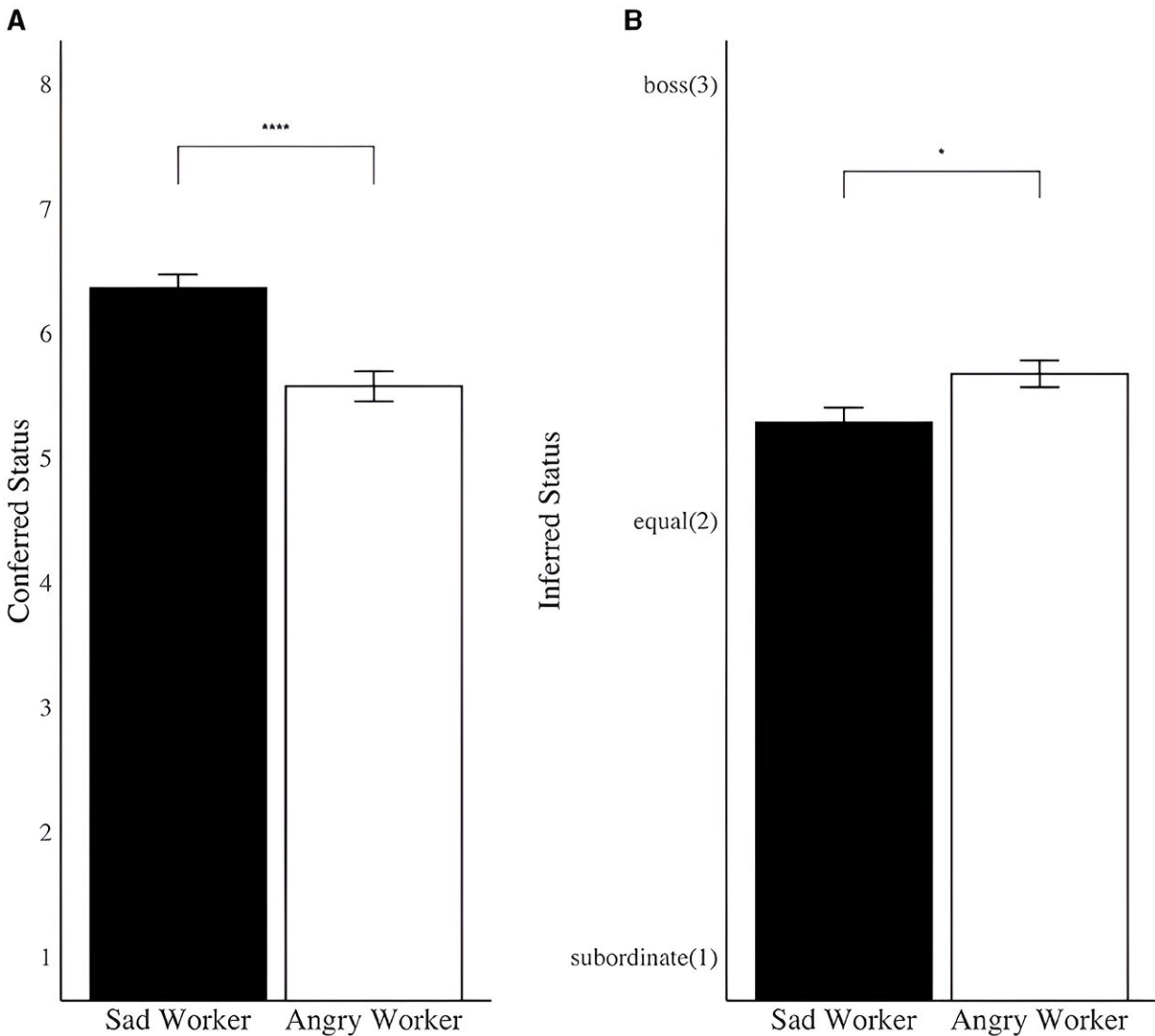


Expressing workplace anger: Not the way to get ahead, says study

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Study 1. Participants conferred less status to the angry worker relative to the sad worker (A), but inferred that the angry worker had more status relative to the sad

worker (B). Credit: *Frontiers in Social Psychology* (2024). DOI: 10.3389/frsps.2024.1337715

Contrary to previous research suggesting that expressing anger in the workplace leads to higher status and positive outcomes, a new study by researchers from Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Princeton University found that expressing anger is not a catalyst for higher status in the workplace.

The researchers conducted four robust studies, manipulating variables such as gender, target of emotional expression, and context. The findings indicate that people do not reward the expression of anger with more status, perceiving it as inappropriate, cold, an overreaction, and counter-instrumental for workplace goals. Additionally, the study challenges the notion that women's anger is perceived differently than men's anger in the workplace.

Overall, the research presents a countervailing perspective to the prevailing view of anger as a positive and instrumental emotion in the context of the workplace.

While a large body of previous research suggests that workers who express anger are judged to be competent and hold a high status—resulting in more power and money—a new study by Hebrew University of Jerusalem (HU) and Princeton University researchers debunks this consensus.

In a new study [published in *Frontiers in Social Psychology*](#), the researchers revisited these claims in U.S. experiments using similar methods as in previous work.

In four preregistered, robust studies, the researchers revisited the paradigms that tested whether expressing anger could help a worker gain status in the workplace. Specifically, they asked: do workers gain status when they express anger? Is anger perceived to be a signal of competence? And at the most basic level: do others like anger in the workplace?

"We found that anger isn't a catalyst for higher status in the workplace," says Dr. Roni Porat, a senior lecturer at the Hebrew University in the Departments of Political Science and International Relations who conducted the study along with Dr. Elizabeth Levy Paluck of Princeton University.

"Moreover, we found that anger is regarded more poorly than other emotional expressions like sadness. The only instance in which anger is considered as positive is when it is expressed in response to another person's clear wrongdoing. These findings hold for both men and women expressing anger in the workplace."

The data suggests that even though people assume that individuals expressing anger have higher status, they do not reward the expression of anger with more status because they find their anger to be inappropriate, cold, an overreaction, and counter-instrumental for workplace goals. Moreover, the researchers found that people hold negative attitudes toward workplace anger expressions, citing them as relatively more harmful, foolish, and worthless compared to other emotional expressions.

Across all four studies, the researchers experimentally manipulated the emotion being expressed (i.e., anger, sadness, or no/muted emotion). They measured status conferral similarly by asking participants to indicate how much status, power, independence, and respect the worker expressing the emotion deserved in the organization, as well as by asking

participants to indicate the yearly salary they would pay the worker expressing the emotion.

"To test the boundaries of our findings, we experimentally varied the gender of the worker expressing the emotion (i.e., men or women), the target of the emotional expression (i.e., another person, the circumstances), and the context in which the emotion was expressed (i.e., job interview, a normal workday)," Porat says.

"We experimentally varied the workers' gender to understand whether our findings held for both men and women. This is important given some work demonstrating that women are penalized for expressing anger while men are rewarded."

"Despite influential studies in this area, we didn't find that women's anger is regarded differently than men's anger," Porat continued.

"At first glance, it seems like these findings contradict a large body of previous work on gender and anger at work. Two possible explanations are that gendered norms of anger expression have changed over time since previous studies were conducted, or that we used different samples compared to previous studies. These two explanations seem unlikely."

Notwithstanding acknowledged limitations, these clear and consistent findings represent a strong countervailing perspective to current views of anger as a positive instrumental emotion. These studies highlight one context where anger may not serve or promote an individual's status, regardless of whether they are a man or a woman.

While most of the recent accounts of anger in [scholarly journals](#) as well as in the [public discourse](#) tend to highlight the positive consequences of expressing anger, this study suggests that in the context of the [workplace](#), anger may not lend the same [positive outcomes](#).

More information: Roni Porat et al, Anger at work, *Frontiers in Social Psychology* (2024). [DOI: 10.3389/frsps.2024.1337715](https://doi.org/10.3389/frsps.2024.1337715)

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