-.01	.20*	.00	.06	.11	.02	.09	.00	.11	.00	.05	.03	-.03					
15. Elevation	3.07	1.05	.07	.13†	.19*	.07	.27**	.17*	.30**	-.03	-.14†	.18*	.00	.22**	.04	.14†				
16. Threat	2.19	1.05	-.19*	-.01	-.07	.25**	-.19*	.32**	-.12	.41**	.13†	.04	.27**	.01	-.26**	.08	-.10			
17. Likeability	3.68	0.75	-.08	.16*	.01	.05	.12	.11	.15†	-.01	-.10	.31**	.06	.13†	.02	.05	.51**	.03		
18. Status	3.27	0.70	.15*	.09	.05	-.23**	.22**	-.04	.20**	-.19**	-.06	.11	.02	.09	.28**	-.06	.24**	-.24**	.40**	
19. Support	3.09	1.38	-.03	.12†	.03	.03	.20**	-.02	.05	-.02	-.03	.15*	.10	.07	.17*	-.05	.19*	-.22**	.27**	.23**

†  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed

Table 4 Hypotheses and Results

Hypotheses	Supported or not
<b><i>Effects of voice characteristics on moral threat and elevation (H1a-f)</i></b>	
1a Prevention framing is positively related to observer moral threat.	Yes
1b Promotion framing is positively related to observer moral elevation.	Yes
1c Expressing other-condemning emotions is positively related to observer moral threat.	Yes
1d Expressing other-suffering emotions is positively related to observer moral elevation.	Yes
1e Delivery of ethical voice to an external audience is positively related to observer moral threat.	No
1f Delivery of ethical voice to an internal audience is positively related to observer moral elevation.	No
<b><i>Moderating effects of context (ethical voice climate and actor role expectation) (H2a-H3b)</i></b>	
2a The effects of voice characteristics on observer moral threat are stronger when the ethical voice climate is less favorable	No; opposite for external delivery
2b The effects of voice characteristics on observer moral elevation are stronger when the ethical voice climate is less favorable	No
3a When ethical voice is beyond the actor's role expectation, the effects of voice characteristics on observer moral threat are stronger.	No; opposite for prevention framing
3b When ethical voice is beyond the actor's role expectation, the effects of voice characteristics on observer moral elevation are stronger.	No
<b><i>Effects of observer characteristics (implicated by or benefiting from ethical voice and moral identity) (H4-H11)</i></b>	
4 The extent of observer being implicated by ethical voice is positively related to moral threat.	Yes
5 The extent of observer being implicated by ethical voice strengthens the effects of voice characteristics on moral threat.	No; opposite for other-condemning emotion
6 The extent of observer benefiting from the ethical voice is positively related to moral elevation.	Yes
7 The extent of observer benefiting from the ethical voice strengthens the effects of voice characteristics on moral elevation.	No
8 Observer moral identity centrality strengthens the effect of observer being implicated by ethical voice on observer moral threat.	No

- 9 To the extent that the observer is implicated by ethical voice, observer moral identity centrality strengthens the effects of the voice characteristics on observer moral threat. No
- 10 Observer moral identity centrality strengthens the effect of observer benefiting from ethical voice on observer moral elevation. No
- 11 To the extent that the observer benefits from ethical voice, observer moral identity centrality strengthens the effects of the voice characteristics on observer elevation. No

***Effects of moral threat on outcomes and the indirect effects via moral threat (H12-H17)***

- 12 Observer moral threat is negatively related to support for the ethical voice. Yes
- 13a Observer moral threat mediates the relationship between voice characteristics and support. Yes
- 13b Observer moral threat mediates the relationship between observer being implicated and support. Yes
- 14 Observer moral threat is negatively related to likeability of the voicer. No
- 15a Observer moral threat mediates the relationship between voice characteristics and likeability. No
- 15b Observer moral threat mediates the relationship between observer being implicated by ethical voice and likeability. No
- 16 Observer moral threat is negatively related to the observer's evaluation of the status of the ethical voicer. Yes
- 17a Observer moral threat mediates the relationship between voice characteristics and status evaluation. No
- 17b Observer moral threat mediates the relationship between observer being implicated by ethical voice and status evaluation of the ethical voicer. Yes

***Effects of moral elevation on outcomes and the indirect effects via moral elevation (H18-H23)***

- 18 Observer moral elevation is positively related to support for the ethical voice. Yes
- 19a Observer moral elevation mediates the relationship between voice characteristics and support. Only for emotional expression
- 19b Observer moral elevation mediates the relationship between observer benefiting from ethical voice and support. No
- 20 Observer moral elevation is positively related to likeability of the ethical voicer. Yes
- 21a Observer moral elevation mediates the relationship between voice characteristics and likeability. Yes for all except external delivery
-

21b	Observer moral elevation mediates the relationship between observer benefiting from ethical voice and likeability of the ethical voicer.	Yes
22	Observer moral elevation is positively related to the observer's evaluation of the status of the ethical voicer.	Yes
23a	Observer moral elevation mediates the relationship between voice characteristics and status evaluation.	Yes for all except external delivery
23b	Observer moral elevation mediates the relationship between observer benefiting from ethical voice and status evaluation of the ethical voicer.	Yes

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Table 5 Regression Results for Threat

Predictors	Baseline	Model1	Model2	Model3	Model4	Model5	Model6	Model7	Model8
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
Social desirability	-.16(.12)	-.13(.12)	-.16(.11)	-.15(.12)	-.12(.11)	-.15(.12)	-.16(.12)	-.18(.12)	-.12(.11)
Voicer status	.00(.09)	.02(.09)	-.00(.09)	.02(.09)	.02(.08)	.02(.09)	-.00(.09)	.00(.09)	.02(.08)
Observer promotion focus	-.02(.13)	-.02(.12)	-.06(.12)	.01(.13)	.01(.12)	-.04(.12)	-.02(.13)	-.01(.12)	.00(.12)
Observer prevention focus	.25**(.09)	.26**(.09)	.21*(.09)	.26**(.09)	.24**(.08)	.26**(.09)	.25**(.09)	.23*(.09)	.21*(.08)
Promotion framing		-.17*(.07)							-.14†(.07)
Prevention framing			.28**(.07)						.12(.08)
Other-suffering emotional expression				-.11†(.07)					.07(.07)
Other-condemning emotional expression					.38**(.06)				.30**(.08)
External delivery						.39†(.21)			.17(.20)
Observer benefiting from voice							.02(.06)		.01(.05)
Observer implicated by voice								.40*(.16)	.25(.15)
$\Delta R^2$		.03*	.09**	.07**	.16**	.02†	.00	.03*	.20**
$R^2$	.07**	.10**	.16**	.14**	.23**	.09**	.07**	.10**	.27**

†  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed



Table 6 Regression Results for Elevation

Predictors	Baseline	Model9	Model10	Model11	Model12	Model13	Model14	Model15	Model16
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
Social desirability	.11(.12)	.06(.12)	.11(.12)	.09(.11)	.11(.12)	.10(.12)	.12(.12)	.12(.12)	.08(.11)
Voicer status	.17 <sup>†</sup> (.09)	.15(.09)	.16 <sup>†</sup> (.09)	.14(.09)	.17 <sup>†</sup> (.09)	.15 <sup>†</sup> (.09)	.14(.09)	.17 <sup>†</sup> (.09)	.09(.09)
Observer promotion focus	.34 <sup>**</sup> (.13)	.29 <sup>*</sup> (.12)	.32 <sup>*</sup> (.12)	.28 <sup>*</sup> (.12)	.34 <sup>**</sup> (.13)	.35 <sup>**</sup> (.12)	.34 <sup>**</sup> (.12)	.33 <sup>**</sup> (.13)	.23 <sup>†</sup> (.12)
Observer prevention focus	.15 <sup>†</sup> (.09)	.14(.09)	.14(.09)	.13(.09)	.15 <sup>†</sup> (.09)	.15(.09)	.15(.09)	.16 <sup>†</sup> (.09)	.10(.09)
Promotion framing		<b>.24<sup>**</sup></b> (.07)							.14 <sup>†</sup> (.07)
Prevention framing			.14 <sup>*</sup> (.07)						.20 <sup>*</sup> (.08)
Other-suffering emotional expression				<b>.24<sup>**</sup></b> (.06)					.23 <sup>**</sup> (.07)
Other-condemning emotional expression					-.01(.07)				-.00(.08)
External delivery						<b>-.40<sup>†</sup></b> (.21)			-.19(.20)
Observer benefiting from voice							<b>.13<sup>*</sup></b> (.06)		.09(.05)
Observer implicated by voice								-.22(.17)	-.20(.16)
$\Delta R^2$		.05 <sup>**</sup>	.02 <sup>*</sup>	.07 <sup>**</sup>	.00	.02 <sup>*</sup>	.03 <sup>*</sup>	.01	.16 <sup>**</sup>
$R^2$	.07 <sup>*</sup>	.12 <sup>**</sup>	.09 <sup>**</sup>	.14 <sup>**</sup>	.07 <sup>*</sup>	.09 <sup>**</sup>	.10 <sup>**</sup>	.07 <sup>*</sup>	.23 <sup>**</sup>

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed

Table 7 Interaction of Ethical Voice Climate and Predictors on Threat

Predictors	Model17 B (SE)	Model18 B (SE)	Model19 B (SE)	Model20 B (SE)	Model21 B (SE)
Social desirability	-.11(.12)	-.14(.12)	-.12(.12)	-.10(.11)	-.10(.12)
Voicer status	.01(.09)	.01(.09)	.03(.09)	.03(.08)	.04(.09)
Observer promotion focus	.03(.12)	-.05(.12)	.00(.13)	.01(.12)	-.03(.12)
Observer prevention focus	.21*(.09)	.20†(.09)	.20*(.10)	.21*(.09)	.19*(.09)
Promotion framing	-.73**(.28)				
Prevention framing		.41(.34)			
Other-suffering emotional expression			-.26(.31)		
Other-condemning emotional expression				.29(.26)	
External delivery					-2.09*(1.01)
Ethical voice climate	-.78**(.28)	.00(.32)	-.29(.19)	-.14(.18)	-.30**(.09)
Promotion framing X ethical voice climate	.16*(.07)				
Prevention framing X ethical voice climate		-.04(.08)			
Other-suffering emotional expression X ethical voice climate			.05(.08)		
Other-condemning emotional expression X ethical voice climate				.02(.07)	
External delivery X ethical voice climate					.65*(.26)
$\Delta R^2$ due to interaction	.02*	.00	.00	.00	.03*
$R^2$	.15**	.17**	.12**	.23**	.16**

†  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed

Table 8 Interaction of Ethical Voice Climate and Predictors on Elevation

Predictors	Model22 B (SE)	Model23 B (SE)	Model24 B (SE)	Model25 B (SE)	Model26 B (SE)
Social desirability	.07(.12)	.09(.12)	.09(.12)	.10(.12)	.10(.12)
Voicer status	.15 <sup>†</sup> (.09)	.15 <sup>†</sup> (.09)	.14(.09)	.16 <sup>†</sup> (.09)	.15(.09)
Observer promotion focus	.29*(.12)	.31*(.12)	.27*(.12)	.34**(.13)	.35**(.13)
Observer prevention focus	.14(.09)	.16 <sup>†</sup> (.09)	.10(.09)	.16 <sup>†</sup> (.10)	.16 <sup>†</sup> (.09)
Promotion framing	.43(.28)				
Prevention framing		.50(.35)			
Other-suffering emotional expression			-.05(.31)		
Other-condemning emotional expression				.11(.28)	
External delivery					-.35(1.04)
Ethical voice climate	.21(.28)	.41(.33)	-.20(.19)	.11(.19)	.05(.09)
Promotion framing X ethical voice climate	-.05(.07)				
Prevention framing X ethical voice climate		-.08(.08)			
Other-suffering emotional expression X ethical voice climate			.07(.08)		
Other-condemning emotional expression X ethical voice climate				-.03(.07)	
External delivery X ethical voice climate					-.01(.27)
$\Delta R^2$ due to interaction	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
$R^2$	.13**	.10**	.14**	.07 <sup>†</sup>	.09*

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed

Table 9 Interaction of Voicer Role Expectation and Predictors on Threat

Predictors	Model27 B (SE)	Model28 B (SE)	Model29 B (SE)	Model30 B (SE)	Model31 B (SE)
Social desirability	-.12(.12)	-.15(.11)	-.14(.12)	-.11(.11)	-.15(.12)
Voicer status	-.00(.09)	-.03(.09)	-.02(.09)	-.01(.09)	.00(.09)
Observer promotion focus	.01(.13)	-.06(.12)	.00(.13)	.01(.12)	-.03(.13)
Observer prevention focus	.25*(.09)	.22*(.09)	.26**(.09)	.24**(.08)	.25**(.09)
Promotion framing	-.18**(.08)				
Prevention framing		.25**(.07)			
Other-suffering emotional expression			-.08(.07)		
Other-condemning emotional expression				.35**(.07)	
External delivery					.33(.22)
Voicer leadership role	.72(1.67)	-1.89†(1.01)	1.29†(.68)	-.33(.57)	.09(.36)
Promotion framing X Voicer leadership role	-.09(.40)				
Prevention framing X Voicer leadership role		.61*(.27)			
Other-suffering emotional expression X Voicer leadership role			-.35(.21)		
Other-condemning emotional expression X Voicer leadership role				.29(.24)	
External delivery X Voicer leadership role					.38(.66)
$\Delta R^2$ due to interaction	.00	.02*	.01	.00	.00
$R^2$	.11**	.19**	.11**	.24**	.10*

†  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed

Table 10 Interaction of Voicer Role Expectation and Predictors on Elevation

Predictors	Model32 B (SE)	Model33 B (SE)	Model34 B (SE)	Model35 B (SE)	Model36 B (SE)
Social desirability	.06(.12)	.11(.12)	.09(.11)	.11(.12)	.11(.12)
Voicer status	.12(.09)	.14(.09)	.11(.09)	.14(.09)	.11(.09)
Observer promotion focus	.29*(.12)	.32*(.12)	.28*(.12)	.34**(.13)	.36**(.12)
Observer prevention focus	.14(.09)	.13(.09)	.12(.09)	.14(.09)	.13(.09)
Promotion framing	.22**(.07)				
Prevention framing		.13†(.07)			
Other-suffering emotional expression			.25**(.07)		
Other-condemning emotional expression				-.00(.07)	
External delivery					-.55*(.22)
Voicer leadership role	-.94(1.63)	.04(1.06)	.78(.66)	.75(.62)	.28(.35)
Promotion framing X voicer leadership role	.31(.39)				
Prevention framing X voicer leadership role		.11(.29)			
Other-suffering emotional expression X voicer leadership role			-.15(.21)		
Other-condemning emotional expression X voicer leadership role				-.15(.26)	
External delivery X voicer leadership role					.84(.65)
$\Delta R^2$ due to interaction	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
$R^2$	.13**	.10**	.15**	.08*	.11**

†  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed

Table 11 Interaction of Observer Implicated by Voice and Voice Characteristics on Threat

Predictors	Model37 B (SE)	Model38 B (SE)	Model39 B (SE)	Model40 B (SE)	Model41 B (SE)
Social desirability	-.11(.11)	-.18(.11)	-.14(.11)	-.15(.11)	-.14(.11)
Voicer status	-.02(.09)	-.01(.09)	-.01(.09)	.01(.08)	-.02(.09)
Observer promotion focus	.03(.12)	-.04(.12)	.03(.12)	.05(.11)	-.03(.12)
Observer prevention focus	.26**(.09)	.21*(.09)	.27**(.09)	.23**(.08)	.26**(.09)
Promotion framing	-.19(.13)				
Prevention framing		-.43**(.12)			
Other-suffering emotional expression			-.21†(.12)		
Other-condemning emotional expression				.57**(.13)	
External delivery					.54(.51)
Observer implicated	.30(.32)	.63*(.25)	.17(.16)	.59**(.19)	.31**(.08)
Promotion framing X observer implicated	.00(.08)				
Prevention framing X observer implicated		-.10(.06)			
Other-suffering emotional expression X implicated			-.21(.12)		
Other-condemning emotional expression X observer implicated				-.15**(.07)	
External delivery X observer implicated					-.03(.36)
$\Delta R^2$ due to interaction	.00	.01	.01	.02*	.00
$R^2$	.18**	.24**	.17**	.28**	.17**

†  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed

Table 12 Interaction of Observer Benefiting from Voice and Voice Characteristics on Elevation

Predictors	Model42 B (SE)	Model43 B (SE)	Model44 B (SE)	Model45 B (SE)	Model46 B (SE)
Social desirability	.07(.12)	.13(.12)	.10(.11)	.12(.12)	.11(.12)
Voicer status	.12(.09)	.15(.09)	.11(.09)	.14(.09)	.13(.09)
Observer promotion focus	.29*(.12)	.32*(.12)	.28*(.12)	.34**(.12)	.35**(.12)
Observer prevention focus	.14(.09)	.14(.09)	.12(.09)	.16†(.09)	.15†(.09)
Promotion framing	.05(.15)				
Prevention framing		.34**(.16)			
Other-suffering emotional expression			.20(.14)		
Other-condemning emotional expression				.06(.15)	
External delivery					.08(.42)
Observer benefiting from voice	-.12(.19)	.41**(.20)	.10(.12)	.20†(.19)	.15*(.06)
Promotion framing X observer benefit	.06(.05)				
Prevention framing X observer benefit		-.08(.05)			
Other-suffering emotional expression X observer benefit			.01(.05)		
Other-condemning emotional expression X observer benefit				-.03(.05)	
External delivery X observer benefit					-.18(.15)
$\Delta R^2$ due to interaction	.00	.01	.00	.00	.00
$R^2$	.15**	.12**	.16**	.10*	.12**

†  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed

Table 13 Interaction of Observer Implicated by Ethical Voice, Moral Identity, and Predictors on Threat

Predictors	Model47	Model48	Model49	Model50	Model51
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
Social desirability	-.15(.12)	-.20 <sup>†</sup> (.11)	-.20 <sup>†</sup> (.12)	-.19(.11)	-.21 <sup>†</sup> (.11)
Voicer status	-.02(.09)	-.05(.09)	-.02(.09)	-.03(.08)	-.04(.09)
Observer promotion focus	-.04(.13)	-.07(.12)	-.05(.13)	-.02(.11)	-.11(.12)
Observer prevention focus	.27 <sup>**</sup> (.09)	.22 <sup>*</sup> (.08)	.27 <sup>*</sup> (.09)	.24 <sup>**</sup> (.08)	.26 <sup>**</sup> (.09)
Promotion framing	1.17(1.52)				
Prevention framing		-.52(1.33)			
Other-suffering emotional expression			1.33(1.35)		
Other-condemning emotional expression				-1.90 <sup>**</sup> (1.31)	
External delivery					-6.73 <sup>†</sup> (4.06)
Observer implicated	2.20(3.24)	.30 (1.94)	2.96(1.76)	-.73(1.61)	.86(.73)
Moral identity	1.78(1.22)	.00(1.01)	1.50(.81)	-.50 <sup>*</sup> (.70)	.46(.33)
Observer implicated X moral identity	-.29(.32)	.20(.28)	-.32(.28)	.53 <sup>†</sup> (.28)	1.80 <sup>*</sup> (.87)
Promotion framing X Observer implicated	-.20(.86)				
Promotion framing X moral identity	-.42(.69)				
Promotion framing X observer implicated X moral identity	.05(.18)				
Prevention framing X observer implicated		.34(.56)			
Prevention framing X moral identity		.06(.43)			
Prevention framing X observer implicated X moral identity		-.09(.12)			
Other-suffering emotional expression X observer implicated			-.58(.60)		
Other-suffering emotional expression X moral identity			-.59(.37)		
Other-suffering emotion X observer implicated X moral identity			.13(.13)		



Other-condemning emotional expression X observer implicated				.90(.62)	
Other-condemning emotional expression X moral identity				.29(.35)	
Other-condemning emotion X observer implicated X moral identity				-.23 <sup>†</sup> (.13)	
External delivery X observer implicated					3.29 <sup>†</sup> (1.72)
External delivery X moral identity					-.12(.16)
External delivery X observer implicated X moral identity					-.74 <sup>†</sup> (.40)
$\Delta R^2$ due to interaction	.00	.00	.00	.01 <sup>†</sup>	.02 <sup>†</sup>
R <sup>2</sup>	.22**	.26**	.20**	.33**	.22**

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed

Table 14 Interaction of Observer Benefiting from Ethical Voice, Moral Identity, and Predictors on Elevation

Predictors	Model52	Model53	Model54	Model55	Model56
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
Social desirability	.01(.12)	.08(.12)	.04(.11)	.06(.12)	.06(.12)
Voicer status	.10(.09)	.12(.09)	.06(.09)	.13(.09)	.11(.09)
Observer promotion focus	.22 <sup>†</sup> (.13)	.24 <sup>†</sup> (.13)	.19(.12)	.26 <sup>*</sup> (.13)	.28 <sup>*</sup> (.13)
Observer prevention focus	.12(.09)	.13(.09)	.10(.09)	.12(.09)	.13(.09)
Promotion framing	.58(2.54)				
Prevention framing		.45(1.80)			
Other-suffering emotional expression			-.82(1.79)		
Other-condemning emotional expression				.56(1.68)	
External delivery					5.88(4.99)
Observer benefit from voice	2.04(3.10)	.41(1.80)	.02(1.53)	-.07(1.33)	.57(.59)
Moral identity	1.03(2.05)	.47(1.39)	.02(1.53)	.79(.93)	.70(.42)
Observer benefit X moral identity	-.45(.65)	.00(.39)	.02(.32)	-.10(.35)	-.09(.13)
Promotion framing X observer benefit	-.39(.78)				
Promotion framing X moral identity	-.10(.53)				
Promotion framing X observer benefit X moral identity	.09(.16)				
Prevention framing X observer benefit		-.06(.51)			
Prevention framing X moral identity		-.02(.38)			
Prevention framing X observer benefit X moral identity		-.00(.11)			
Other-suffering emotional expression X observer benefit			.14(.52)		
Other-suffering emotional expression X moral identity			.22(.37)		
Other-suffering emotional expression X observer benefit X moral identity			-.02(.11)		

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Other-condemning emotional expression X observer benefit					.21(.54)
Other-condemning emotional expression X moral identity					-.10(.35)
Other-condemning emotion X observer benefit X moral identity					-.05(.11)
External delivery X observer benefit					-1.78(1.92)
External delivery X moral identity					-1.23(1.05)
External delivery X observer benefit X moral identity					.34(.41)
$\Delta R^2$ due to interaction	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
$R^2$	.18**	.15**	.21**	.14**	.15**

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†  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed

Table 15 Effects of Elevation and Threat on Outcomes

Predictors	DV: Support			DV: Likeability		DV: Status		
	Model57	Model58	Model59	Model60	Model61	Model62	Model63	Model64
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
Social desirability	-.09(.16)	-.11(.16)	-.13(.16)	-.13 <sup>†</sup> (.08)	-.09(.09)	.05(.07)	.05(.07)	.03(.07)
Voicer status	.17(.12)	.21 <sup>†</sup> (.12)	.18(.12)	.08(.06)	.15*(.06)	.04(.06)	.06(.06)	.04(.06)
Observer promotion focus	.01(.17)	.08(.17)	.02(.17)	-.08(.08)	.05(.09)	-.05(.08)	-.00(.08)	-.05(.08)
Observer prevention focus	.01(.12)	.13(.12)	.09(.12)	-.04(.06)	.02(.07)	-.17**(0.06)	-.12*(.06)	-.15*(.06)
Elevation	.24*(.10)		.20*(.10)	.37**(0.05)		.16**(0.05)		.15**(0.05)
Threat	-.32**(0.10)		-.30**(0.10)	.01(.06)		-.11*(.05)		-.10*(.05)
$\Delta R^2$	.03*	.05*	.08**	.25**	.00	.06**	.03*	.08**
$R^2$	.05	.07*	.10**	.28**	.03	.12**	.10**	.14**

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed

Table 16 95% Bootstrapped confidence interval for indirect effects via threat and elevation (N = 5,000)

IV	DV: Support		DV: Likeability		DV: Status	
	via threat	via elevation	via threat	via elevation	via threat	via elevation
Promotion framing	[.00, .12]	[-.00, .12]	[-.04, .01]	[.03, .17]	[-.00, .05]	[.01, .07]
Prevention framing	[-.28, -.03]	[-.00, .09]	[-.02, .06]	[.00, .11]	[-.07, .00]	[.00, .05]
Other-suffering emotional expression	[.00, .09]	[.00, .13]	[-.03, .01]	[.04, .16]	[-.00, .04]	[.01, .07]
Other-condemning emotional expression	[-.25, -.05]	[-.05, .03]	[-.03, .08]	[-.07, .05]	[-.08, .02]	[-.03, .02]
External delivery	[-.30, -.02]	[-.28, .00]	[-.36, .02]	[-.02, .09]	[-.14, .00]	[-.18, .00]
Observer benefiting from voice	[-.05, .03]	[-.00, .07]	[-.01, .02]	[.01, .10]	[-.02, .01]	[.00, .05]
Observer implicated by voice	[-.20, -.04]	[-.05, .03]	[-.03, .05]	[-.07, .05]	[-.08, -.00]	[-.03, .02]

Table 17 Direct Effects of Predictors on Support

Predictors	baseline	Model65	Model66	Model67	Model68	Model69	Model70	Model71	Model72
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
Social desirability	-.06(.16)	-.11(.16)	-.06(.16)	-.06(.16)	-.06(.16)	-.06(.16)	-.05(.16)	-.06(.16)	-.10(.16)
Voicer status	.21 <sup>†</sup> (.12)	.18(.12)	.21 <sup>†</sup> (.12)	.20(.12)	.21 <sup>†</sup> (.12)	.21 <sup>†</sup> (.12)	.18(.12)	.21 <sup>†</sup> (.12)	.16(.13)
Observer promotion focus	.09(.17)	.03(.17)	.10(.17)	.08(.17)	.09(.17)	.09(.17)	.09(.17)	.09(.17)	.04(.17)
Observer prevention focus	.05(.12)	.03(.12)	.05(.12)	.04(.12)	.05(.12)	.05(.12)	.04(.12)	.05(.12)	.04(.12)
Promotion framing		.27 <sup>**</sup> (.10)							.26 <sup>*</sup> (.11)
Prevention framing			-.03(.09)						-.05(.11)
Other-suffering emotional expression				.04(.09)					-.03(.10)
Other-condemning emotional expression					-.02(.09)				-.01(.12)
External delivery						-.07(.28)			.15(.30)
Observer benefiting from voice							.13 <sup>†</sup> (.08)		.09(.08)
Observer implicated								-.03(.22)	.09(.11)
$\Delta R^2$		.04 <sup>**</sup>	.00	.00	.00	.00	.02 <sup>†</sup>	.00	.05
$R^2$	.02	.06 <sup>†</sup>	.02	.02	.02	.02	.03	.02	.07

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed

Table 18 Direct Effects of Predictors on Likeability

Predictors	baseline	Model73	Model74	Model75	Model76	Model77	Model78	Model79	Model80
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
Social desirability	-.09(.09)	-.11(.09)	-.09(.09)	-.10(.09)	-.09(.09)	-.10(.09)	-.08(.08)	-.09(.09)	-.10(.08)
Voicer status	.15*(.07)	.14*(.07)	.14*(.07)	.13*(.07)	.14*(.07)	.14*(.07)	.11(.06)	.14*(.07)	.09(.07)
Observer promotion focus	.05(.09)	.03(.09)	.04(.09)	.03(.09)	.05(.09)	.05(.09)	.04(.09)	.05(.09)	.01(.09)
Observer prevention focus	.02(.07)	.02(.07)	.01(.07)	.01(.07)	.02(.07)	.02(.07)	.02(.06)	.02(.07)	-.01(.06)
Promotion framing		.09(.05)							.02(.05)
Prevention framing			.07(.05)						.09(.06)
Other-suffering emotional expression				.09†(.05)					.08(.05)
Other-condemning emotional expression					-.01(.05)				-.00(.06)
External delivery						-.19(.15)			-.10(.16)
Observer benefiting from voice							.16**(0.04)		.15**(0.04)
Observer implicated								.03(.06)	-.02(.06)
$\Delta R^2$		.01	.00	.02†	.00	.00	.08**	.00	.12**
$R^2$	.03	.05	.03	.05†	.03	.03	.11**	.04	.15**

†  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed

Table 19 Direct Effects of Predictors on Status

Predictors	baseline	Model81	Model82	Model83	Model84	Model85	Model86	Model87	Model88
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
Social desirability	.07(.07)	.04(.07)	.07(.08)	.05(.07)	.05(.07)	.06(.07)	.07(.07)	.07(.08)	.04(.07)
Voicer status	.06(.06)	.05(.06)	.06(.06)	.05(.06)	.06(.06)	.06(.06)	.05(.06)	.04(.06)	.01(.06)
Observer promotion focus	.02(.08)	-.03(.08)	.00(.08)	-.03(.08)	-.01(.08)	.01(.08)	.00(.08)	-.02(.08)	-.06(.08)
Observer prevention focus	-.15*(.06)	-.16**(06)	-.15*(.06)	-.16**(06)	-.14*(.06)	-.15**(06)	-.15**(06)	-.13*(.06)	-.15*(.06)
Promotion framing		.13**(05)							.07(.05)
Prevention framing			-.01(.04)						.05(.05)
Other-suffering emotional expression				.12**(04)					.06(.05)
Other-condemning emotional expression					-.10*(.04)				-.11†(.06)
External delivery						-.11(.13)			.02(.14)
Observer benefiting from voice							.05(.04)		.06†(.04)
Observer implicated								.00(.05)	-.00(.05)
$\Delta R^2$		.04**	.00	.04**	.03*	.00	.01	.00	.09*
$R^2$	.06*	.11**	.06*	.11**	.09**	.07*	.08*	.05†	.14**

†  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed



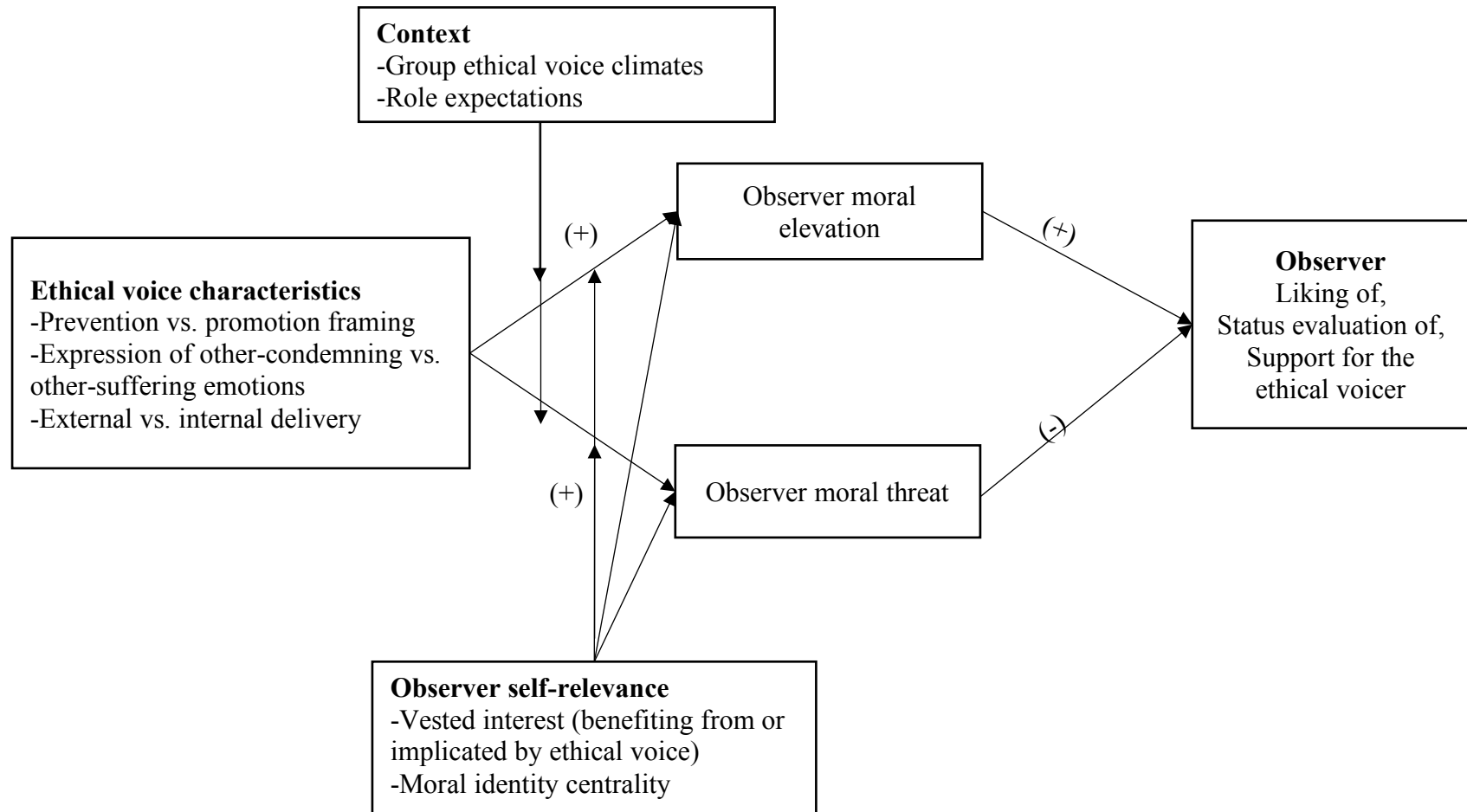


Figure 1 Model of Observer Reactions to Ethical Voice

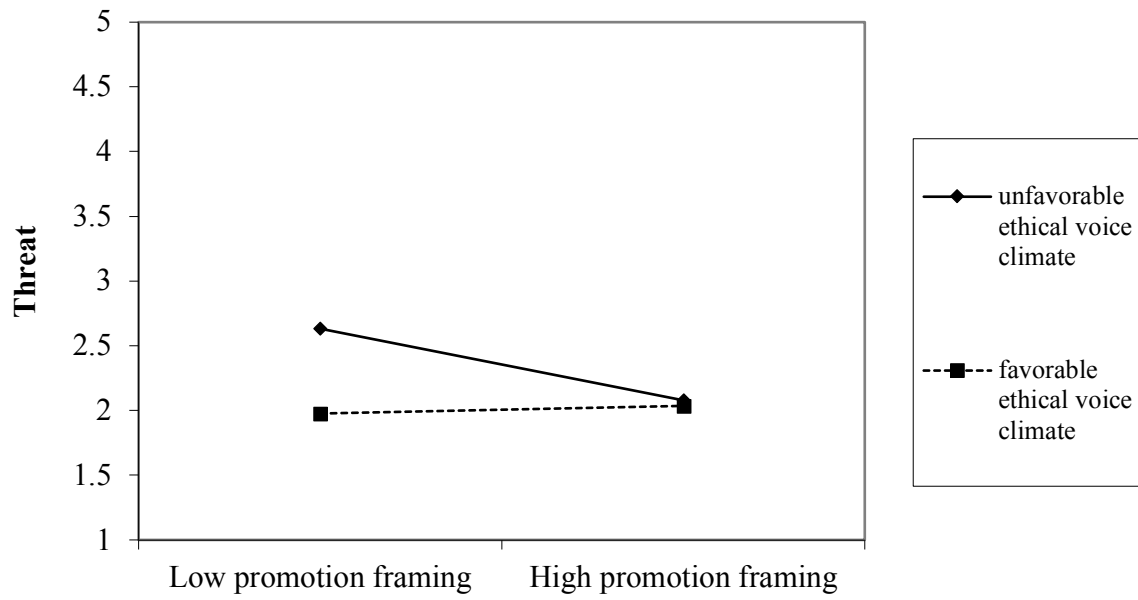


Figure 2 Interaction of Promotion Framing and Ethical Voice Climate on Threat

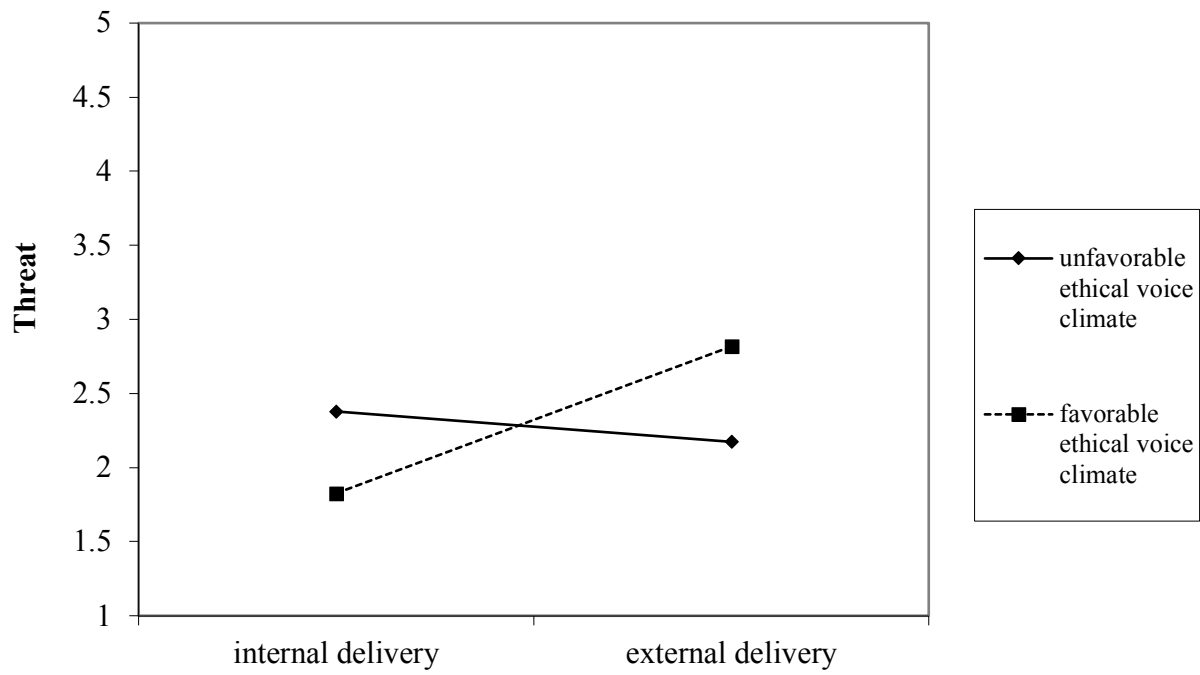


Figure 3 Interaction of External (vs. internal) Delivery and Ethical Voice Climate on Threat

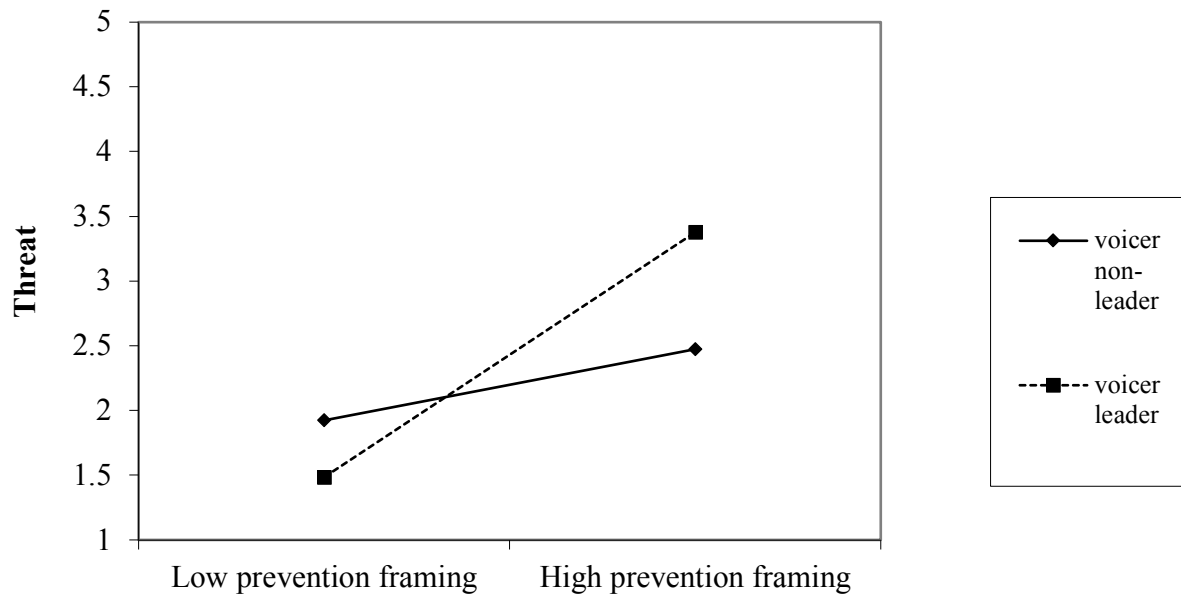


Figure 4 Interaction of Prevention Framing and Voicer Leadership Role on Threat

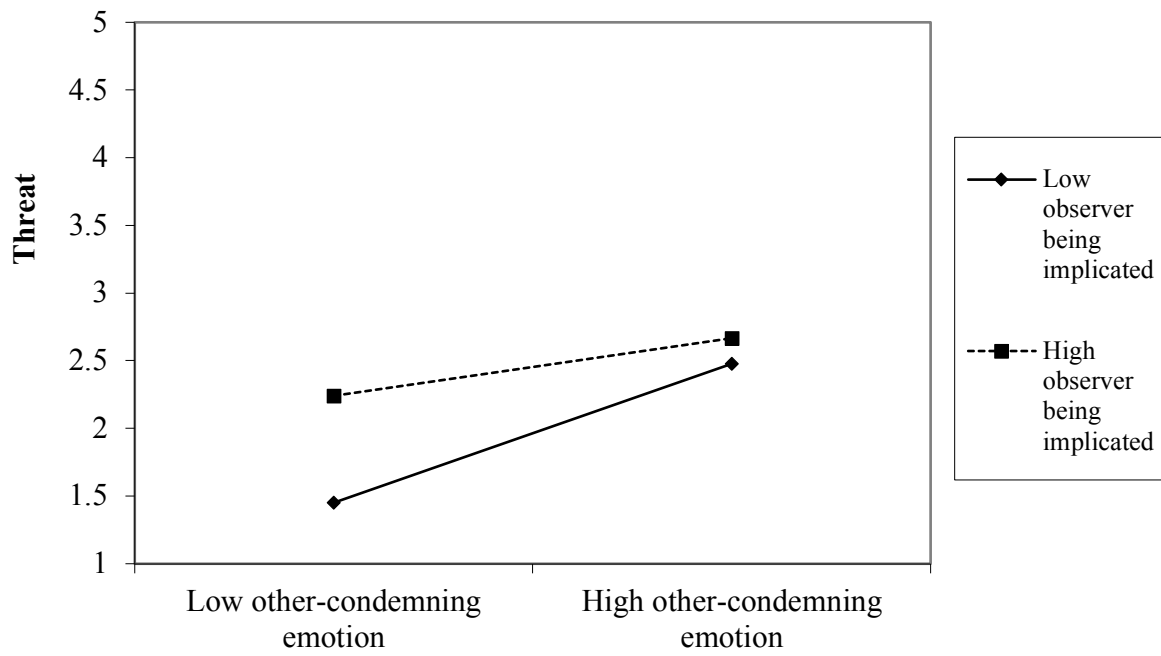


Figure 5 Interaction of Other-condemning Emotion and Observer Being Implicated on Threat

## APPENDIX A PRE-SCREENING SURVEY QUESTIONS AND CRITERIA FOR INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION

### Questions:

1, During the past year, have you ever personally witnessed a coworker in your work unit or department speaking up to other coworkers, supervisors, or managers to either:

make suggestions to propose more ethical and responsible practices, behaviors, or decisions  
OR

communicate information or concerns about work practices, behaviors, or decisions that he or she thought were ethically wrong.

This can be about but not limited to the following aspects of work:

- ethical (or unethical) decisions being made
- personal or work unit/department integrity
- workplace diversity and inclusion
- consumer safety and well-being
- community service
- fairness of treatment of others (not the speaker him/herself)

- Note. 1, This must be something you personally witnessed rather than heard about from others.  
2, This must NOT be something that directly affects the speaker's personal interests.  
3. It does not matter whether you agree with the speaker or not.

2, (if indicated yes in 1) You indicated that you have witnessed such a behavior. What is the specific issue that the coworker raised? Please describe it in 1-2 sentence(s).

### Criteria for inclusion and exclusion:

Invite a participant to Survey 1, if the participant indicates all of the following:

- 1, A *coworker* engaged in *voice behavior*, communicating issues to other coworkers or supervisors in an attempt to effect changes.
- 2, The coworker was raising concerns for violations of *ethical principles* (e.g., caring/harm, fairness, honesty) or/and making suggestions for upholding ethical principles.

Exclude a participant for further surveys, if one of the following was reported:

- 1, The participant him or herself was the person who engaged in voice behavior;
- 2, The voicer causally shared one's opinions about an issue with colleagues or asked their advice on an issue, without the intention to change the situation. For example, complained about an abuse with friends.
- 3, The issue is an amoral issue that does not involve ethics. For example, organizational/unit performance/efficiency related issues.

## APPENDIX B MEASURES

### Time 1:

#### Promotion and prevention framing

How much did the coworker emphasize that we (or someone) have the potential to improve the situation?

How much did the coworker emphasize an opportunity to make things better?

How much did the coworker emphasize what could be done to make things better?

How much did the coworker emphasize that we (or someone) did something wrong?

How much did the coworker emphasize the need to stop or avoid something wrong?

How much did the coworker emphasize that we (or someone) should stop or avoid doing something wrong?

(1 = Not at all, 5 = Extremely)

#### Emotional expression

How much did the coworker appear in each of the following ways when he or she expressed his or her opinion?

Angry, contemptuous, disgusted; Compassionate, sympathetic

(1 = Not at all, 5 = Extremely)

#### Observer Being Implicated by or Benefiting From the Ethical Voice

How much did you feel the coworker's claim implicated you?

How much did you feel the coworker directly or indirectly implicated you? (*not included in the final measure*)

If the situation is changed in the way the colleague advocated for, how much would it benefit you in any way?

If the situation is changed in the way the colleague wished for, how much would it help you in any way?

(1 = Not at all, 5 = Extremely)

#### Group ethical voice climate

My workgroup members feel it is very safe to speak up with ideas or opinions about ethical issues in our workgroup.

My workgroup members feel it is very safe to challenge questionable behavior, decision, conditions, practices in our workgroup.

My workgroup members feel it is very safe to raise suggestions about how to protect societal or stakeholder welfare in our workgroup.

My workgroup members feel we are capable of effectively speaking up with ideas or opinions about ethical issues in our workgroup.

My workgroup members feel we are capable of effectively challenging questionable behavior, decision, conditions, practice in our workgroup.

My workgroup members feel we are capable of effectively raising suggestions about how to protect societal or stakeholder welfare in our workgroup.

(1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)

#### Moral Identity Centrality

Listed below are some characteristics that may describe a person:

Caring, compassionate, fair, friendly, generous, helpful, hardworking, honest, and kind.

For a moment, visualize in your mind the kind of person who has these characteristics. When you have a clear image of what this person would be like, indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following items.

It would make me feel good to be a person who has these characteristics.

Being someone who has these characteristics is an important part of who I am.

I would be ashamed to be a person who has these characteristics.

Having these characteristics is not really important to me.

I strongly desire to have these characteristics.

(1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)

## **Time 2:**

### **Threat and Elevation**

Please indicate the extent to which you felt in each of the following ways at the time when the colleague spoke:

Uncomfortable, nervous, tense, worried, and apprehensive, moved, inspired, respectful, and admiring

(1 = Not at all, 5 = Extremely)

### **Supporting the ethical voicer**

I spoke up in the same conversation/meeting to voice my support for the coworker's comments.

I joined the coworker in voicing this issue in the same conversation/meeting.

I spoke up in the same conversation/meeting to support the coworker by offering additional ideas.

(1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)

### **(Change in) liking of the voicer**

After this occurred, did you like the coworker more or less?

After this occurred, did you and the coworker become more or less close?

After this occurred, did you enjoy working with the coworker more or less?

(1 = More, 5 = Less)

### **(Change in) status of the voicer**

After this occurred, did the coworker lose or gain prestige in your work group?

After this occurred, did the coworker lose or gain status in your work group?

After this occurred, did the coworker lose or gain power and influence in your work group?

(1 = Lost a lot, 5 = Gained a lot)



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**REFERRED PUBLICATIONS**

**Chen, A.**, Treviño, L. K., & Humphrey, S. E. (2020). Ethical champions, emotions, framing, and team ethical decision making. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 105(3), 245–273.

Hess, M. F., Treviño, L. K., **Chen, A.**, & Cross, R. (2019). Beyond silence or compliance: The complexities of reporting a friend for misconduct. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 28(4), 546-562.

**BOOK CHAPTERS**

Kish-Gephart, J. J., Treviño, L. K., **Chen, A.**, Tilton, J. (2019). Behavioral business ethics: The journey from foundations to future. In D. M. Wasieleski & J. Weber (Eds.), *Business and Society 360: Business Ethics* (pp. 3-33). Emerald Publishing Limited

**AWARDS AND GRANTS**

Grace G. Albrecht Scholarship for Women in Management, Smeal College of Business 2019  
Exemplar of Ethical Graduate Student Practice Award, Academy of Management 2019  
Smeal RISE Above Graduate Student Award, Smeal College of Business 2019  
Smeal Small Research Grants (\$1,000/year), Smeal College of Business 2017-2020  
Robert W. Graham Endowed Graduate Fellowship (\$4,000), Smeal College of Business 2015