Original Article

Angry leaders and coworkers: Cross-cultural evaluation of anger expression through high-status and equal-status roles

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Abstract
Anger expressed in organizations conveys potent social information that influences social perceptions and determines subsequent relationships among employees. The present research examined how cultural contexts and hierarchical structure of a given relationship interact to shape perceptions of anger expression. Conducting a survey on subsidiary employees of a multinational high-tech company, Study 1 showed that employees from the Confucian Asian culture (specifically Korea) evaluate anger expressed by high-status counterparts (i.e., managers) more positively in terms of appropriateness and effectiveness compared to those from the Anglo culture (specifically the United States). Study 2, which was based on different samples from the same company, showed that employees from another Confucian Asian country (Japan), compared to those from the Anglo culture (the United States), provide more positive evaluations of the anger expressed by high-status counterparts. In contrast, Study 2 further showed that this cultural difference is reversed when anger is expressed by equal-status counterparts (coworkers). Finally, Study 3 replicated the findings of Study 2 using online-recruited samples and further demonstrated that Confucian Asian sample

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(Koreans) is more likely to decide to hire a job applicant who expressed anger as a leader than Anglo sample (Americans) is. In contrast, this pattern is reversed when considering a job applicant who expressed anger as a coworker. Theoretical and practical implications for social emotions and cross-cultural management are discussed.

Departing from the initial focus on the intrapersonal effects of emotional experiences (Fitness, 2000; Kuppens et al., 2007; Levenson, 1999), emotion researchers have increasingly attended to the interpersonal and social ramifications of emotions (e.g., Van Kleef et al., 2006). For example, studies on emotional labor, emotion contagion, and group affect illustrate the significance of interpersonal processes of emotions in organizations (e.g., Barsade and Knight, 2015; Pugh, 2001). A recent meta-analysis showed that expressing positive emotions leads to positive outcomes, whereas expressing negative emotions (e.g., anger) is generally related to unfavorable interpersonal consequences (Chervonsky and Hunt, 2017). However, organizational researchers also theorized and found that negative emotional expressions, especially by leaders, can sometimes result in positive outcomes, such as mobilizing support from others and helping organizations identify and fix deficiencies (Coté, 2005; Geddes and Callister, 2007; Van Kleef, 2009). The present study aims to complement and add to the workplace emotion literature by examining the effects of culture and hierarchical relationships in shaping the observers' evaluations of anger expression in organizations.

A social functional approach to emotions indicates that emotions initiate interpersonal interactions because they provide meaningful social information, such as the intention and attitudes of the actor toward others (Frijda and Mesquita, 1994; Keltner and Haidt, 1999). In the present study, we focus on expression of anger, one of the most prevailing discrete emotions in contemporary organizations (Glomb, 2002; Inness et al., 2008). Research has demonstrated that anger possesses an unusually strong capacity to capture attention and exert pervasive influences on judgments and decisions (Lerner and Tiedens, 2006). In most professional organizations, individuals who express anger are considered lacking emotional control and self-discipline, and therefore, are regarded as incompetent and ineffective in their work (Glomb and Hulin, 1997; Madera and Smith, 2009). Accordingly, when high-status employees express anger, it often leads to unfavorable evaluations and raise doubts among others regarding their capability to effectively resolve challenges (Boin and Hart, 2003; Pearson and Clair, 1998). However, they can also be seen as dominant, assertive, and competent (Bucy and Newhagen, 1999; Tiedens et al., 2000). Likewise, evidence is mixed on interpersonal consequences of anger expression in organizational contexts (e.g., Lindebaum and Fielden, 2011; Van Kleef et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2018). To address these mixed interpersonal consequences of anger expression, previous studies explored potential moderating contingencies, such as the causes of anger (e.g., competency vs integrity-based violations; Wang et al., 2018), the coexistence of other emotions (e.g., a combination of anger and sadness; Madera and Smith, 2009), and the display norms of the organization (Lindebaum et al., 2016).

In this study, we developed theoretical propositions to explore potential cross-cultural differences in the perceptions of anger expression by comparing evaluations made by participants from Anglo and Confucian Asian countries. Specifically, we focused on participants' post-interaction ratings of anger expressor in terms of appropriateness and effectiveness. Despite criticism for underestimating similarities among nations (Venaik and Brewer, 2019), Anglo versus Confucian

Asian societies were found to diverge, particularly concerning cultural value dimensions of power distance and individualism-collectivism (Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004). In the current work, we examined whether Confucian Asians have a less negative (or more positive) view of managers who express anger. By contrast, we propose that anger in public, within non-hierarchical relationships, is more likely to be perceived as a threat to harmonious social relations in the Confucian Asian culture. In the meanwhile, since the Anglo culture regards anger expression as an isolated event apart from the context, hierarchical status is less likely to justify (or provide information about socially acceptable intentions to infer from) one's anger expression.

The present study employs a cross-cultural perspective and compares the effects of anger expression in varying relational structures, for instance, manager-to-subordinate and coworker-to-coworker. Our consideration of the hierarchical structure complements previous studies that have overlooked this critical relational context in determining ratings of anger expressors (e.g., Aquino et al., 2001; Kuwabara et al., 2016; Park et al., 2013; Tiedens, 2001; Tiedens et al., 2000). With the goal of cross-cultural comparison in mind, we conducted three studies using employees of a global high-tech company (Studies 1 & 2) and online samples (Study 3) from Confucian Asian (Korea & Japan) versus Anglo (the United States) countries to investigate the interactive effect of culture and the hierarchical relationship between the actor and the target on the evaluation of (1) the appropriateness of expressed anger, (2) the effectiveness of the actor, and finally (3) the intention to hire an anger-prone candidate. Such cross-cultural investigations enrich the literature on social emotions and offer critical practical implications for multinational organizations that carry out their businesses across cultural boundaries.

Theory and hypothesis development

In business organizations, employees and managers alike are exposed to various pressing and sometimes highly threatening events, which inevitably generate negative emotions, such as anger, fear, and frustration. Distressed employees can respond to their emotional experience in diverse manners, by suppressing or communicating their feelings and intentions, and lead to diverse outcomes, such as eliciting greater concessions from negotiating counterparts (Sinaceur and Tiedens, 2006). The social interaction model of emotion presents a feedback loop between individuals who display emotions and those who observe them (Coté, 2005). Accordingly, anger expression becomes an affective event for 'organizational observers' (Geddes and Callister, 2007), including anger targets, witnesses, negotiating partners, and various others, who interpret and respond (Geddes and Stickney, 2011; Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996).

Drawing on the social functional approach to emotions (Frijda and Mesquita, 1994; Keltner and Haidt, 1999), the emotion as social information (EASI) model elaborates that the emotional display of a focal actor conveys important information to others, which not only elicits affective reactions but also triggers their social perceptions of the actor, which further reformulates their relationships (Coté, 2005; Van Kleef et al., 2009). In this perspective, expressed anger sends a clear signal regarding social intentions of the actor (e.g., ventilation of frustration or display of authority; Park et al., 2013). Inferring the underlying motivations and situations of the angry actor, observers draw specific and context-sensitive inferences from the actor's signal (Levy and Dweck, 1998) and generate appraisals accordingly (e.g., irresponsible and incompetent; Van Kleef et al., 2009). Given that cultural values set the ground rules of interpersonal interaction and societal norms for sense-making and emotional displays (Geddes and Callister, 2007), we contend that cultural values and hierarchical context could influence the inferential processes of observers toward anger display, potentially yielding cross-cultural differences in the evaluations of the focal actor. Figure 1 presents

our theoretical model on the interactive role of culture and hierarchical characteristics in shaping social judgments of anger expression.

Culture-dependent outcomes of anger expression

Societal culture plays a critical role in shaping interpersonal dynamics (Brislin, 2000; Hofstede, 1980), thus affecting global business practices and the effectiveness of multinational operations (Javidan et al., 2006). Accordingly, different cultures develop culture-specific prototypes, which result in varying forms of effective leader behaviors that resort to the use of task superiority, power, and/or close supervision (Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004; Van de Vliert, 2006). Likewise, judgments of the appropriateness of a discrete emotion are context-dependent, particularly on the cultural context that embeds the emotional display (Madera and Smith, 2009). Consequently, limitations exist in any attempt to appraise the social outcomes of expressing anger that does not consider culture, from which observers draw their value systems to define the social acceptability or adequacy of such emotional displays (Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Sedikides et al., 2003).

Anger is one of the basic discrete emotions observed in all cultures (Izard, 1977; Spielberger et al., 1983). However, display rules regarding anger—norms that dictate the occasions when the expression of anger is appropriate and acceptable—differ across cultural contexts (Ekman and Friesen, 1971; Matsumoto et al., 1998, 2008). For example, previous cross-cultural studies have found that emotional display rules in the Confucian Asian culture ensure members to consider expressing anger less normative than those in the Anglo culture (Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Matsumoto et al., 2008). Particularly, Confucian Asians are encouraged to control and suppress negative emotions, particularly anger, and accordingly, expressing anger may lead to more negative
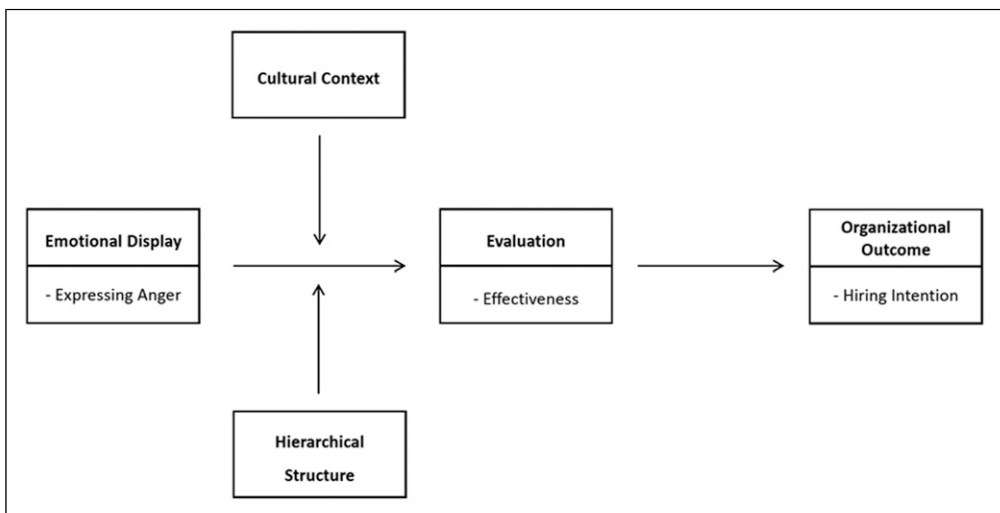

Figure 1. Illustration of our moderated mediation model. According to this model, the effects of anger expression on organizational outcomes will be mediated by evaluations of the anger-expresser, which are further moderated by cultural context and hierarchical structure. Specifically, the hierarchical standing of the anger-expresser (relative to the recipient) will either increase or decrease perceived effectiveness in different ways in different cultures. This perceived effectiveness, in turn, induces greater hiring intentions in each culture.

consequences than in the Anglo culture (Adam et al., 2010; Adam and Shirako, 2013; Kitayama et al., 2006; Kopelman and Rosette, 2008; Mauss and Butler, 2010). Although display rules vary as a function of felt emotions and interaction targets in non-work contexts (Matsumoto et al., 2005), only few examined the effect of interaction partners on display rules in the organizational context (for exceptions, see Diefendorff and Greguras, 2009). Considering the interactive effect between culture and relational structure, we developed and tested hypotheses which specify cross-cultural differences in the evaluation of anger of the following types of relationships in the workplace: interactions involving hierarchically unequal versus equal partners.

Anger expression in hierarchical relationships

The fundamental rules of organizations involve hierarchical controls by upper-level managers with decision authorities and legitimacy (Fiske, 2010; Magee and Galinsky, 2008; Murdock, 1949). Even in the radical forms of decentralized authority, such as team-based flat organizations, managers play a critical role in coordinating various functions within and across work units (Marks et al., 2005). With the acknowledged status and power, individuals with high-status are expected to express negative emotions more frequently than those with low-status roles (Tiedens, 2001; Tiedens et al., 2000). Perhaps, anger expressed by employees occupying high-status roles are more likely tolerated and may result in less penalty or retaliation by others (Taylor and Risman, 2006). Given that cultures differ in their emphasis on hierarchical status differences (Hofstede et al., 2010; Markus and Kitayama, 1991), we propose cultural differences (Anglo vs Confucian Asian) in this general tendency expected for hierarchical relationships.

Cross-cultural literature suggests that the Confucian Asian cultures are characterized by high levels of institutional collectivism—the degree to which organizational and societal institutions encourage individuals to be integrated into groups and organizations (Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004). The Confucian cultural emphasis on cohesion and group action (Javidan et al., 2006) leads its members to have more positive attitudes about hierarchical status differences within an organization and the use of hostility by those in authority against the less powerful as a necessary means of maintaining control and social order (Bond et al., 2004; Hofstede et al., 2010). Employees from the Confucian Asian culture (e.g., China, Japan, & Korea) highly value deference to authority and maintaining social order based on a given hierarchical structure (Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). In this culture, members who occupy higher positions are expected to exercise the inherent authority and power to attain respect from others and preserve the existing hierarchical order (Leung et al., 2002; Pye, 1985), increasing a normative acceptance of inequality within the group and society (Triandis and Gelfand, 1998). As a result, high-status members in the Confucian Asian culture are entitled to express their anger more freely (cf. "anger privilege," Park et al., 2013; Taylor and Risman, 2006). From the social functional approach to emotions (Frijda and Mesquita, 1994; Keltner and Haidt, 1999), anger in such context meeting a shared cultural conception may be attributed to the potentially beneficial and system-endorsed function and generates more positive social information for observers (Gibson and Callister, 2010).

In contrast, employees from the Anglo culture (e.g., the United States) appreciate the ideas of individual rights and egalitarianism even when they hold differing positions in the organization. Accordingly, high-status members in the Anglo culture may not entertain the anger privilege (Taylor and Risman, 2006), and members may not evaluate and respond favorably to expressed anger even when such emotional display comes from high-status counterparts, such as their managers. In this case, social information conveyed from anger can be detrimental to the actor as observers of such emotional display may blame the actor for his/her incompetence and lack of social skills, such as

empathy (Goleman, 1998; Madera and Smith, 2009). Emotion management is undeniably a core aspect to successful leadership (Humphrey, 2002), and leaders who accurately sense emotions and respond with appropriate empathy are rated to be more effective by subordinates (Burch, 2013). More importantly, a meta-analysis illustrated that positive leader trait affectivity was positively related to leadership criteria including leadership effectiveness (Joseph et al., 2015), supporting the idea that employees would react negatively when high-status employees express anger. Besides these overarching trends in subordinate evaluations, we posit that the cultural phenomenon of "anger privilege" would lead employees in the Confucian Asian culture, compared with those in the Anglo culture, to perceive anger expression as more appropriate and acceptable. Consequently, Confucian Asians may perceive the anger expressers as being more effective, particularly if they occupy high-status roles within a hierarchically structured relationship (e.g., when a *manager* expresses anger to a subordinate).

> **Hypothesis 1a**: *In hierarchical relationships, anger expressed by employees occupying high-status roles will be rated as more appropriate by employees from Confucian Asian countries compared to those from Anglo countries.*
> **Hypothesis 1b**: *In hierarchical relationships, employees who express anger while holding high-status roles are expected to be rated as more effective as a leader by respondents from Confucian Asian countries compared to those from Anglo countries.*

Expression of anger in non-hierarchical relationships

In business organizations, peer-to-peer interactions among coworkers are as common and important as hierarchically structured interactions with managers and leaders (Sparrowe and Liden, 1997; Uhl-Bien et al., 2000). Such horizontal working relationships may be prone to conflicts and negative treatments including expressing or even venting anger because of the lack of a clear authority or status differential between partners (Ronay et al., 2012). Again, social norms and perceptions in such general interaction settings may be prescribed differently by Anglo versus Confucian Asian culture. In the Confucian Asian culture, social norms are against explicit expressions of anger because they can be highly dysfunctional to maintenance of group harmony (Kitayama et al., 2006; Kopelman and Rosette, 2008; Matsumoto et al., 2008). For example, Adam et al. (2010) argued that because East Asians feel a sense of distaste and humiliation, expressing anger is a less effective negotiation strategy that elicits smaller concessions than in Western countries.

Even in the Anglo culture, anger expression may not result in positive social consequences (Gibson and Callister, 2010; Madera and Smith, 2009). However, people from this culture may be less apathetic toward angry coworkers because they see themselves as independent entities separated from others and are thus buffered from potential harm posed by others (Kitayama et al., 2006). These individuals cherish independence, which inoculates them against potential disruption of social harmony (Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). Accordingly, the Anglo culture may reduce the threat or tension caused by angry people because of relatively loose social connections and the appreciation of individual choices over interpersonal harmony and cohesion (Kitayama et al., 2006; Markus and Kitayama, 1991). In sum, we propose that expressing anger among partners occupying equal-status roles may produce less negative evaluations among employees from Anglo countries compared to those from Confucian Asian countries. This is because such emotional display is more likely to be acceptable given the Anglo culture's appreciation of social independence rather than social harmony. Furthermore, in contexts where non-hierarchical

relationships prevail, Confucian Asians may not perceive anger through the lens of "anger privilege" as positively as they do in hierarchical settings.

> **Hypothesis 2a**: *In non-hierarchical relationships, anger expressed by employees occupying equal-status roles will be rated as less appropriate by respondents from Confucian Asian countries compared to those from Anglo countries.*
> **Hypothesis 2b**: *In non-hierarchical relationships, employees who express anger while holding high-status roles are expected to be rated as less effective as a leader by respondents from Confucian Asian countries compared to those from Anglo countries.*

Decisional implications of anger expression

The current theoretical propositions elaborate on how the evaluations of anger expression in the workplace vary across cultures depending on the hierarchical structure of the relationship in which anger is displayed. In effect, these arguments indicate that anger expression may lead to positive evaluations even in the same culture depending on the hierarchical context. To demonstrate potential implications on decision-making processes in organizational settings, we further explored how such perceptions may affect recruiting decisions. For example, when recruiters become aware of the anger-prone nature of a candidate through a reference check procedure, they are less likely to hire the candidate, insofar as anger expression in a given cultural context entails negative social consequences. Investigating such decision implications can be an important first step in understanding the downstream consequences of anger expression depending on the social position (i.e., as a leader or as a coworker) in business organizations. Despite its inherent limitations, the intention to perform a particular behavior (i.e., the hiring intention) is an immediate antecedent of the behavior (i.e., the hiring decision) according to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991). On the basis of our propositions, we developed a moderated mediation hypothesis about the relationship between the hierarchical context of the anger episode and the hiring intentions on the anger expresser. More specifically, whereas perception of the effectiveness of the anger expresser is contingent on the relative status of the actor, the effectiveness rating predicts the hiring intentions. Meanwhile, we also predict that the relationship between hierarchical structure and perceived effectiveness of the anger expresser is moderated by culture.

> **Hypothesis 3**: *The indirect effect of hierarchical structure of the relationship (*via *perceived effectiveness of the anger expresser) will be moderated by culture, such that the indirect effect will be negative for respondents from Anglo countries but positive for those from Confucian Asian countries.*

Overview of the present research

We conducted three studies to investigate how employees from different cultures make different social judgments and decisions regarding explicit expressions of anger in the workplace. In these studies, we compared Americans, the Anglo sample with South Koreans (Studies 1 & 3) and Japanese (Study 2), the Confucian Asian sample. These countries were chosen on the basis of previous cross-cultural studies showing that Americans were considerably different from both South Koreans and Japanese in terms of their appreciation of social harmony and unequal hierarchical status among people (e.g., Hofstede et al., 2010; Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Oyserman et al., 2002).

In Studies 1 and 2, we analyzed corporate survey data collected from subsidiaries of a multinational company in the United States, South Korea, and Japan. In Study 1, employees from the United States and South Korea read a vignette in which an employee with high-status role expressed anger to a subordinate and were then asked to evaluate the extent to which they perceived anger expression of the actor to be appropriate and effective, thus testing Hypothesis 1. In Study 2, employees from the United States and Japan were asked to read a vignette in which an employee with high-status role (in the hierarchical relationship condition) or with equal-status role (in the non-hierarchical relationship condition) expressed anger, and evaluated appropriateness and effectiveness of anger display in a given situation, thereby testing Hypotheses 1 and 2. Finally, Study 3 aimed to extend the findings of Studies 1 and 2 by using an online simulation with participants recruited from crowdsourcing platforms in the United States and South Korea.

Study 1

In Study 1, cultural differences in the evaluation of anger expression within hierarchical relationships were examined by comparing Americans from the Anglo culture with Koreans from the Confucian Asian culture. Participants in both countries were presented with a vignette in which a target in the high-status position expressed anger to a subordinate and asked to report their perceptions of the target. We predicted that participants from the Anglo sample would perceive anger expressed by high-status employees as less appropriate (Hypothesis 1a) and less effective as a leader (Hypothesis 1b) than participants from the Confucian Asian sample.

Method

Participants

Participants were employees of a Korean multinational corporation. This corporation is a high-tech manufacturing company listed in the Fortune Global 500, with a *global network* of overseas subsidiaries with more than 50,000 employees in total. Data were collected through a web-based survey that was created as part of a project to develop assessment tools and training programs of cultural adaptation for expatriate managers. The Anglo sample included 62 American employees working for the subsidiaries of this company located in the United States. By asking country of birth, we confirmed that Korean Americans were not included in the US sample. The Confucian Asian sample included 94 Korean employees working in South Korea. However, since data collection occurred during the test development phase within a firm, anonymity was necessary, preventing the collection of basic demographic information such as gender and position in Study 1.

Materials and procedure

Participants were asked to read a vignette depicting expression of anger in a business context. The vignette was initially used by Tiedens et al. (2000), in which a character experiences goal interference (i.e., loss of a contract). While we altered the business setting, we retained the main plot of missing a business opportunity due to a mistake made by a character in a lower status role. To avoid any potential ethnic implications associated with last names, we opted to represent character names with single alphabet letters (i.e., K & B). In addition, whereas Tiedens et al. (2000) did not specify the negative emotions that the characters could have experienced, we explicitly stated that the

character occupying a higher status role expressed anger, aiming to investigate how participants would react:

> K is the head executive of a manufacturing company. Today, he had a very important meeting with an investor to sign a contract for the construction of a new manufacturing plant. Given that sealing the deal was very important for his company, he had worked hard to prepare for this meeting. He asked his secretary, B, to bring the necessary documents, including the contract, and accompany him to the meeting. They arrived on time but were unable to close the deal because the secretary forgot to bring the contract. The investor was upset and decided to cancel the partnership. K became angry with B and yelled at him.

After reading the vignette, participants were asked to rate the extent to which they perceived the target as angry (this question served as our manipulation check of anger expression). Participants were then asked to rate the extent to which they found the anger expression of the target as appropriate. They also rated how effective they found the target to be as a leader. Participants responded these questions on 7-point scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*).

Participants completed the questionnaire in their native language: English for Americans and Korean for Koreans. The instructions, vignettes, and all other items were first created in English, translated to Korean, and then back-translated to English to check translation accuracy. Differences between the original English version and the back-translated version were discussed by two translators until a consensus version was achieved.

Results and discussion

We first checked the effectiveness of the anger manipulation. As predicted, the target was perceived as significantly angrier than the scale midpoint for both Americans ($M = 6.42$, $SD = 0.88$), t (61) = 21.68, $p < .001$, $d_{unb} = 2.75$, 95% confidence interval (CI) [2.37, 3.53], and Koreans ($M = 6.21$, $SD = 1.24$), t (93) = 17.26, $p < .001$, $d_{unb} = 1.77$, 95% CI: [1.45, 2.10].[1] Moreover, there was no cultural difference in the anger ratings, t (154) = 1.13, $p = .258$, suggesting that our anger manipulation was equally successful across different cultures.

Next, we tested Hypotheses 1a and 1b, which posits that anger expression by a high-status person in hierarchical relationships is more positively evaluated by employees from Confucian Asian countries than those from Anglo countries. As depicted in Figure 2, an independent samples *t* test revealed a significant cultural difference in the perceived appropriateness of the target's anger expression, t (154) = 2.22, $p = .028$, $d_{unb} = 0.38$, 95% CI: [0.06, 0.70], with Koreans ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 1.34$) reporting higher levels of appropriateness than Americans ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.81$). The ratings of leader effectiveness were also significantly higher among Koreans ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.18$) than Americans ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 1.21$), t (154) = 2.80, $p = .006$, $d_{unb} = 0.45$, 95% CI: [0.12, 0.77]. These results provide empirical support for Hypotheses 1a and 1b.

Overall, Study 1 provided an initial support for our prediction that participants from the Anglo sample tend to appraise anger expression of employees occupying high-status roles more negatively compared to those from the Confucian Asian sample.

Study 2

Study 2 was designed to replicate and extend the findings of Study 1 in two ways. First, although the results of Study 1 suggested that employees from Confucian Asian countries evaluate a high-status
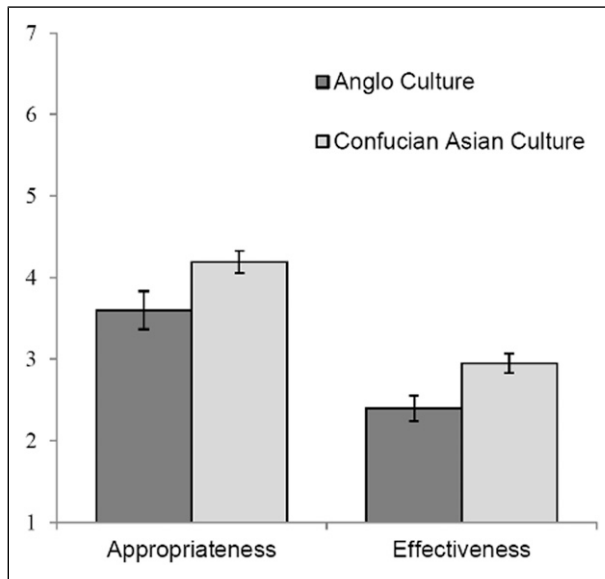
Figure 2. Cultural differences in the perception of leaders expressing anger in study 1 (column indicates the ratings of the appropriateness and effectiveness of anger expression). Error bars represent ±1 *SEs*.

member's expression of anger as more acceptable and effective than employees from Anglo countries, it remains unknown whether anger expression is generally more tolerated in the Confucian Asian culture or only allowed to high-status individuals, such as managers. To address this issue, Study 2 included two conditions to examine our hypothesis that the relative hierarchical standing of the focal actor plays a critical role in modulating cultural differences in the evaluations of anger expression in the workplace. Second, Study 2 used participants from another Confucian Asian country (i.e., Japanese) to show that the findings from Study 1 were not limited to Koreans. We expected that anger expression in non-hierarchical relationships would be perceived as less appropriate (Hypothesis 2a) and the target as less effective as a leader (Hypothesis 2b) by employees from Confucian Asian countries than by those from Anglo countries.

Method

Participants

Study 2 was based on an extended culture-assessment project that was used in Study 1, conducted by the same Korean multinational corporation. Using a company-provided list, we contacted American and Japanese employees. The sample included 237 American employees (186 males, 33 females, & 18 undisclosed; tenure: $M = 5.89$ years, $SD = 4.32$; position: staff = 116, assistant manager = 67, manager = 32, department head = 22) working in local subsidiaries in the United States and 161 Japanese employees (146 males, 13 females, & 2 undisclosed; tenure: $M = 6.23$ years, $SD = 4.85$; position: staff = 11, assistant manager = 47, manager = 59, department head = 42) from local subsidiaries in Japan. A significant difference in position between the samples was observed, $\chi^2 (1) = 66.29$, $p < .001$, such that compared to American participants (22.8%), more Japanese participants (63.5%) were in managerial positions. However, position as well as gender or

tenure did not change the pattern or the significance of the results. Thus, we excluded those variables from further analyses for parsimony.

Materials and procedure

The instructions and procedures were similar to those in Study 1, except that participants from each cultural cluster in Study 2 were randomly assigned to one of the two hierarchy conditions (unequal-status vs equal-status), depending on the relative hierarchical standings of the focal actor. Participants read a vignette in which either a leader or a coworker expressed anger in the same business context described in Study 1. Specifically, participants in the unequal-status condition (115 Americans & 79 Japanese) were given the same vignette used in Study 1, in which the target character in a leader position expressed anger toward his subordinate. By contrast, participants in the equal-status condition (122 Americans & 82 Japanese) were given another version of the vignette, in which the target character expressed anger toward his coworker in the same hierarchical level.

After reading the vignette, participants were asked to rate the extent to which they perceived the target as angry (manipulation check), the expression of anger by the target as appropriate, and the target to be effective on 7-point scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). The instructions, vignettes, and all items were generated through the standard back translation practice and presented in the native language of the participants, as discussed in Study 1.

Results and discussion

The anger manipulation was successful. As expected, the target was perceived as significantly angrier than the scale midpoint in both the unequal-status condition ($M = 6.16$, $SD = 1.13$), $t(193) = 26.67$, $p < .001$, $d_{unb} = 1.91$, 95% CI: [1.67, 2.15] and the equal-status condition ($M = 6.23$, $SD = 1.03$), $t(203) = 31.01$, $p < .001$, $d_{unb} = 2.17$, 95% CI: [1.91, 2.42]. The anger ratings did not differ between the two conditions, $F(1, 394) = 0.26$, $p = .614$ or between the cultural groups, $F(1, 394) = 2.95$, $p = .112$, suggesting that our manipulation was equally successful across different conditions and cultures.

To test our main hypotheses, we next conducted a 2 (Culture: Anglo vs Confucian Asian) × 2 (Hierarchy condition: unequal-status vs equal-status) analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the appropriateness ratings for anger expression. Neither Culture nor Hierarchy condition had a significant main effect, $F(1, 394) = 0.01$, $p = .976$, and $F(1, 394) = 0.85$, $p = .358$, respectively. However, a significant Culture × Hierarchy condition interaction occurred, $F(1, 394) = 15.01$, $p < .001$, $w^2 = 0.04$, 95% CI: [0.01, 0.07]. As predicted and consistent with Study 1 (see Figure 3), Japanese ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 1.06$) perceived the expression of anger in the unequal-status condition to be more appropriate than Americans did ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.73$), $t(192) = 2.74$, $p = .007$, $d_{unb} = 0.37$, 95% CI: [0.08, 0.66]. However, this cultural difference was reversed in the equal-status condition, such that Americans ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.53$) perceived the expression of anger by a coworker to be more appropriate than Japanese did ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.02$), $t(202) = 2.27$, $p = .024$, $d_{unb} = 0.30$, 95% CI: [0.02, 0.58], thus supporting Hypothesis 2a.

The same pattern of the interaction effect was also observed for leader effectiveness ratings. Specifically, the analysis revealed no main effect of Culture or Hierarchy condition, $F(1, 394) = 1.41$, $p = .236$, and $F(1, 394) = 0.001$, $p = .982$, respectively. However, we found a significant Culture × Hierarchy condition interaction, $F(1, 394) = 19.50$, $p < .001$, $w^2 = 0.05$, 95% CI: [0.01, 0.09]. Consistent with Study 1, in the unequal-status condition, Japanese ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 1.21$) evaluated a leader who expressed anger to be more effective than Americans
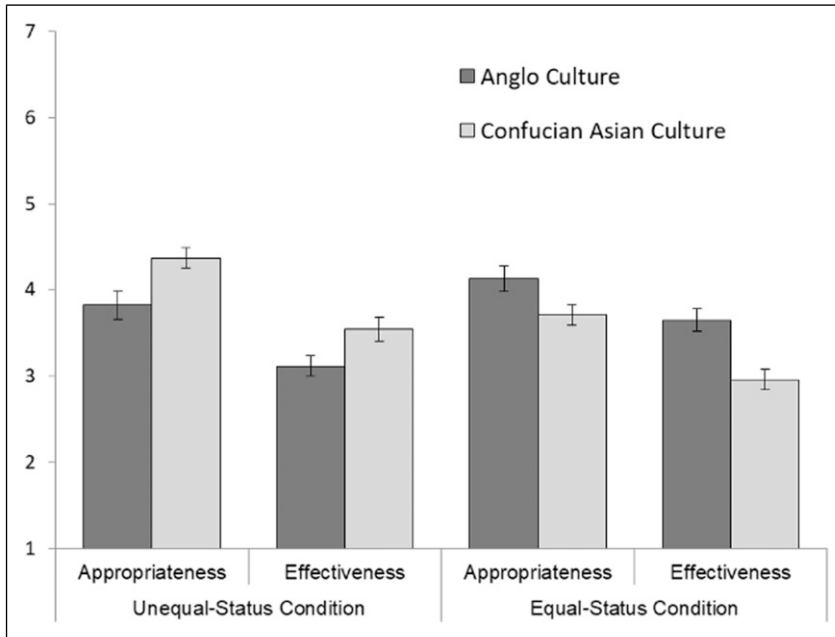
Figure 3. Cultural differences in the perception of anger expression as a function of the hierarchical standing of the anger-expresser (relative to the recipient) in study 2 (column indicates the ratings of the appropriateness and effectiveness of anger expression). Error bars represent ±1 *SEs*.

did ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 1.27$), t (192) = 2.32, $p = .021$, $d_{unb} = 0.34$, 95% CI: [0.05, 0.63]. By contrast, in the equal-status condition, Americans ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.45$) evaluated a coworker who expressed anger to be more effective than Japanese did ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 1.08$), t (202) = 3.81, $p < .001$, $d_{unb} = 0.52$, 95% CI: [0.23, 0.80] (see Figure 3). This pattern of the results supports Hypothesis 2b.

In sum, Study 2 showed that participants from the Confucian Asian sample evaluated anger expression as more appropriate and the target as more effective than those from the Anglo Western sample, only when it is displayed by those who hold higher positions in organizational hierarchy. The pattern became the opposite for expressing anger among status-equals, such that employees from a Confucian Asian country evaluated anger expression within the non-hierarchical relationship (where a coworker expresses anger to his/her peers) less favorably. These findings demonstrate that the relative hierarchical standings of the focal actor constitute a critical boundary condition for the evaluation of anger expression in organizational contexts across different cultures.

Study 3

Study 3 was conducted to extend the previous findings by testing whether cultural differences in the evaluation of anger expression also influence decision-makings such as selection decision. Employees may infer the attributes of targets based on their expression of anger, and such inference can meaningfully impact their judgment of the targets' suitability for leadership roles. To examine this idea, we presented participants with reference information on an applicant who once expressed anger and asked to rate how likely they would be to hire the applicant. We predicted that the

hierarchical standing of the anger-expresser (relative to the recipient) would affect perceived leadership effectiveness in different ways in different cultures, and perceived leadership effectiveness would lead to a greater hiring intention in each culture (Hypothesis 3). Moreover, although consistent with our predictions, one evident limitation of Studies 1 and 2 is utilizing a single item to measure the target's effectiveness as a leader. Thus, in Study 3, we used a more validated measure of perceived effectiveness to examine the robustness of our previous findings.

Method

Participants

We recruited 214 American participants (Anglo sample: 109 males & 105 females; education: high school = 8.4%, some college = 22.0%, college degree = 48.6%, graduate degree = 21.0%) from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (https://www.mturk.com) and 218 Korean participants (Confucian Asian sample: 111 males & 107 females; education: some college = 18.3%, college degree = 66.1%, graduate degree = 15.6%) from a South Korean crowdsourcing market similar to MTurk (https://www.embrain.com). IP addresses were restricted to those accessing the survey from U.S. locations only for American participants and from South Korea locations only for Korean participants. In addition, given that participants would be asked to make hiring decisions, we wanted to ensure that participants themselves were in the workforce. Therefore, we limited our recruiting pool to full-time employees. There was a significant difference in position between the samples, χ^2 (1) = 25.79, $p <$ .001, such that compared to American participants (19.7%), more Korean participants (31.0%) were in managerial positions. Furthermore, Korean participants ($M = 42.17$, $SD = 6.32$) were older than American participants ($M = 39.16$, $SD = 9.84$), t (430) = 3.76, $p < .001$, $d_{unb} = 0.36$, 95% CI: [0.17, 0.55]. However, these variables did not affect the pattern or the significance of the results. Thus, we excluded them from our main analyses for parsimony.

Materials and procedure

Participants were asked to imagine that they were a hiring manager at company X and were evaluating Candidate K, a job applicant for an executive position. Candidate K was described as having job-relevant skills, work experience, and other credentials required for the position. As a next step, participants were asked to check the references and were given one of two vignettes featuring this candidate. These two vignettes were identical to the ones used in Study 2.

Similar to Study 2, participants from each country were randomly assigned to one of the two hierarchy conditions (unequal-status vs equal-status), which differed in the relative hierarchical standings of the focal actor. Participants who were assigned to the unequal-status condition (110 Americans & 109 Koreans) read a vignette in which the job applicant expressed anger to his subordinate. In contrast, those who were assigned to the equal-status condition (104 Americans & 109 Koreans) read a vignette in which the applicant expressed anger to his coworker.

After reading the vignette, participants were asked to respond to the same anger manipulation check as in Studies 1 and 2. Subsequently, they evaluated the effectiveness of the applicant. Unlike Studies 1 and 2, which used a single-item measure to assess the effectiveness of the target, we employed a multi-item measure to avoid potential problems owing to scale reliability and content validity (e.g., Robins et al., 2001). Specifically, participants rated the degree to which the applicant matched with each of the following five characteristics related to leader effectiveness (see Ames and Flyn, 2007; Cuddy et al., 2008): capable, intelligent, confident, efficient, and reliable (Americans:

α = 0.91; Koreans: α = 0.89). Finally, participants reported how likely they would hire the applicant. All responses were made on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). The instructions, vignettes, and all items were generated through the standard back-translation practice and presented in the native language of the participants as in Studies 1 and 2.

Results and discussion

We first checked the success of our anger manipulation. Neither the main effect of hierarchy condition, $F (1, 428) = 0.001$, $p = .979$, nor hierarchy condition × culture interaction, $F (1, 428) = 2.71$, $p = .100$, was significant. However, the main effect of culture was unexpectedly significant, such that the applicant was perceived as angrier by Americans ($M = 6.47$, $SD = 0.73$) than by Koreans ($M = 6.27$, $SD = 1.06$), $F (1, 428) = 5.16$, $p = .024$, $w^2 = 0.01$, 95% CI: [0.0002, 0.04].[2]

Next, we conducted a 2 (Culture: Anglo vs Confucian Asian) × 2 (Hierarchy condition: unequal-status vs equal-status) ANOVA on the effectiveness ratings. The main effect of hierarchy condition was not significant, $F (1, 428) = 0.04$, $p = .838$. However, the analysis revealed a significant main effect of culture, in which Americans ($M = 4.89$, $SD = 1.15$) offered significantly higher effectiveness ratings than Koreans ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.02$), $F (1, 428) = 75.65$, $p < .001$, $w^2 = 0.15$, 95% CI: [0.10, 0.22]. Importantly, as shown in Study 2, a significant culture × hierarchy condition interaction was found, $F (1, 428) = 9.13$, $p = .003$, $w^2 = 0.02$, 95% CI: [0.002, 0.05].

We probed this interaction effect by testing the effect of hierarchy condition separately for each cultural group. American participants rated the applicant who expressed anger in the unequal-status relationship ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 1.13$) to be less effective than the applicant who expressed anger in the equal-status relationship ($M = 5.06$, $SD = 1.15$), $t (212) = 2.15$, $p = .033$, $d_{unb} = 0.28$, 95% CI: [0.01, 0.55]. In contrast, this condition effect was completely reversed for Korean participants; they rated the applicant who expressed anger in the equal-status relationship ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.07$) to be less effective than the applicant who expressed anger in the unequal-status relationship ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.96$), $t (216) = 2.12$, $p = .035$, $d_{unb} = 0.27$, 95% CI: [0.01, 0.54].

Finally, we tested Hypothesis 3 using the PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2018) by entering hierarchy condition (unequal-status vs equal-status) as the predictor, culture (Anglo vs Confucian Asian) as the moderator, effectiveness evaluation as the mediator, and hiring intention as the outcome. Hierarchy condition was dummy-coded with the unequal-status condition as 1 and the equal-status condition as 0. A bootstrap test with 5000 resamples revealed a statistically significant indirect effect of hierarchy condition on hiring intention via the effectiveness evaluation of the candidate in both cultures (see Figure 4).

For participants in the Anglo culture, the indirect effect was negative, $b = -0.19$, bias-corrected 95% CI = $[-0.37, -0.02]$, indicating that in the United States, anger expression in the unequal-status relationship (vs the equal-status relationship) was *negatively* associated with leadership effectiveness, thereby *negatively* affecting hiring intention. By contrast, the indirect effect was significant in the positive direction for participants from the Confucian Asian sample, $b = 0.17$, bias-corrected 95% CI = [0.01, 0.33]. This indicates that expressing anger in the unequal-status relationship (vs the equal-status relationship) was *positively* associated with leadership effectiveness, thereby exerting a *positive* effect on the hiring intention among Koreans. These patterns confirm Hypothesis 3.

Taken together, Study 3 provides further evidence of cultural differences in the evaluation of anger expression in organizations. In accordance with our findings from Studies 1 and 2, employees from Confucian Asian countries (specifically Korea) reacted positively to the expression of anger in the unequal-status relationship, whereas employees from Anglo countries (specifically the United
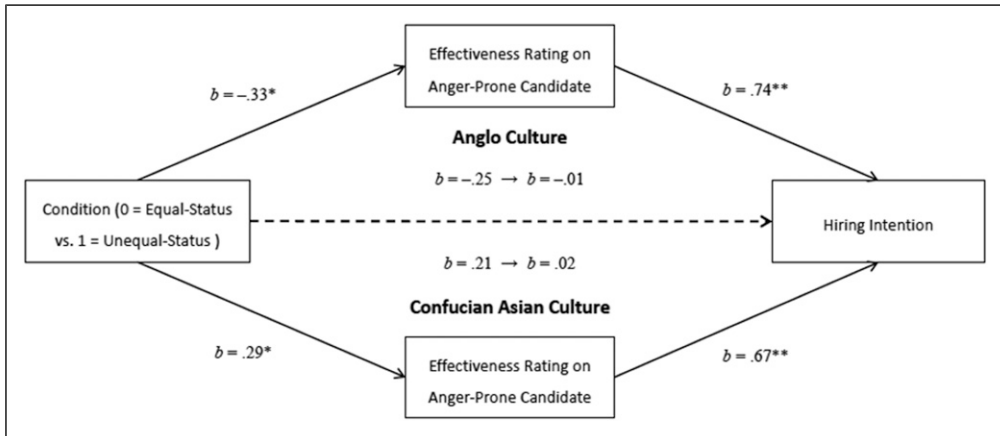
Figure 4. Analysis of our moderated mediation model in study 3. Reported coefficients are unstandardized. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$.

States) reacted negatively to the same situation. Moreover, cultural backgrounds shape not only how people perceive anger expression in the workplace but also whom they choose to hire. Specifically, the results suggest that participants from the Anglo sample consider an applicant who expresses anger toward a coworker (than toward a subordinate) to be more suitable for a leader position because they perceive that applicant to be effective as a leader. By contrast, participants from the Confucian Asian sample consider an applicant who expresses anger toward a subordinate (than toward a coworker) to be more suitable for the same hiring decision.

General discussion

Emotions comprise a critical component of interpersonal interaction and work processes in organizations because emotions expressed to others carry critical social information (Van Kleef, 2009). Such emotional display operates as an affective event to others who evaluate and respond to the focal actor (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996), thereby completing the feedback loop and shaping interpersonal relations to influence social outcomes and performance (Coté, 2005). Anger is considered a powerful emotion and is viewed as functional as long as it is expressed in socially appropriate ways (Eid and Diener, 2001). However, emotional display rules have been shown to vary across cultures (Safdar et al., 2009; Triandis, 1994). The present study complements this literature by exploring cultural differences in the evaluation of expressing anger in the workplace, which holds considerable implications for interpersonal interactions and performance.

As can be seen in Table 1, three studies provide consistent evidence that people from different cultures respond disparately, depending on the relative hierarchical standing of the person expressing anger. Specifically, compared with employees from Confucian Asian countries, those from Anglo countries appraised anger expression within the equal-status relationships (i.e., coworkers expressing anger to each other) to be more appropriate and acceptable, thereby perceiving greater effectiveness. Conversely, employees from Confucian Asian countries evaluated anger expression within the hierarchically structured relationships (i.e., a leader expressing anger to a subordinate) to be more appropriate, and thus more effective, than those from Anglo countries did.

Table 1. Summary of the results obtained from studies 1, 2, and 3.

	Study 1			Study 2		
	Americans	Koreans		Americans	Japanese	
Appropriateness	M	M	t	M	M	t
Unequal-status	3.60	4.19	2.22*	3.81	4.37	2.74**
Equal-status	—	—	—	4.24	3.67	2.27*
Effectiveness	M	M	t	M	M	t
Unequal-status	2.40	2.95	2.80**	3.12	3.54	2.32*
Equal-status	—	—	—	3.70	2.96	3.81**

Study 3			
Predictor	Outcome variable: effectiveness		
	b	SE	t
Constant	3.84**	0.10	37.30
Condition	0.29*	0.15	2.00
Culture	1.21**	0.15	8.23
Condition × culture	−0.63**	0.21	−3.02
Predictor	Outcome variable: hiring decision		
	b	SE	t
Constant	1.57**	0.25	6.40
Condition	−0.02	0.12	−0.15
Effectiveness	0.57**	0.05	11.07

Note. In study 3, condition was coded 0 = the equal-status condition, 1 = the unequal-status condition; culture was coded 0 = the Confucian Asian sample, 1 = the Anglo sample.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.

Furthermore, the results of Study 3 suggest that anger expression has distinct consequences for employment decisions across cultures. Participants in the Anglo culture perceived the applicant who expresses anger toward a subordinate to be less effective, and thus they were less willing to hire that applicant for a leader position. By contrast, participants from Confucian Asian countries evaluated the applicant who expresses anger toward a coworker to be less effective and were thus less likely to hire that applicant. These findings imply that expressing anger carries disparate social information that affects both proximal and distal outcomes for the focal actor in either an equal or an unequal status situation. Below, we elaborate the implications of the current theoretical and empirical analysis and specify the limitations of this study to identify further research directions.

Theoretical and practical implications

The current work is the first to demonstrate how cultural contexts and the hierarchical structure of a given relationship interact to generate the evaluations of anger expression. The results show that the

adverse effects of expressing anger can be attenuated or even reversed in differing cultural contexts depending on the relative status of a focal actor to the target. These findings stand in stark contrast to previous empirical findings indicating that overtly expressed anger is perceived as relatively more inappropriate and unacceptable in the Confucian Asian culture than in the Anglo Western culture (Adam et al., 2010; Kopelman and Rosette, 2008; Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Matsumoto et al., 2008). By considering the relative hierarchical standing of the focal actor, the current findings specify conditions in which anger expression elicits opposite evaluations across cultures, thereby providing a nuanced perspective on social information accounts of emotions (Van Kleef, 2009).

Moreover, the present studies using samples from three countries further expand the literature on the impact of culture on perception of expressed anger by demonstrating the general social perceptions, judgments, and decisions on the basis of observing (not experiencing) anger episodes. Previous studies have focused on the attitudes that the recipients of anger expression hold (Fitness, 2000; Vogel et al., 2015). Unlike such studies, we examine general social perceptions and the accompanying decision patterns of observers, who are not victimized by anger expression. The results reflect how observers or, more broadly, the general public in both Anglo and Confucian Asian societies disambiguates the situation and appraises the focal actor, based on their beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and perceptions based on culture (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1994). Accordingly, this study integrates a cross-cultural perspective with the EASI model (Van Kleef, 2009), which proposes that emotional expressions shape behavior and regulate social life 1) by eliciting affective reactions in observers and 2) by triggering inferential processes in observers. Specifically, the results reveal that the inferential process (i.e., inferences about the source, meaning, and implications of the expresser's emotion) in the EASI model is influenced by social-contextual factors. This pattern supports Van Kleef's (2009) view on critical moderators, and both perceivers' cultural background and the relative hierarchical standings of the focal interactants create a social-contextual background for perceivers to judge the appropriateness and effectiveness of anger expression.

The present findings also have important practical implications. In particular, the current results partially address leadership challenges that arise for managers who lead work teams incorporating members with different cultural backgrounds with diverse expectations of their leaders. Likewise, employees of multinational corporations who collaborate and sometimes negotiate with coworkers and counterparts from other countries may benefit from understanding the social information they convey through expressing anger toward others with an equal or unequal status. The current analysis presents valuable information for global leaders, expatriate managers, and employees working in a global context. Such lesson is timely in that one of the most distinguishable and rapidly emerging changes in the current workforce in recent years is increasing cultural diversity (Lloyd and Härtel, 2010).

Our results raised the possibility that culturally diverse workplaces involving individuals in various positions are particularly fertile grounds for miscommunication and misunderstanding among people. For instance, when leaders from the Confucian Asian culture express anger to show their authority with a constructive intention to maintain the social order, subordinates and observers from the Anglo culture may interpret such actions as immature and offensive. The cultural disparity may generate mismatch between social information intended by a focal actor or sender and social information attained by observers or receivers, yielding unintended and unexpected consequences, such as leader evaluation, levels of cooperation and performance. The results of this work can be used to develop training programs for employees and managers, including expatriate candidates, to enhance awareness of their expressions of anger and increase their emotional competencies through a nuanced understanding of the inclinations of subordinates and colleagues from different cultures.

Limitations and future research

The present research should be considered in light of several limitations. First, although the converging patterns observed across three studies strengthen our confidence in the robustness of the results, all three studies were based on vignettes involving a hypothetical situation. Therefore, the cross-cultural appraisals of anger under intact situations characterized by specific display rules should be replicated and further validated through alternative research designs. For example, future studies may employ a multisource and/or longitudinal panel design to probe intact workplace interactions or adopt the experience sampling method to capture directly how people from different cultures perceive and respond to the expressions of anger they experience or observe during their daily work.

Second, we used a single-item measure as our dependent variable in Studies 1 and 2. Single-item measures may raise critical issues such as reliability and content validity if the target variable is a multifaceted construct (Robins et al., 2001). However, we assumed that a single-item measure would benefit respondents as it reduces the fatigue or frustration associated with redundant and repeated questions on a hypothetical character in a restricted context (Robins et al., 2001). Despite these reasons, future research may benefit from employing additional research methods and elaborating respondents' responses by adding a set of measures of dependent variables.

Third, the current research did not delve into investigating the mechanisms underlying the culturally divergent evaluations of appropriateness and effectiveness. Although we found no difference in patterns across appropriateness and effectiveness, crucial signals such as perceived competency could elucidate the enhanced perception of leader effectiveness, rather than appropriateness, in the Confucian Asian cultures. However, the same might not be supported in the Anglo culture. Further research is warranted to understand the mediating mechanism as well as the relationship between dependent variables.

Forth, the generalizability of the current research findings may be limited due to the sampling being drawn from a select few representative countries. The present work attempted to test cultural differences and recruited participants from only three countries as representatives of the Anglo versus the Confucian Asian culture. Therefore, future research can benefit from recruiting representative samples from other countries and investigate the extent to which our findings can be generalized in other cultural regions. Alternatively, a finer-grained measurement approach can be exploited by directly assessing the participants' cultural values at the individual level to ensure the operation of those values in shaping the perceptions and evaluations of anger expression.

Finally, in the current studies, we did not specify the motives of expressing anger in the vignettes. Park et al. (2013) found that expressing anger primarily serves as a channel to vent frustration in America, but it serves such goals as asserting authority or power in Japan. Given that the functions of anger expression vary across cultures, tests must be conducted to determine whether the intentions of expressing anger moderate the observed cultural differences in the social perceptions of anger. Indeed, the causal attributions of reasons and intentions underlying anger expression should generate distinct social information to be processed differently depending on cultural norms (Gibson and Callister, 2010; Park et al., 2013). Future investigations may also extend the current analysis by exploring the extent to which the current findings can be generalized for other types of negative emotions (e.g., guilt, embarrassment, fear, and sadness), which are also likely to arise for various reasons and intents to carry distinct social information to others.

Conclusion

The current research constitutes a significant step toward understanding cultural differences in the evaluation of anger expression in the workplace. The present results indicate that organizations need

to take into account not only the cultural backgrounds of their employees and managers who directly engage in or observe emotionally charged episodes but also the hierarchical structure of the given interaction. Only then, organizations can fully understand the consequences of anger on the important work attitudes and outcomes of individuals and teams involved. Improved understanding on such emotional exchanges should improve the work process and performance of multinational enterprises and organizations with global connections.

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Data availability statement

All the data reported in the manuscript are available online at: https://osf.io/3b9kz/.

Notes

1. In this article, the effect size, Cohen's *d* was adjusted for bias (Cumming, 2012), and we reported unbiased Cohen's *d* (d_{unb}). The pooled sample standard deviation was used as the standardizer.
2. Given this difference, we ran all the analyses for Study 3 controlling for the ratings of experiencing anger. However, we excluded this variable from the analyses for parsimony because the pattern and significance of the results did not change.

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