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Promotive and Prohibitive Ethical Voice: Coworker Emotions and Support for the Voice

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Despite the importance of ethical voice for advancing ethics in organizations, we know little about how coworkers respond to ethical voice in their work units. Drawing on the fundamental approach/avoidance behavioral system and the promotive and prohibitive distinction in the voice literature, we distinguish between promotive and prohibitive ethical voice and propose that they engender different emotions—elevation (an approach-oriented moral emotion) and feelings of threat (an avoidance-oriented emotion), respectively, in coworkers. We propose that these emotions differentially influence coworker subsequent responses to the ethical voice behavior. In a time-lagged critical incident survey and two experimental studies, we consistently found support for our hypothesis that promotive ethical voice elicits moral elevation in coworkers with subsequent coworker verbal support for the ethical voice (an approach-oriented response). However, results for prohibitive ethical voice were more complex because prohibitive ethical voice leads to mixed emotions in coworkers. It sometimes leads to feelings of threat, with indirect negative effects via threat on coworker support. But surprisingly, it also leads to coworker elevation and hence can have positive indirect effects via elevation on coworker support. We will discuss the research and practical implications of these findings.

Keywords: behavioral ethics, voice, ethical voice, moral emotions

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Scholars and practitioners have long emphasized the importance of employees speaking up about ethical issues at work (Gentile, 2010; Near & Miceli, 1995), a behavior we refer to as “ethical voice.” We define ethical voice as individual organization members’ communication of concerns about violations of societal ethical standards (e.g., honesty, fairness, care, respect) and/or suggestions about upholding societal ethical standards. Examples of ethical voice include an employee expressing serious concerns about the safety of a new product for customers’ health (Chen et al., 2020) or proposing ways to treat disabled employees more fairly. Ethical voice is important because it has the potential to inform peers and managers of perceived ethical issues while they have time to act to improve ethical decisions and/or avoid ethical missteps.

Because it is aimed at promoting societal or stakeholders’ (e.g., employees, customers) welfare, ethical voice qualifies as a kind of prosocial, constructive voice (Morrison, 2014). However, it is also

conceptually distinct from the forms of prosocial voice long studied in that literature. Ethical voice “involves an explicit appeal to ethical principles” (Wellman et al., 2016, p. 793) or super organizational interests (Graham, 1986) while prosocial voice studies have traditionally focused on improving organizational/unit efficiency or effectiveness (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014; Morrison, 2011). Examples of traditional constructive voice include proposing plans to reduce costs (Burris, 2012) and making suggestions to improve sales (McClellan et al., 2018). Noting the difference, Liang et al. (2012) acknowledged that traditional voice is “born out of a desire to help one’s organization . . . rather than out of . . . moral norms.” (p. 76)

Although multiple types of ethical voice have been studied (e.g., whistleblowing, Miceli et al., 2008; ethical championing, Chen et al., 2020; moral objection, Wellman et al., 2016), empirical research has focused primarily on whistleblowing, the reporting of ethical concerns to organizational authorities or external entities (the media or government; Klaas et al., 2012; Near & Miceli, 1985). Less attention has been paid to informal ethical voice that occurs in work groups (Chen et al., 2020; Wellman et al., 2016). This scarcity of research is consequential because employees typically begin voicing their concerns within their own work groups and to their supervisors (Culiberg & Mihelič, 2017; Kaptein, 2011). Informal ethical voice is where ethical voice begins, whereas whistleblowing is generally treated as a last resort, when the issues are serious and remain unaddressed (Vandekerckhove & Phillips, 2019).

Because ethical voice is perceived to be quite risky for the ethical voicer (Ethical Compliance Initiative, 2021; Milliken et al., 2003) who may feel alone and unsupported, we are particularly interested in understanding whether and when (informal) ethical voicers can

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garner verbal support from their coworkers at the time the ethical issue is raised. Coworkers' verbal support for the ethical voice matters because such support can amplify the voiced ideas (Bain et al., 2021) and influence additional coworkers and/or supervisors (Nemeth et al., 1977), contributing to momentum toward ethical decisions and their implementation (Anderson & Bateman, 2000; Satterstrom et al., 2021).

Although we know of no empirical study that focuses explicitly on coworker support for ethical voice, related research suggests that coworkers may or may not provide such support. The research on retaliation against and derogation of ethical voicers (Cortina & Magley, 2003; Monin et al., 2008; Park et al., 2020; Wellman et al., 2016) suggests that coworkers may view ethical voice expressed in their group negatively and therefore may be disinclined to support the ethical voice. However, recent experimental studies find that ethical voicers can positively influence team decisions (Chen et al., 2020) and engender trust from peers (Kennedy & Schweitzer, 2018). Further, an emerging positive view from the moral psychology literature (Bai, 2017; Goodwin, 2015) suggests that highly ethical behavior (such as that exhibited by an ethical voicer) may signal the actor's good character, eliciting favorable responses and even support from observers.

In the set of studies presented here, we explore when and why ethical voice in work groups results in coworker support. Building on the prohibitive–promotive distinction in the voice literature (Liang et al., 2012) and in the moral psychology literature (Janoff-Bulman et al., 2009), we conceptually distinguish prohibitive from promotive ethical voice. Prohibitive ethical voice emphasizes what we should *not do* (i.e., ethically wrong behaviors such as harm to others or violation of ethical standards), while promotive ethical voice emphasizes what we *should or can do* (i.e., ethically good behaviors such as advancing others' welfare). Further, drawing upon the approach/avoidance and behavioral activation/inhibition systems (Carver, 2006; Gray, 1990; Sherf et al., 2021), we develop a new theory, proposing that these two forms of ethical voice should differentially influence coworker verbal support by triggering approach or avoidance-oriented affective mechanisms. We propose that prohibitive ethical voice discourages coworker verbal support by triggering feelings of threat (an avoidance-oriented emotion experienced when one believes that they fail to meet moral standards held by others and anticipates potential negative moral judgment from others, Higgins, 1987), whereas promotive ethical voice motivates coworker verbal support by triggering moral elevation (an approach-oriented moral emotion experienced when one witnesses others' displays of virtue, Algoe & Haidt, 2009).

This research contributes significantly to the ethical voice, the broader behavioral ethics, and the broader voice literatures. First, we shift the focus of ethical voice research from managerial retaliation against whistleblowers to coworker verbal support for the more common ethical voice that occurs in their work groups. Whistleblowers report wrongdoing, potentially putting managers' and organizations' interests at risk, resulting in feared or actual retaliation. Our research moves us beyond the thinking that only negative consequences are associated with ethical voice and helps to push research on ethical voice and its consequences in a more positive direction by focusing on the consequences of the more informal and common type of ethical voice. Importantly, we provide a theoretical lens for understanding when and why more positive consequences are likely, by distinguishing promotive and prohibitive forms of ethical voice and the associated underlying affective mechanisms (i.e., elevation and threat).

We also contribute to the broader behavioral ethics literature by focusing on what leads coworkers to verbally support ethical voice, which is essentially an extraordinary ethical behavior (Treviño et al., 2014) because it is potentially risky and extends beyond just following company rules or codes. Thus, our research moves beyond the dominant prohibitive emphasis in the behavioral ethics literature that focuses on (preventing) unethical behavior (e.g., lying, cheating, stealing; De Cremer & Moore, 2020; Higgins & Cornwell, 2016). This is important because it helps us understand not just when employees fail the ethical test but when and why employees make positive ethical contributions to their groups, organizations, and society (Spreitzer et al., 2021). Importantly, we show not only that good behavior (i.e., ethical voice) can be "contagious," leading to coworker verbal support but also that moral elevation, a uniquely positive moral affective mechanism explains the contagion.

Our research contributes to the broader voice literature as well. Despite a broadened definition of prosocial voice (Morrison, 2014), empirical research on prosocial voice has either focused on voice aimed at improving an organization's work methods and procedures (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014; Morrison, 2011), or it has not specified voice issue content (Burris, 2012; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). However, voice researchers have recently called for more fine-tuned theorization about voice content (Burris et al., 2017; McClean et al., 2021). In theorizing how coworkers will respond to voice about *ethical* issues, we take this approach and propose ethics-based affective mechanisms (moral elevation and threat) underlying reactions to promotive and prohibitive ethical voice. Affective mechanisms may be more important in understanding ethical voice consequences because processing ethics-related information is thought to be highly intuitive and affective (Haidt, 2001; Salvador & Folger, 2009). For example, elevation is a uniquely moral emotion experienced when someone views an admirable *moral* behavior and it motivates the person to emulate it (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Haidt & Morris, 2009). Further, negative information about the moral self has been shown to be particularly threatening (Fleischmann et al., 2021). These ethics-based affective mechanisms are quite distinct from the cognitive mechanisms recently shown to explain peer positive evaluation of traditional voicers: perceived voicer competence (Weiss & Morrison, 2019; Zhang et al., 2020) and perceived constructiveness for the organization (Whiting et al., 2012). Thus, our research helps to distinguish theoretical mechanisms underlying consequences of different kinds of voice. Further, in contrast to traditional voice research that shows negative or nonpositive effects for prohibitive voice (Chamberlin et al., 2017; McClean et al., 2018), we find that even prohibitive ethical voice can produce moral elevation in observers. Thus, there appears to be something quite powerful and inspiring about observing a coworker "sticking their neck out" to speak up about an ethical issue at work (whether promotive or prohibitive). This finding appears to further differentiate ethical voice from traditional forms of constructive voice.

Theory Development

The Approach–Avoidance Systems

Our theorization is based on the fundamental approach–avoidance systems (Elliot, 2006; Gray, 1990). Although different labels have been used, research posits that human motivations and behaviors are

regulated by two distinct systems (approach–avoidance or activation–inhibition). The *approach* or *activation* system is triggered by environmental cues regarding positive opportunities and desirable outcomes, and it spurs motivation to move toward these possibilities and subsequent approach-oriented behavior. In contrast, the *avoidance* or *inhibition* system is activated by environmental cues regarding potential threats and negative outcomes, and it spurs motivations to move away from those possibilities and subsequent avoidance-oriented behavior (Carver & Scheier, 1998). The avoidance- or approach-oriented behavior may not necessarily manifest in physical movements. Rather, they may involve psychological strategies that orient the person toward or away from the stimulus (Elliot et al., 2013). For example, one may psychologically orient away from a coworker who engages in ethical voice by taking no action to support the coworker or by undermining the coworker (Elliot et al., 2013).

These regulation systems can be activated by corresponding environmental cues. The environmental cues mobilize approach- or avoidance-oriented behaviors by triggering different affective motivation mechanisms: positive emotions (e.g., happiness) that sustain or impel actions toward something pleasant or negative emotions (e.g., fear) that sustain or impel actions away from something unpleasant (Elliot et al., 2013; Gray, 1990; Roseman, 2008). Research shows that workplace events can serve as such environmental cues (e.g., Ferris et al., 2016; Nifadkar et al., 2012). We argue that ethical voice represents an environmental cue, triggering feelings of threat or elevation in coworkers and subsequently leading coworkers to either move away from or toward the ethical voice, respectively.

We operationalize whether coworkers orient away from versus toward the ethical voice as whether coworkers remain silent or simply go along with a less ethical option versus verbally supporting the ethical voice at the time the ethical issue is raised. Coworkers' verbal support is a meaningful outcome because it is essentially a form of ethical voice itself that may amplify the voiced idea(s) (Bain et al., 2021; Satterstrom et al., 2021), increase the ethical voicer's credibility (Dutton & Ashford, 1993), and boost the ethical voicer's influence on the decision or action (Chen et al., 2020). We consider coworker verbal support to be an approach behavior. Prosocial voice in general is considered an approach-oriented behavior because the goal is to improve the situation (Sherf et al., 2021). Likewise, verbal support for ethical voice fits with the approach system's orientation toward positive possibilities. In contrast, the absence of verbal support for the ethical voice, in the form of silence or going along with less ethical positions adopted by the majority, is avoidance oriented (Sherf et al., 2021). This is because ethical voice is considered risky in business settings, as it is frequently misaligned with the organization's (short-term) financial interests (Sonenshein, 2016). Taking the ethical stance (in this case via verbal support for the ethical voice) is associated with danger and threats to the self (Kish-Gephart et al., 2009). Therefore, remaining silent or distancing oneself from the ethical stance avoids that danger and fits with the avoidance system's orientation away from negative possibilities.

Promotive–Prohibitive Ethical Voice

Ethical voice has been traditionally assumed to be about stopping something wrong such as harm to people (Miceli & Near, 1985; Wellman et al., 2016). This may lead one to conclude that ethical

voice is an environmental cue that likely activates the avoidance system. However, recent moral psychology research recognizes that morality is not only about proscribing violations of minimal moral standards to *avoid* negative outcomes but also about prescribing excellent moral behaviors to *approach* positive outcomes (Janoff-Bulman et al., 2009). Thus, ethical voice can also be about proposing positive ethical ideas and serve as an environmental cue to activate the approach system. This distinction echoes the prohibitive and promotive distinction from the voice literature (Liang et al., 2012). Promotive voice is defined as employees proposing new ideas for improving the functioning of the *unit or organization* and the focus is on better outcomes. In contrast, prohibitive voice is defined as employees expressing concerns about factors that are harmful *to their organization* and the focus is on (potential) negative outcomes.

Given this prohibitive/promotive differentiation in both the recent moral psychology literature and the voice literature, we propose that ethical voice can be either promotive or prohibitive. The language used by the ethical voicer can shape whether others perceive the ethical voice to be promotive (what we should or can do better) or prohibitive (what we should avoid or not do). When opposing the sale of a harmful product, an ethical voicer could argue in prohibitive terms that the company should *not harm* customers by selling *dangerous* products. Or the voicer could argue in promotive terms that the company can *care more* for customers by selling *healthier* products. Even if there has not been a specific moral violation (e.g., if the voicer advocates for gender equity policies), prohibitive language can still highlight potential violations. For example, when championing social equality, the voicer could argue that we should *avoid discriminating* against women; alternatively, the voicer could argue that we can *promote equality* for women (Does et al., 2011). Therefore, observers may perceive an instance of ethical voice to be more promotive or prohibitive depending on the language used to convey it. This has also been shown in the traditional voice literature (e.g., McClean et al., 2018 Study 2).

Although prohibitive/promotive (traditional) voice and prohibitive/promotive ethical voice are both about avoiding negative outcomes versus approaching better outcomes, the outcomes being approached or avoided are fundamentally different. Voice has been traditionally focused on what benefits or harms the work unit or the organization, whereas ethical voice emphasizes upholding (or avoiding breaching) societal ethical standards that may or may not benefit the organization (at least in the shorter run). Because of traditional voice's task or organizational focus, past research on managerial endorsement and peer perception of traditional voice has relied on mechanisms such as perceived voicer competence (Weiss & Morrison, 2019; Zhang et al., 2020) or perceived constructiveness for the organization/unit (Burris, 2012; Whiting et al., 2012). However, because prohibitive/promotive ethical voice resides conceptually in the moral domain, we look to the moral psychology literature to theorize new mechanisms that explain coworker responses to ethical voice. Below, we theorize about how promotive and prohibitive ethical voice activate the two behavioral systems by engendering (moral) threat (an avoidance-oriented emotion) or elevation (an approach-oriented moral emotion), respectively, which in turn inhibits or promotes coworker verbal support for the ethical voice.

Prohibitive Ethical Voice, Feelings of Threat, and Coworker Verbal Support

We propose that prohibitive ethical voice is an environmental cue that triggers an avoidance emotion—coworker feelings of threat that in turn inhibit coworker support for the ethical voice. The moral psychology literature has relied upon feelings of moral threat (Monin, 2007; Monin et al., 2008; Monin & Jordan, 2009) to explain people's responses to individuals who object to unethical behavior. Feelings of threat or fear are "emotions (that) occur when danger or harm is anticipated . . ." (Higgins, 1987, p. 323). According to Higgins (1987), feelings of *moral* threat occur when one's current state, "does not match the state that the person believes some . . . other person considers to be . . . [their] duty or obligation to attain" (p. 323), that is, the moral standard held by this other person, and therefore one anticipates others' negative moral judgment of the self. Other moral psychology scholars similarly refer to moral threat as fear of anticipated condemnation or reproach from others (Dasborough et al., 2020; Haidt, 2003a; Monin et al., 2008). The subjective feelings of moral threat are likened to agitation-related feelings such as fear, anxiety, unease, nervousness, apprehension, and stress (Higgins, 1987; Higgins et al., 1986). Moral threat is thought to be particularly intense because morality is so central to how we view ourselves and how others view us (Fleischmann et al., 2021).

Feelings of moral threat and similar emotions such as fear are avoidance-oriented emotions (Elliot et al., 2013). As part of the human defense system, they are elicited by potential harm or other perceived negative outcomes and they mobilize psychological and physiological resources to enable individuals to avoid the source of threat and danger (Lerner & Keltner, 2001). With moral threat, the source of threat is the other person (or people) whose moral standards one has failed to live up to. One fears negative judgment from the other person who has taken the moral high ground. Theory and empirical research suggest that individuals want to perceive themselves in a positive light or be seen by others that way (Sedikides & Strube, 1997). This need applies especially to the moral domain because morality is so central to identity (Goodwin, 2015). As a result, moral threat is followed by individuals' avoidance-oriented, defensive behavior, where individuals psychologically orient themselves away from the source of the moral threat (Does et al., 2011; Monin et al., 2008; Shalvi et al., 2015).

We propose that prohibitive ethical voice triggers the avoidance system by producing feelings of moral threat. This is because prohibitive ethical voice is focused on (potential) ethical violations in the work group. From the coworker's perspective, it implies that "we did (or are about to do) something wrong." Even when the observing coworkers are not responsible for "what we should not do," they may perceive the ethical voice as implicitly questioning their morality because they were in the same situation but did not speak up. Their inaction can be viewed as contributing to the moral failure (Monin, 2007). They may feel threatened, anticipating negative moral judgment from the voicer who appears to have higher moral standards. Experimental studies (Minson & Monin, 2012; O'Connor & Monin, 2016) show that observers of an individual who objects to experimental tasks for moral reasons expect rejection and reproach from this moral objector. Therefore, we propose that coworkers observing prohibitive ethical voice will more likely feel threatened.

We further argue that these threat feelings should inhibit coworkers from verbally supporting the ethical voice. Individuals may psychologically orient themselves away from the moral threat feelings by defensively disengaging from the moral domain, reducing the importance of the moral domain (e.g., "it is more important to improve work efficiency"), and avoiding engaging in activities related to the domain (Tesser, 1988). Thus, coworkers who feel threatened are likely to dismiss the ethical issue and are less likely to verbally support the ethical voice. In addition, individuals may also orient themselves away from the threat by derogating the source of the threat (Monin, 2007). In our case, it is the prohibitive ethical voicer who points out ethical failures. Coworkers may question the voicer's intention and even derogate the voicer, therefore discounting the morality of the ethical voice (Alicke, 2000). This can undermine the validity of the prohibitive ethical voice such that coworkers are less likely to support it.

Hypothesis 1: Prohibitive ethical voice has a negative indirect effect on coworker verbal support for the ethical voice through coworker feelings of (moral) threat.

Promotive Ethical Voice, Elevation, and Coworker Support

In contrast, we propose that promotive ethical voice is an environmental cue that generates coworker elevation, an approach-oriented emotion that motivates coworker support for the ethical stance. Moral elevation is a positive moral emotion (Haidt, 2000; 2003a), described as "a warm, uplifting feeling that people experience when they see . . . acts of human goodness, kindness, and compassion" (Haidt, 2000, p. 1) or "acts of charity, . . . , generosity, or any other strong display of virtue" (Algoe & Haidt, 2009, p. 106). Those acts represent moral "good deeds" that can benefit others (Aquino et al., 2011; Haidt, 2000). Moral elevation involves a unique pattern of affective experiences including feeling moved, inspired, or "elevated." The associated motivations involve desires to improve the moral self, emulate the morally excellent actor, and help others (Aquino et al., 2011; Schnall & Roper, 2012). Multiple empirical studies show that those unique eliciting conditions, affective experiences, cognitions, and action tendencies set moral elevation apart from general positive affect and other positive discrete emotions such as joy and gratitude (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Schnall et al., 2010; Strohinger et al., 2011).

In contrast to other approach-oriented emotions such as joy that are elicited by (potential) rewards for the self, moral elevation is elicited by others' excellent moral actions that benefit others. Based on Fredrickson's (2001) broaden and build framework, positive emotions generally broaden individuals' thought-action repertoire, opening individuals to opportunities, mobilizing the individuals to approach the environment and build social bonds. Elevation opens people's hearts to opportunities to benefit others (Haidt, 2003a) and it motivates actions aimed at achieving positive outcomes for others (e.g., helping behaviors, charitable acts, Schnall et al., 2010).

We propose that promotive ethical voice (rather than prohibitive ethical voice) is more likely to trigger the approach system and associated approach behavior by producing moral elevation. This is because promotive ethical voice highlights positive outcomes for others or for society, or what we can do better ethically (e.g., advancing others' welfare), rather than negative outcomes. This helps

focus observing coworkers' attention on the opportunity to do something good for others. Behaviors intended to bring better moral outcomes are generally deemed more virtuous and praiseworthy than behaviors simply aimed at preventing ethical failures (Janoff-Bulman et al., 2009). This act of advocating for moral good deeds seems to be quite salient and virtuous in business contexts because employees generally fear speaking up about ethical issues that deviate from the primary goal of efficiency and profit maximization (Kish-Gephart et al., 2009; Milliken et al., 2003; Sonenshein, 2016). Haidt (2003b) argued that elevation is an intuitive reaction to "people behaving in a virtuous way" (p. 279). Therefore, we propose that coworkers will experience moral elevation as an intuitive affective response to promotive ethical voice.

We further propose that moral elevation, an approach-oriented emotion should enable a coworker's verbal support for the ethical stance. Elevation is viewed to function as a "moral reset button" (Haidt, 2003a), heightening awareness of opportunities for moral betterment (Shiota et al., 2014). Elevation has been shown to motivate such behaviors. Empirical research on elevation shows that elevated individuals offer more help to strangers (Schnall et al., 2010) and donate more to charities (Aquino et al., 2011). Morally elevated individuals are especially likely to follow the example of the moral actor by engaging in the same kind of ethical behavior. For example, college students later engaged in volunteerism in the domain in which they felt morally elevated (rather than other domains; Cox, 2010). Thus, we argue that promotive ethical voice is more likely to induce moral elevation in coworkers. As a result, the elevated coworkers are more likely to follow the voicer's example and show their verbal support for the ethical voice.

Hypothesis 2: Promotive ethical voice has a positive indirect effect on coworker verbal support for the ethical voice through coworker moral elevation.

Overview of Studies

We used three adult samples to test our hypotheses, using different methodologies. Because coworker responses to ethical voice have rarely been studied, we first conducted a time-lagged critical incident survey (Study 1) with individuals in real work settings to establish external validity. The critical incident survey enabled us to collect rich data on concrete and wide-ranging ethical voice incidents reported by employees. We then complemented the survey with two experiments (Studies 2 and 3) to replicate the findings, while strengthening causal inferences. In Study 3, we further strengthened the results by examining actual support for ethical voice (not just self-reported or intended support).

Transparency and Openness

We described our sampling plan, all data exclusions (if any), all manipulations, and all measures in Studies 1–3 and additional studies reported in the Supplemental Material, and we adhered to the *Journal of Applied Psychology* methodological checklist. Analysis code, research materials, and data are available from the first author upon request. Data were analyzed using R, Version 4.0.3 and the package Lavaan, Version 0.6-7 (Rosseel, 2012) in Study 1 and the third study reported in Supplement B. Data were analyzed using SPSS 27 and PROCESS macro Version 3.5 (Hayes, 2017) in Studies

2 and 3 and the study reported in Supplement C. Study design, hypothesis, and data analysis plan were not preregistered.

Study 1

According to Gartner, Inc (2019), only about 40% of ethically questionable conduct is reported in organizations, making ethical voice a low-frequency phenomenon. The base rates are similar in other studies (Miceli et al., 2012; Miceli & Near, 1984, 1985). Following prior research on low-frequency events in the workplace such as moral objection and social issue selling (e.g., Mayer et al., 2019; Wellman et al., 2016), we conducted a critical incident survey (Flanagan, 1954), targeting individuals who could recall a specific event of coworker ethical voice and asking them to answer related questions about the event and how they responded.

To reduce common method variance and demand characteristics (Podsakoff et al., 2012), we measured predictors and outcomes separately and at recommended intervals (Dang et al., 2017; Mitchell et al., 2015). At Time 1, participants completed measures of prohibitive and promotive ethical voice and demographics. We administered the Time 2 survey 2 weeks later and participants completed measures of experienced emotions (feelings of threat and elevation) and behavioral responses to the particular ethical voice incident they had described at Time 1.

Participants

This study has been approved by the Pennsylvania State University's Institutional Review Board as an exempt study ("Reaction to coworker voice and championing," STUDY00012036). We recruited U.S. citizens with full-time employment status from the Prolific Academic online panel. Prolific Academic provides access to populations that are naïve to common research tasks, are demographically diverse, and produce high-quality responses (Peer et al., 2017). Importantly, given the low-frequency nature of the phenomenon, an online panel such as Prolific with a big participant pool increased our likelihood of finding a sufficient number of individuals who had witnessed coworker ethical voice. We used demographic filters to invite individuals who met the following criteria to participate in a prescreening survey: U.S. citizens who were employed full time, working as part of a group (rather than independently), with college or higher degrees, currently not students, and with an approval rate of 99% and higher. About 1,000 prescreening surveys (with a payment of \$0.2) were sent to ask whether, in the last year, the individual had personally witnessed a coworker in their work unit or department speaking up to colleagues, supervisors, or managers to communicate either ideas and suggestions for more ethical practices, behaviors, or decisions that could advance the welfare of consumers, the community, other employees or the society as a whole, or information or concerns about work practices, behaviors, or decisions that he or she thought were ethically wrong. If yes, they were then asked to provide a detailed description of the event. Five hundred and fifty-six individuals indicated that they had witnessed such an event. Based on the following predetermined inclusion criteria: (a) the participant indicated that *one specific coworker* (not the participant themselves or multiple coworkers) initiated the voice behavior; (b) the participant indicated that the coworker was raising issues about violating or upholding *ethical principles* (e.g., caring/harm, fairness, honesty); (c) the participant

provided a description of a *concrete* event, we invited 269 individuals to participate in the Time 1 survey. Two hundred and nineteen participants completed the Time 1 survey in exchange for a payment of \$3 (response rate 81.4%) and were invited to complete the Time 2 survey. For the Time 2 survey, participants were presented with their own description of a coworker ethical voice incident that they had provided at Time 1 and were asked to answer additional questions related to the event. One hundred and eighty-two participants completed the Time 2 survey in exchange for an additional payment of \$4 (response rate 83.1%). Participants in the final sample average 35 years old ($SD = 9$) and have worked in their organizations for 6.5 years on average ($SD = 6.3$). About 44.5% are male, 80.3% are White, 7.1% are Asian, and 6% are African American. The industries most represented were professional, scientific, or technical services, health care, education, finance/insurance, publishing, retail. See Supplement A for coworker ethical voice incident characteristics.

Measures

All the items are shown in Appendix A.

Perceived Prohibitive and Promotive Ethical Voice

We developed three items to assess the degree to which the respondent perceived the ethical voice to emphasize the prohibitive (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$) or the promotive (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$), respectively. The promotive/prohibitive wording is based on Janoff-Bulman et al.'s (2009) conceptual work on dual systems of morality and Liang et al.'s (2012) promotive and prohibitive voice. We could not use Liang et al.'s (2012) items because they emphasize advancing unit/organization efficiency rather than ethics. Specifically, to measure prohibitive ethical voice, we assessed the emphasis on what should be avoided or should not be done—morally wrong or unethical behavior. To measure promotive ethical voice, we assessed the emphasis on what we should or can do (better)—something morally good or ethical. We conducted three studies to assess validity of the measures following Colquitt et al. (2019). Results (see Supplement B) suggest that prohibitive and promotive ethical voice and prohibitive and promotive (traditional) voice (defined by Liang et al., 2012) are related but distinguishable.

Feelings of Threat and Elevation

Following Higgins's (1987) original conceptualization of feeling threatened and Haidt's (2003b) conceptualization of elevation, we treated feelings of threat and elevation as emotions. Emotion consists of a series of interrelated responses, including subjective feelings, cognitions, and action tendencies (Frijda et al., 1989). Researchers primarily assess emotions by measuring the subjective feeling component. Therefore, we asked the participants to indicate the extent to which they felt in each of the following ways at the time when the coworker spoke up on 5-point Likert scales (1 = *Not at all*, 5 = *Extremely*). For feelings of threat, we used five items (e.g., tense) based on Higgins et al. (1986), Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$. We did not include those items not directly capturing threat, such as calm, quiet. For elevation, we used four items (e.g., inspired) from Algoe and Haidt (2009), Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$. These items were embedded in items capturing other emotions (e.g., angry, irritated).

Verbal Support for the Ethical Voice

At Time 2, participants indicated on 5-point Likert scales whether they voiced support for the voicer using three items adapted from the behavioral items (e.g., "support this person's comments . . .") in Burris's (2012) voice endorsement scale. Because we intended to assess verbal support behavior, we did not use the attitudinal items in the original scale (e.g., "This person's comments are valuable.") We worded the items to be specific about speaking up to support the voicer in the same conversation/meeting. Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$.

Results

We conducted structural equation modeling (SEM) using the Lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012) in R (Version 4.0.3) to test the hypotheses. SEM accounts for covariance between predictors and mediators and therefore is suitable to test our model that has multiple predictors and mediators. Correlations between variables including demographical ones are in Table 1.

Measurement Model

We first tested our measurement model (Model 0) with five latent variables. The model had a good fit given the fitness indices: $\chi^2(125) = 190.80, p < .001, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .06, CFI = .97, TLI = .96$. All the items significantly loaded on the corresponding factors, $ps < .001$ and factor loadings were all above .60. As shown in Table 2, this model fitted the data significantly better than several alternative models. Table 2 further provides evidence that promotive and prohibitive ethical voice are distinct from each other.

Hypothesis Testing

We then fitted a full model (see Figure 1) to the data, including not only the hypothesized paths but also direct paths from promotive ethical voice and prohibitive ethical voice to verbal support for ethical voice, a path from promotive ethical voice to feelings of threat, and a path from prohibitive ethical voice to elevation. We allowed the two exogenous factors (promotive ethical voice and prohibitive ethical voice) to covary, as is the default in the Lavaan package. Following Preacher and Hayes's (2008) recommendation for multiple mediator models, we also allowed the two mediators (feelings of threat and elevation) to covary. The model had a good fit: $\chi^2(125) = 190.80, p < .001, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .06, CFI = .97, TLI = .96$.

As seen in Figure 1, prohibitive ethical voice was positively related to feelings of threat ($B = .37, SE = .09, p < .001, 95\% CI [.19, .54]$), which was negatively related to verbal support for ethical voice ($B = -.29, SE = .12, p = .02, 95\% CI [-.53, -.05]$). Promotive ethical voice was positively related to elevation ($B = .32, SE = .08, p < .001, 95\% CI [.16, .48]$), which was positively related to verbal support ($B = .22, SE = .11, p = .049, 95\% CI [.00, .43]$). These provide preliminary support for the hypothesized indirect effects (Hypotheses 1 and 2).

We further tested indirect effects using the bootstrap resampling method with 5,000 samples (MacKinnon et al., 2004; see Table 3). Hypothesis 1 was supported. Prohibitive ethical voice has a significantly negative indirect effect via feelings of threat on verbal support for ethical voice (effect = $-.11, SE = .06, bootstrapped 95\% CI$

Table 1
Correlations in Study 1

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	35.21	9.19	—							
2. Gender (female)	.54	.50	-.07	—						
3. Race (White)	.81	.40	.14	.00	—					
4. Job tenure	6.48	6.33	.68**	-.07	.03	—				
5. Prohibitive ethical voice	3.48	1.10	.11	.05	.09	.20**	—			
6. Promotive ethical voice	3.69	1.04	.12	-.03	-.08	.14	-.02	—		
7. Elevation	3.07	1.05	.03	.09	-.08	.05	.17*	.27**	—	
8. Feelings of threat	2.19	1.05	-.05	.01	.06	.06	.32**	-.19*	-.10	—
9. Verbal support	3.09	1.38	.15*	-.10	-.01	.13	-.02	.20**	.19*	-.22**

Note. *N* = 182. Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female; Race: 0 = non-White, 1 = White.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ two-tailed.

[-.24, -.02]). Hypothesis 2 was also supported. Promotive ethical voice has significantly positive indirect effects via elevation on verbal support for ethical voice (effect = .07, $SE = .04$, bootstrapped 95% CI [.00, .18]).

Additional Findings

Although not hypothesized, promotive ethical voice was negatively related to feelings of threat ($B = -.20$, $SE = .07$, $p = .006$, 95% CI [-.34, -.06]) and had a significantly positive indirect effect on verbal support for ethical voice via reduced feelings of threat (effect = .06, $SE = .04$, bootstrapped 95% CI [.01, .15]; see Figure 1 and Table 3). Surprisingly, prohibitive ethical voice was also positively related to elevation ($B = .24$, $SE = .10$, $p = .01$, 95% CI [.05, .43]) and had a significantly positive indirect effect via elevation on verbal support for ethical voice (effect = .05, $SE = .04$, bootstrapped 95% CI [.00, .16]).

Total and Residual Effects of Prohibitive and Promotive Ethical Voice

Overall, the total effect of prohibitive ethical voice (indirect and residual direct effects combined) on verbal support for ethical voice was not significant ($B = -.05$, $SE = .12$, $p = .68$, 95% CI [-.29, .19]). The nonsignificant total effect of prohibitive ethical voice on verbal support for ethical voice was fully explained by the positive indirect effect via elevation and the negative indirect effect via feelings of threat and the residual direct effect of prohibitive ethical voice was not significant ($B = .00$, $SE = .13$, $p = .98$, 95% CI [-.26, .27]). The total effect of promotive ethical voice on verbal support

for ethical voice was significant and positive ($B = .26$, $SE = .11$, $p = .02$, 95% CI [.05, .47]). This effect was fully explained by elevation (and feelings of threat) and the residual direct effect of promotive ethical voice support for ethical voice ($B = .13$, $SE = .11$, $p = .24$, 95% CI [-.09, .35]) was not significant.

Study 1 Discussion

As hypothesized, we found that promotive ethical voice led to verbal support, an approach-oriented coworker response via elevation (and reduced feelings of threat). However, results for prohibitive ethical voice were more complex. Prohibitive ethical voice led to mixed feelings—both threat and elevation—and both positive and negative indirect effects on coworker verbal support. We will discuss this finding more in the general discussion.

Although Study 1 established external validity and general support for our hypotheses, we could not rule out reverse causality. In addition, we used adjectives describing subjective feelings to assess coworker elevation and feelings of threat across different ethical voice incidents. We cannot rule out alternative mechanisms that may produce similar feelings (e.g., positive and negative moods, other negative emotions such as fear). Thus, we designed an experiment based on an ethical voice episode described by a Study 1 participant.

Study 2

Participants

This study has been approved by the Pennsylvania State University's Institutional Review Board as an exempt study

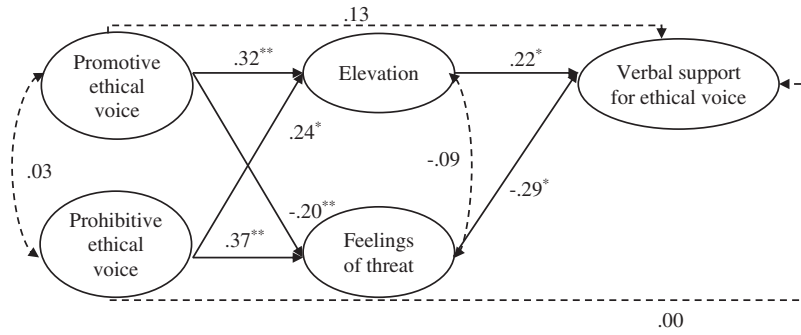
Table 2
Comparison of Alternative Measurement Models in Study 1

Model	χ^2	<i>df</i>	$\Delta\chi^2$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
5-factor	190.80**	125		.97	.96	.05	.06
1-factor	1,573.95**	135	1,383.15**	.34	.25	.24	.22
4-factor A	452.08**	129	261.28**	.85	.82	.12	.13
4-factor B	869.72**	129	678.92**	.66	.60	.18	.20

Note. 1-factor: All items were collapsed into a common factor. 4-factor A: Promotive and prohibitive ethical voice were collapsed into a common factor. 4-factor B: Elevation and feelings of threat were collapsed into a common factor. CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean squared residual.

** $p < .01$ two-tailed.

Figure 1
Structural Modeling Results in Study 1



Note. $N = 182$. Numbers were unstandardized coefficients. Dotted path was not statistically significant.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ two-tailed.

(“Antecedents and outcomes of moral elevation and moral threat in the context of moral advocacy,” STUDY00011706). Using Amazon Mechanical Turk’s online panel, we recruited 180 participants with approval rates over 99% in the U.S. We excluded nine individuals from data analysis using predetermined criteria. Four of them failed more than one attention check (e.g., “Please select strongly agree for this item”), three of them provided irrelevant answers to open-ended questions, and two of them had duplicate IP addresses. The final sample consists of 171 individuals, with an average age of 39 ($SD = 11$) and average work experience of 16 years ($SD = 11$). Fifty-one percent are male and 77% had a bachelor’s degree or higher. Eighty-seven percent are fully employed, and the industries most represented were professional and scientific services, retail, education, health care, finance, and publishing. About 70.2% are White, 10.5% Asian, 8.8% African American, and 5.8% Hispanic.

Experimental Design

We used a between-subjects design where participants were randomly assigned to three conditions: 59 in the prohibitive ethical voice condition, 57 in the promotive ethical voice condition, and 55 in the control condition. Participants were asked to consider themselves to be part of a data analysis unit in E-Marketing Solutions, a digital marketing startup. Following prior experimental work on ethical voice (Chen et al., 2020), we chose a startup setting because startup companies are frequently faced with ethical challenges, affording opportunities for ethical voice. They were then presented with a situation involving an ethical issue that was drawn from participants’ responses in Study 1. Participants were

told that due to company growth, many teams were experiencing increasing workloads. In the weekly meeting, the team manager announced a decision to replace Peter, a coworker taking a medical leave for a surgery that required several months of rehabilitation despite the fact that Peter was previously told that the position would be kept for him. The manager had contacted potential hires and asked the team members’ opinions on one candidate who could start the job right away. The manager said he would not inform Peter. We first presented the manager’s selected candidate’s profile to the participants and asked them for their thoughts on the manager’s plan to replace Peter with the candidate. We then told the participants that a coworker, Pat, disagreed with the plan and spoke up in the meeting. Participants in different conditions were shown scripts with different content but similar length and structure (see Appendix B). In the promotive ethical voice condition, Pat suggested that they be more compassionate to Peter and go the extra mile to let him keep his job; in the prohibitive ethical voice condition, Pat said that they were being unfair to Peter and should stop the process before harming Peter; in the control condition (which is designed to have neither promotive nor prohibitive moral arguments), Pat dissented from an efficiency and productivity standpoint. After viewing Pat’s comments, participants reported on their emotions, their intention to verbally support Pat’s idea in the meeting, and completed manipulation checks. We chose an ethical issue that is moderately intense—an issue that involves some psychological and financial harm to a coworker because such ethical issues occur in the workplace more often than issues involving severe physical harm and therefore are more realistic.

Table 3
Indirect Effects on Verbal Support in Study 1 (Bootstrap Resampling $N = 5,000$)

Variable	Indirect effect via feelings of threat			Indirect effect via elevation		
	Effect	SE	95% CI	Effect	SE	95% CI
IV: Prohibitive ethical voice	-.11	.06	[-.24, -.02]	.05	.04	[.00, .16]
IV: Promotive ethical voice	.06	.04	[.01, .15]	.07	.04	[.00, .18]

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Measures

All the items are shown in Appendix A.

Manipulation Checks

We assessed manipulation of prohibitive and promotive ethical voice using two items adapted from our measure in Study 1. Cronbach's α s for prohibitive and promotive ethical voice manipulation check are .90 and .88.

Feelings of Threat and Elevation

To more precisely capture feelings of threat as fear about potential negative moral judgment from the voicer, we used three items to assess specific content of the threat based on Monin et al. (2008) and Higgins's (1987) theorizing of threat. Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$. We used the same elevation measure as in Study 1. Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$.

Verbal Support for Ethical Voice

We used the same items to assess verbal support for ethical voice but changed the wording to fit the experimental design (e.g., "I would join Pat in voicing the idea in the meeting"). Cronbach's $\alpha = .98$.

Controls

Because attitude toward an object is shown to influence an individual's actual behavior (Ajzen, 2001) and individuals' own stance on an ethical issue is shown to influence their response to moral objectors (Monin et al., 2008), before presenting Pat's comments, we assessed the extent to which participants agreed with the idea of hiring the candidate to replace Peter on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). This item was reverse coded such that higher scores represent an ethical stance of keeping Peter.

Results

Correlations among variables, including demographics are shown in Table 4.

Manipulation Checks

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) results show a significant difference among conditions in the prohibitive ethical voice manipulation check, $F(2, 168) = 205.94, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .71$. The prohibitive ethical voice condition had significantly higher ratings on the prohibitive ethical voice manipulation check, $M = 4.44, SD = .71$, than the promotive ethical voice, $M = 1.54, SD = .67, t(114) = 13.03, p < .001, Cohen's d = 2.42$, and the control condition, $M = 2.42, SD = .95, t(112) = 22.43, p < .001, Cohen's d = 4.20$. There was a significant difference among conditions in the promotive ethical voice manipulation check, $F(2, 168) = 172.83, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .67$. The promotive ethical voice condition had significantly higher ratings on the promotive ethical voice manipulation check, $M = 4.54, SD = .62$, than the prohibitive ethical voice, $M = 2.80, SD = 1.09, t(114) = 10.55, p < .001, Cohen's d = 1.96$,

and the control condition, $M = 1.55, SD = .77, t(110) = 22.58, p < .001, Cohen's d = 4.27$. The manipulations were therefore effective.

Hypothesis Testing¹

We used PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017; Version 3.5) Model 4 to test the mediation hypotheses in SPSS (Version 26). Following Hayes and Preacher's (2014) recommendation for mediation analysis with multicategorical independent variables, we used two dummy codes to represent the contrast between the prohibitive ethical voice and the control condition (d1) and the contrast between the promotive ethical voice and the control condition (d2).

Results in Table 5 show that prohibitive ethical voice was positively related to feelings of threat ($B = .43, SE = .19, p = .03, 95\% CI [.05, .82]$) and elevation ($B = .72, SE = .19, p < .001, 95\% CI [.35, 1.09]$). Feelings of threat were negatively related to verbal support for ethical voice ($B = -.18, SE = .08, p = .02, 95\% CI [-.33, -.03]$). Bootstrapping results in Table 6 support Hypothesis 1 that the prohibitive ethical voice condition had a significant negative indirect effect via feelings of threat on verbal support for ethical voice (effect = $-.08, SE = .05, bootstrapped 95\% CI [-.20, -.00]$). Results in Table 5 show that promotive ethical voice was positively related to elevation ($B = .83, SE = .19, p < .001, 95\% CI [.46, 1.20]$). Elevation was significantly and positively related to verbal support ($B = .72, SE = .08, p < .001, 95\% CI [.56, .87]$). Table 6 supports Hypothesis 2 about the positive indirect effect of the promotive ethical voice via elevation on verbal support (effect = $.59, SE = .14, bootstrapped 95\% CI [.32, .87]$).

Additional Findings

Although not hypothesized, but consistent with Study 1 findings, we also found that the prohibitive ethical voice condition had a significant positive indirect effect via elevation on verbal support for the ethical voice (effect = $.51, SE = .15, bootstrapped 95\% CI [.23, .81]$).

Total and Residual Effects of Prohibitive and Promotive Ethical Voice

As shown in Table 5, despite the negative indirect effect via feelings of threat, the total effect of prohibitive ethical voice was marginally significant and positive on verbal support ($B = .41, SE = .24, p = .09, 95\% CI [-.06, .87]$). It was fully explained by the mediation as the residual direct effect of prohibitive ethical voice on verbal support was no longer significant. The total effect of promotive ethical voice on support was significantly positive and fully explained by the mediation.

¹ We also conducted analyses without the control variable. The pattern of results remained the same. Prohibitive ethical voice was positively related to threat ($B = .42, SE = .20, p = .04, 95\% CI [.03, .80]$), which in turn was negatively related to support ($B = -.20, SE = .08, p = .009, 95\% CI [-.35, -.05]$). The indirect effect was significant and negative (effect = $-.08, SE = .06, bootstrapped 95\% CI [-.21, -.00]$), supporting Hypothesis 1. Promotive ethical voice was positively related to elevation ($B = .78, SE = .19, p < .001, 95\% CI [.40, 1.17]$), which was in turn positively related to support ($B = .76, SE = .08, p < .001, 95\% CI [.60, .91]$). The indirect effect was significant (effect = $.59, SE = .15, bootstrapped 95\% CI [.31, .89]$), supporting Hypothesis 2.

Table 4
Correlations in Study 2

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Age	38.56	10.85	—										
2. Gender (female)	.51	.50	.08	—									
3. Race (White)	.70	.46	.19*	-.07	—								
4. Employed	.95	.22	.00	.09	.08	—							
5. Initial attitude	2.07	.96	.05	.08	-.03	.10	—						
6. Prohibitive MC	2.83	1.45	-.01	-.09	.05	-.05	.09	—					
7. Promotive MC	2.98	1.49	.08	-.11	.10	.03	-.06	.18*	—				
8. Prohibitive condition	.35	.48	-.02	-.06	-.06	-.05	.09	.81**	-.09	—			
9. Promotive condition	.33	.47	.12	-.05	.11	.06	-.10	-.20**	.75**	-.51**	—		
10. Elevation	3.12	1.09	.06	.04	.02	.06	.25**	.25**	.28**	.15*	.17*	—	
11. Feelings of threat	1.82	1.06	-.03	-.13	-.01	-.20*	-.14	.17*	.03	.20**	-.12	-.08	—
12. Verbal support	3.50	1.33	-.07	.18*	-.03	.11	.29**	.15*	.21**	.05	.13	.63**	-.21**

Note. $N = 171$. MC = manipulation check. Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female; Race: 0 = non-White, 1 = White; Employed: 0 = unemployed, 1 = employed; Prohibitive condition: 0 = control and prohibitive conditions, 1 = prohibitive condition; Promotive condition: 0 = control and prohibitive conditions, 1 = promotive condition. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ two-tailed.

Study 2 Discussion

The pattern of results was similar to Study 1: Promotive ethical voice elicits elevation and coworker support but prohibitive ethical voice leads to both threat and elevation and more complex effects (a marginally significant positive effect on support).²

Study 3

Experimental Design

This study is designed to replicate findings of Studies 1 and 2 while adding an assessment of actual verbal support behavior in an experiment. To do so, we used a virtual team chat design similar to Study 3 of Mayer et al. (2013) and Study 3 of Wellman et al. (2016). This design allowed us to assess whether the participant sends messages to support the ethical voicer during the team chat. The participants were told that we were interested in studying virtual team decision-making and that they would be randomly grouped with four other participants online to make a hiring decision for a company as a team (the decision is the same as Study 2). They were first instructed to read the information about the company independently and indicate their initial recommendation. They were then directed to an online chat window where they were instructed to discuss the decision with other team members. The messages from other (virtual) “teammates” were scripted and programmed to appear at designated times. Similar to Study 2, teammates proposed an ethically questionable decision to replace Peter but one teammate Pat had a different opinion. We manipulated ethical voice by varying Pat’s messages. The messages were patterned after the scripts in Study 2 but we revised the control condition such that Pat opposed making the replacement decision because Pat thought the pros and cons should be further discussed and considered. The control condition in Study 2 involved efficiency arguments but research shows that using efficiency arguments to support an ethical decision can also lead observers to make more ethical decisions (Chen et al., 2020). Therefore, the Study 2 control condition could have undermined our ability to detect effects of ethical voice and we rule out this factor in Study 3. See Appendix C for detailed study instructions and team chat scripts. Participants were prompted to send a message

when it was their turn and they were asked to evaluate two “randomly assigned” teammates (the voicer was always one of them) after the chat. Following Leavitt et al.’s (2021) guideline for electronic confederates, we enhanced believability of the virtual teammates by having “load screens” to simulate teammates joining the task, calling the real participants’ usernames, using typos and internet abbreviations, and structuring the chat to reduce unnecessary communication. Study participants were engaged in the group chat task: They typed 331 characters (64 words) on average (min = 37, max = 1,134).

Participants

This study has been approved by the Pennsylvania State University’s Institutional Review Board (“Virtual team decision-making,” STUDY00017039). To ensure sufficient power to replicate the previous findings, we conducted post hoc power analysis of Study 2 following recommendations by Schoemann et al. (2017) on parallel mediation effects, using their online utility (https://schoemanna.shinyapps.io/mc_power_med/). Results show that the sample size needed for $\alpha = .05$ and power = .80 (Cohen, 1992) to detect the smallest effect found in Study 2 is 353. This led us to recruit 360 U.S. citizens from Mturk who had not participated in the previous study (with past approval rates over 99%). We excluded 10 individuals because they did not participate in the group chat and another 10 individuals because they failed more than one attention check (e.g., “Please select strongly agree for this item”). The 340 participants in the final sample were 40.7 years old on average (58% female). Seventy-nine percent were White, 9.4% Asian, 6.5% African American, 2.9% Hispanic, and the rest were of other races. About 77% were employed full time or part time and the industries most represented were professional and scientific services, education, health care, retail, and finance. One hundred and seventeen participants were randomly

² To further demonstrate that these ethics-based affective mechanisms are unique to ethical voice, we also conducted an additional experimental study comparing effects of prohibitive and promotive ethical voice with traditional voice on elevation, feelings of threat, and verbal support. Results in Supplement C show that elevation is unique to ethical voice and feelings of threat are unique to prohibitive ethical voice.

Table 5
Regression Results in Study 2

Variable	Dependent variable: Feelings of threat			Dependent variable: Elevation			Dependent variable: Verbal support			Dependent variable: Verbal support		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI
Intercept	2.06**	.22	[1.62, 2.50]	1.98**	.21	[1.56, 2.40]	2.28**	.27	[1.75, 2.82]	1.24**	.32	[-.61, 1.86]
Initial attitude	-.18*	.08	[-.34, -.01]	.30**	.08	[.14, .45]	.41**	.10	[.21, .61]	.17†	.09	[-.00, .34]
d1	.43*	.19	[.05, .82]	.72**	.19	[.35, 1.09]	.41†	.24	[-.06, .87]	-.03	.20	[-.43, .37]
d2	-.09	.20	[-.48, .29]	.83**	.19	[.46, 1.20]	.66**	.24	[.19, 1.13]	.05	.20	[-.35, .45]
Feelings of threat										-.18*	.08	[-.33, -.03]
Elevation										.72**	.08	[.56, .87]
<i>R</i> ²		.07**			.18**			.12**			.43**	
ΔR^2 due to mediator(s)										.31**		

Note. *N* = 171. d1 = prohibitive ethical voice versus control; d2 = promotive ethical voice versus control.

† *p* < .10. * *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01 two-tailed.

assigned to the control condition, 116 to the prohibitive ethical voice condition, and 107 to the promotive ethical voice condition.

Measures

All the measures are shown in Appendix A.

Manipulation Check

We assessed manipulation of prohibitive ethical voice and promotive ethical voice with three items adapted from our measures in Study 1. Cronbach's α s = .95 and .96 for prohibitive and promotive ethical voice manipulation checks.

Feelings of Threat and Elevation

We adapted the items used in Study 2 to more accurately assess feelings of threat and elevation caused specifically by the ethical voicer (teammate Pat) in the virtual team. Cronbach's α s = .92 and .89 for threat and elevation.

Verbal Support. To assess actual verbal support of the participants, we coded the messages that the participants sent *after* they viewed teammate Pat's (i.e., the voicer) message. We trained three undergraduate assistants who were blind to our manipulations and research hypotheses to code the messages into a binary variable: 1 = supporting a stance that prioritizes or considers ethical principles (care for/fairness to Peter); otherwise, the messages were coded as 0. The three coders independently coded 85 randomly selected overlapping responses (1/4 of total responses) and demonstrated strong agreement in their ratings: 94.1% agreement, Fleiss' multirater kappa = .89, $z = 14.21$, $p < .001$. Percent agreement above 90% and Fleiss' kappa value above .80 are considered reliable (Landis & Koch, 1977; Lombard et al., 2002). The coders reconciled their differences and continued to code separate sets of responses. Detailed coding criteria and examples of verbal support messages are in Appendix A and Supplement D, respectively.

Controls

As in Study 2, we assessed participants' initial attitude toward the replacement plan before the group chat by asking them to indicate

whether they recommend hiring the candidate to replace Peter (Yes/No).

Results

Correlations among variables are shown in Table 7.

Manipulation Check

One-way ANOVA results show a significant difference among conditions in the prohibitive ethical voice manipulation check, $F(2, 337) = 186.36$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .53$. It was significantly higher in the prohibitive ethical voice condition ($M = 4.26$, $SD = .91$) than in the promotive ethical voice condition, $M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.03$, $t(221) = 9.23$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.24$, and the control condition, $M = 1.82$, $SD = .96$, $t(231) = 19.89$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 2.61$. There was a significant difference among conditions in the promotive ethical voice manipulation check, $F(2, 337) = 151.59$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .47$. It was significantly higher in the promotive ethical voice condition ($M = 3.95$, $SD = .93$) than in the prohibitive ethical voice condition, $M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.24$, $t(221) = 5.40$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = .72$, and the control condition, $M = 1.65$, $SD = .81$, $t(222) = 19.85$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 2.66$. The manipulation was therefore effective.

Hypothesis Testing³

As in Study 2, we used SPSS PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017; Version 3.5) Model 4 to test mediation hypotheses. Because our dependent variable is a binary variable, logistic regressions were conducted (by PROCESS) to test the hypothesized indirect effects. Regression results in Table 8 showed that prohibitive ethical voice

³ We also conducted analyses without the control variable. The pattern of results remained the same. Prohibitive ethical voice was not related to threat ($B = .06$, $SE = .11$, $p = .60$, 95% CI [-.16, .28]) but threat was negatively and significantly related to support ($B = -1.27$, $SE = .23$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-1.72, -.83]). The indirect effect was not significant (effect = -.07, $SE = .14$, bootstrapped 95% CI [-.38, .19]), providing no support for Hypothesis 1. Promotive ethical voice was positively and significantly related to elevation ($B = .38$, $SE = .14$, $p = .007$, 95% CI [.10, .65]), which in turn was positively related to support ($B = .57$, $SE = .12$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.33, .82]). The indirect effect was significant and positive (effect = .22, $SE = .09$, bootstrapped 95% CI [.06, .43]), supporting Hypothesis 2.

Table 6*Indirect Effects on Verbal Support in Study 2 (Bootstrap Resampling N = 5,000)*

Variable	Indirect effect via feelings of threat			Indirect effect via elevation		
	Effect	SE	95% CI	Effect	SE	95% CI
d1	-.08	.05	[-.20, -.00]	.51	.15	[.23, .81]
d2	.02	.03	[-.05, .09]	.59	.14	[.32, .87]

Note. d1 = prohibitive ethical voice versus control; d2 = promotive ethical voice versus control.

was not significantly related to feelings of threat ($B = .04$, $SE = .11$, $p = .70$, 95% CI [-.17, .25]) but was significantly related to elevation ($B = .28$, $SE = .13$, $p = .03$, 95% CI [.03, .54]), although feelings of threat were negatively related to verbal support ($B = -.94$, $SE = .25$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-1.43, -.46]). Bootstrapping results in Table 9 showed that the indirect effect of prohibitive ethical voice on verbal support was not significant, providing no support for Hypothesis 1. Table 8 shows that promotive ethical voice was positively related to elevation ($B = .38$, $SE = .13$, $p = .005$, 95% CI [.11, .64]), which in turn was positively related to verbal support ($B = .36$, $SE = .15$, $p = .02$, 95% CI [.07, .64]). Bootstrapping results in Table 9 showed a significant and positive indirect effect of promotive ethical voice via elevation on verbal support (effect = .13, $SE = .08$, bootstrapped 95% CI [.02, .33]), supporting Hypothesis 2.

Additional Findings

Consistent with Studies 1 and 2, we also found that the prohibitive ethical voice condition had a significant positive indirect effect via elevation on verbal support for the ethical voice (effect = .10, $SE = .07$, bootstrapped 95% CI [.00, .27]).

Total and Residual Effects of Prohibitive and Promotive Ethical Voice

As shown in Table 8, the total effect of prohibitive ethical voice on verbal support was significant and positive ($B = .85$, $SE = .34$,

$p = .01$, 95% CI [.19, 1.51]) and the residual direct effect of prohibitive ethical voice on verbal support was no longer significant ($B = .68$, $SE = .36$, $p = .06$, 95% CI [-.02, 1.38]). The total effect of promotive ethical voice on verbal support was significant and positive ($B = .84$, $SE = .34$, $p = .01$, 95% CI [.17, 1.52]) and the residual direct effect of promotive ethical voice on verbal support was still significant ($B = .80$, $SE = .35$, $p = .02$, 95% CI [.07, .64]), suggesting other unmeasured mechanisms.

Exploratory Analysis

We noticed that participants' initial attitude was significantly related to moral threat and elevation. We therefore asked whether condition interacts with this initial attitude to influence feelings of threat, elevation, and outcomes. We have argued that prohibitive ethical voice questions observers' morality and therefore triggers threat. But it makes sense that only those who were initially not leaning toward the more ethical decision would experience such threat feelings due to prohibitive ethical voice. Those individuals may also be less likely to experience elevation. We explored these possibilities by testing whether the initial attitude of participants moderated the indirect effects of condition via feelings of threat and elevation on outcomes using SPSS PROCESS macro (Version 3.5) Model 8. Consistent with our expectations, Table 10 shows that the interaction of prohibitive ethical voice and the initial attitude was negatively related to feelings of threat ($B = -.52$, $SE = .21$, $p = .01$, 95% CI [-.94, -.10]) and positively related to elevation ($B = .63$, $SE = .26$, $p = .02$, 95% CI [.11, 1.14]).

Table 7*Correlations in Study 3*

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Age	40.69	13.59	—										
2. Gender (female)	.58	.55	.10	—									
3. Race (White)	.79	.41	.18**	.05	—								
4. Employed	.77	.42	-.07	-.12*	-.13*	—							
5. Initial attitude	.55	.50	.19**	-.02	.03	-.13*	—						
6. Prohibitive MC	3.04	1.40	-.02	-.14*	.01	.07	-.00	—					
7. Promotive MC	2.89	1.38	.01	-.04	.03	.07	.06	.57**	—				
8. Prohibitive condition	.34	.47	-.06	-.06	-.01	-.01	-.03	.63**	.14*	—			
9. Promotive condition	.31	.47	.04	.01	.01	.06	.02	.01	.52**	-.49**	—		
10. Elevation	2.87	1.05	.11*	.04	.02	-.05	.29**	.20**	.26**	.04	.11*	—	
11. Feelings of threat	1.52	.86	-.16**	.01	.05	.08	-.33**	.10	.08	-.00	.05	-.08	—
12. Verbal support (dummy coded)	.44	.50	.20**	.01	.11*	-.18**	.59**	.06	.10	.05	.07	.29**	-.35**

Note. $N = 340$. MC = manipulation check. Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female; Race: 0 = non-White, 1 = White; Employed: 0 = unemployed, 1 = employed; Prohibitive condition: 0 = control and promotive conditions, 1 = prohibitive condition; Promotive condition: 0 = control and prohibitive conditions, 1 = promotive condition; Initial attitude: 0 = not supportive of the ethical decision, 1 = supportive of the ethical decision; Verbal support: 0 = absence of verbal support for an ethical stance, 1 = verbal support for an ethical stance.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ two-tailed.

Table 8
Regression Results in Study 3

Variable	Dependent variable: Feelings of threat			Dependent variable: Elevation			Dependent variable: Verbal support			Dependent variable: Verbal support		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI
Intercept	1.78**	.09	[1.60, 1.95]	2.32**	.11	[2.11, 2.54]	-2.64**	.34	[-3.31, -1.97]	-2.03**	.59	[-3.17, -.88]
Initial attitude	-.58**	.09	[-.75, -.40]	.61**	.11	[.39, .82]	3.02**	.31	[2.41, 3.62]	2.59**	.32	[1.97, 3.22]
d1	.04	.11	[-.17, .25]	.28*	.13	[.03, .54]	.85*	.34	[.19, 1.51]	.68 [†]	.36	[-.02, 1.38]
d2	.13	.11	[-.08, .34]	.38**	.13	[.11, .64]	.84*	.34	[.17, 1.52]	.80*	.35	[.07, .64]
Feelings of threat										-.94**	.25	[-1.43, -.46]
Elevation										.36*	.15	[.07, .64]
<i>R</i> ²		.12**			.11**							
Likelihood ratio χ^2								139.98**				163.79**
McFadden's pseudo <i>R</i> ²								.30				.35

Note. *N* = 340. d1 = prohibitive ethical voice versus control; d2 = promotive ethical voice versus control. Regression coefficients for the binary dependent variable verbal support are shown in a log-odds metric.

[†] *p* < .10. * *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01 two-tailed.

Bootstrapping results further showed that the moderated mediation indices were significant for prohibitive ethical voice, suggesting that the initial attitude moderated the indirect effects of prohibitive ethical voice via threat and elevation on outcomes. As shown in Table 9, for those who initially opposed the ethical decision, prohibitive ethical voice had a marginally significant and negative indirect effect via threat on verbal support (effect = $-.30$, *SE* = $.21$, bootstrapped 95% CI $[-.81, .04]$, 90% CI $[-.71, -.03]$) and the indirect effect via elevation was not significant. In contrast, for those who initially supported an ethical decision, prohibitive ethical voice had positive indirect effects via reduced threat feelings (effect = $.18$, *SE* = $.01$, bootstrapped 95% CI $[.03, .46]$) and increased elevation (effect = $.20$, *SE* = $.12$, bootstrapped 95% CI $[.02, .49]$) on verbal support. In contrast, promotive ethical voice led to elevation but not threat, regardless of initial attitude. The moderated mediation indices were not significant.

Study 3 Discussion

In Study 3, both promotive ethical voice and prohibitive ethical voice were positively related to verbal support via coworker elevation. Our additional analysis shows that prohibitive ethical voice was marginally positively related to feelings of threat only when the participants were initially supportive of the more unethical decision and it was positively related to elevation only when the participants were initially supportive of the more ethical decision. Manipulation check results suggest that the effect sizes of promotive and prohibitive ethical voice manipulations were smaller compared to those in Study 2, possibly because the ethical voicer's message was embedded in messages from other "team members," and thus less salient in Study 3. This may partially explain the overall nonsignificant effect of prohibitive ethical voice on threat.

Additional Analysis on Alternative Affective Mechanisms in Studies 1–3

Because elevation is a positive emotion and threat is a negative emotion, it is also possible that positive or negative mood or other discrete emotions rather than elevation and threat explain the effects of ethical voice on verbal support. We measured alternative

emotions in Studies 1–3 (i.e., anger, guilt, fear of voicing consequences, positive mood, negative mood) and reported results of the analyses in Supplement E. Overall, results ruled out these alternative mechanisms, providing further support for our hypothesized affective mechanisms.

General Discussion

Despite its importance to organizations, we have known little about how coworkers respond to individuals who speak up about ethical issues in their units (see Wellman et al., 2016 and Chen et al., 2020 for exceptions). Are they supportive? Or do they avoid showing support? And, if they are supportive, when and why? Drawing on the approach–avoidance distinction and the promotive/prohibitive distinction in the voice literature, we proposed a theoretical model to understand when and why coworkers respond more or less favorably to ethical voice (by showing verbal support for the ethical voice). Moral psychology research informed our theorization about the underlying mechanisms (moral elevation and threat).

A summary of the three studies in Table 11 reveals that observers' responses to ethical voice are generally more positive than previously thought. Both types of ethical voice (promotive and prohibitive) elicited coworker feelings of moral elevation which led to coworker verbal support. Although prohibitive ethical voice sometimes led to feelings of threat, the resulting negative indirect effects on verbal support did not outweigh the positive indirect effects via elevation. Thus, from an approach–avoidance perspective, the most surprising finding is that coworker responses, even to prohibitive ethical voice, are more approach than avoidance oriented. Participants' open-ended responses in Study 1 suggest that they felt elevated, even by voicers whose ethical voice was perceived to be highly prohibitive: "I admired TH for saying something to the supervisor. Most people would not have done that out of fear of retribution . . ." "I was impressed and in awe that she . . . brought it up in a public setting . . . knowing that doing so would subject herself to possible acts of retribution." "she was brave to have brought it up." As indicated in the quotes and our preliminary results reported in Supplement F, this elevation may occur because prohibitive ethical voice seems risky and coworkers attribute courage to the prohibitive voicer and hence feel morally elevated. Thus, importantly, we found that both types of ethical voice trigger

Table 9
Indirect Effects on Verbal Support in Study 3 (Bootstrap Resampling N = 5,000)

Variable	Indirect effect via feelings of threat				Indirect effect via elevation			
	Effect	SE	95% CI	90% CI	Effect	SE	95% CI	90% CI
d1	-.04	.11	[-.27, .16]	[-.22, .11]	.10	.07	[.00, .27]	[.01, .24]
d2	-.12	.12	[-.38, .11]	[-.33, .05]	.13	.08	[.02, .33]	[.03, .28]
Conditional indirect effects								
Initial attitude = 0: d1	-.30	.21	[-.81, .04]	[-.71, -.03]	-.02	.07	[-.17, .13]	[-.14, .11]
Initial attitude = 1: d1	.18	.11	[.03, .46]	[.04, .40]	.20	.12	[.02, .49]	[.04, .43]
Index of difference	.48	.26	[.10, 1.12]	[.16, .99]	.22	.14	[.01, .55]	[.03, .48]
Initial attitude = 0: d2	-.25	.23	[-.79, .13]	[-.68, .06]	.12	.09	[-.00, .36]	[.01, .31]
Initial attitude = 1: d2	-.02	.12	[-.24, .25]	[-.20, .19]	.14	.10	[.00, .38]	[.02, .33]
Index of difference	.23	.27	[-.20, .85]	[-.14, .73]	.02	.10	[-.19, .24]	[-.15, .19]

Note. Initial attitude: 0 = not supportive of the ethical decision, 1 = supportive of the ethical decision; d1 = prohibitive ethical voice versus control; d2 = promotive ethical voice versus control. Rows in bold indicate significant moderated mediation effects.

moral elevation in coworkers who observe it, resulting in support for the voice. Interestingly, Study 3 revealed that only those who initially supported the ethical stance felt elevated by the prohibitive ethical voice while participants always felt elevated by promotive ethical voice, regardless of their initial stance. These findings suggest different boundary conditions of elevation for ethical voice, an area ripe for future theorizing and research.

Compared to our findings that promotive ethical voice's total effects on verbal support are always positive (mostly due to elevation), findings for prohibitive ethical voice are more complex and worthy of future research. In response to prohibitive ethical voice in work groups, study participants felt mixed emotions, both elevation and threat. As shown in Table 11, in Studies 1 (field survey) and 2 (experiment), we found both negative indirect effects of prohibitive ethical voice via feelings of threat on verbal support and positive indirect effects via elevation. The two opposing indirect effects resulted in nonsignificant total effects on verbal support. In Study 3, an experiment assessing participants' actual verbal support, we found that prohibitive ethical voice was marginally associated with threat only when the participants initially leaned toward the more

unethical stance and it led to elevation only when the participants leaned toward the more ethical stance. This suggests prohibitive ethical voice in work groups may be perceived differently (as being primarily threatening or elevating) depending on coworkers' prior stance on the focal ethical issue (see also Monin et al., 2008), which can be explored in the future. The findings in the two experiments also showed weaker support for avoidance responses based upon feelings of threat (fear of negative moral judgment). This may be, in part, because concerns about others' moral judgments are less likely in temporary, text-based experiments than in ongoing, permanent work units. But, the most important conclusions to draw are that prohibitive ethical voice in work groups is elevating but not always threatening and that the positive indirect effect via elevation on outcomes cancels out or even outweighs (e.g., Study 3) the effect via threat.

Theoretical and Research Implications and Future Directions

This research contributes significantly to multiple literatures. First, we expanded knowledge about the consequences of ethical

Table 10
Regression Results With Interaction Terms in Study 3

Variable	Dependent variable: Feelings of threat			Dependent variable: Elevation			Dependent variable: Verbal support			Dependent variable: Verbal support		
	B	SE	95% CI	B	SE	95% CI	B	SE	95% CI	B	SE	95% CI
Intercept	1.63**	.11	[1.41, 1.86]	2.45**	.14	[2.18, 2.72]	-2.79**	.59	[-3.96, -1.63]	-2.40**	.77	[-3.91, -.89]
Initial attitude	-.32*	.15	[-.62, -.03]	.38*	.18	[.02, .74]	3.20**	.65	[1.93, 4.47]	3.03**	.66	[1.74, 4.32]
d1	.32*	.16	[.02, .63]	-.05	.19	[-.43, .33]	.69	.74	[-.75, 2.13]	.93	.75	[-.54, 2.40]
d2	.27	.16	[-.05, .59]	.35†	.20	[-.04, .74]	1.35†	.70	[-.02, 2.73]	1.43*	.72	[.03, 2.83]
Initial attitude × d1	-.52*	.21	[-.94, -.10]	.63*	.26	[.11, 1.14]	.31	.84	[-1.34, 1.96]	-.27	.87	[-1.97, 1.43]
Initial attitude × d2	-.25	.22	[-.67, .18]	.05	.27	[-.48, .57]	-.75	.80	[-2.32, .82]	-.88	.82	[-2.49, .74]
Feelings of threat										-.93**	.25	[-1.42, -.44]
Elevation										.35*	.15	[.06, .65]
R ²		.13**			.12*							
ΔR ² due to interaction		.02†			.02*							
Likelihood ratio χ ²								142.30**			165.12**	
McFadden's pseudo R ²								.31			.35	

Note. N = 340. d1 = prohibitive ethical voice versus control; d2 = promotive ethical voice versus control. Regression coefficients for the binary dependent variable verbal support are shown in a log-odds metric.

† p < .10. * p < .05. ** p < .01 two-tailed.

Table 11
Summary of Results in Studies 1–3

Effect	Study 1 (critical incident)	Study 2 (experiment)	Study 3 (experiment)
	IV: Prohibitive ethical voice		
Indirect effect via threat (Hypothesis 1)	–	–	ns, but marginally significant negative indirect effect via threat for those who initially leaned toward the unethical decision
Indirect effect via elevation	+	+	+, significant positive effect via elevation for those who initially leaned toward the ethical decision
Total effect	ns	+	+
Residual direct effect	ns	ns	ns
	IV: Promotive ethical voice		
Indirect effect via threat	+	ns	ns
Indirect effect via elevation (Hypothesis 2)	+	+	+
Total effect	+	+	+
Residual direct effect	ns	ns	+

Note. + = significant positive effect; – = significant negative effect; ns = not significant. Rows in bold are hypothesized effects.

voice as we broadly conceived it, by shifting the research focus from managerial responses to whistleblowing to coworker responses to a more common and visible form of ethical voice—speaking up about ethical issues in work units. Ethical voice in one’s work unit is likely to be more common because individuals generally resort to blowing the whistle only when the ethical issue is highly serious and they have exhausted other options (Culiberg & Mihelič, 2017). The form of ethical voice that we studied is also likely more important to organizations because ethical voice at this level means that ethical concerns can be addressed earlier. Our research helps push research on ethical voice in a more positive direction by showing that it generally does not hurt and may even benefit the ethical voicer to speak up about ethical issues in their work units. Importantly, we provide a theoretical lens (moral elevation) to consider when and why the more positive consequences occur.

The differences between what we found—the more positive, although somewhat mixed consequences of prohibitive ethical voice within work units—and the negative consequences (e.g., retaliation) traditionally associated with whistleblowing are worthy of further consideration. This may be traceable to the way whistleblowing has been defined and operationalized. Near and Miceli (1985) defined whistleblowing broadly as “the disclosure by organisation members . . . of illegal, immoral or illegitimate practices . . . , to persons or organisations that may be able to effect action” (p. 4). Recently, Near and Miceli (2016) noted in a practitioner-oriented article: “The vast majority of whistleblowers start by reporting the wrongdoing internally . . . , often to their direct manager, and use external channels only if the internal reports prove unsatisfactory.” (p. 107) These broad definitions include reporting within the unit, formal reporting to higher ups within organizations (Treviño & Victor, 1992), and reporting to outsiders such as the media or regulators. Empirical whistleblowing research (much of it conducted by Near, Miceli, and colleagues over the years), although focused more on formal and external reporting, sometimes lumps together these different behaviors. Yet, Jubb (1999) proposed that whistleblowing *should be* defined more narrowly as “a deliberate non-obligatory act of disclosure, which gets onto public record . . . , about non-trivial illegality or other wrongdoing . . . , to an *external* entity having potential to rectify the wrongdoing.” (p. 83). We believe that the ethical voice literature would be well served by using the term

whistleblowing as defined by Jubb and differentiating the consequences for different kinds of prohibitive ethical voice (the informal voice to coworkers and supervisors that we studied, formal (internal) reporting, and (external) whistleblowing as defined by Jubb). It is arguable that going outside one’s unit and organization to formally report a problem (e.g., whistleblowing) would feel more threatening and less elevating to managers (and other organizational members). Because of the more formal, public, external focus of whistleblowing and the nontrivial, morally intense issues involved, it increases the potential moral and reputational threat to the managers (and/or the organization). Additionally, informal ethical voice implies that the voicer intends to help the organization to identify and address ethical issues as they emerge, whereas whistleblowing may imply antagonistic and punitive intention of the voicer, rendering it less elevating. All these may explain the more negative consequences found in the whistleblowing literature such as retaliation. This is an empirical question that should be further investigated in future research.

In addition, we contribute to the broader voice literature by taking a more fine-tuned approach to voice content and theorizing *ethics*-based affective mechanisms underlying reactions to *ethical* voice. Voice researchers have recently acknowledged that specific voice content is likely important for understanding reactions to voice and they have called for more fine-tuned theorization about voice content (Burris et al., 2017; McClean et al., 2021). Our focus is ethical voice, which is different from the type of voice typically studied in the prosocial voice literature: voice aimed at improving an organization’s work procedures (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014; Morrison, 2011). Because ethical voice resides in the moral domain, reactions to ethical voice can be highly affective and intuitive (Haidt, 2001; Salvador & Folger, 2009). Indeed, we found that coworker responses to ethical voice (but not traditional voice, see Supplement C) were explained by ethics-related affective mechanisms—felt elevation and threat, which differ from the mechanisms typically studied in the voice literature (e.g., perceived constructiveness for the organization, perceived voicer competence; Burris, 2012; Weiss & Morrison, 2019; Whiting et al., 2012). Further, we found that both promotive and prohibitive *ethical* voice led to positive coworker responses via elevation, which contrasts with voice research where prohibitive voice results in no positive or

even negative consequences for the voicer (Chamberlin et al., 2017; McClean et al., 2018). We thus provide initial insights into likely theoretical differences between voice with different content that need to be further explored empirically.

Further, this research advanced moral emotions research by studying unique antecedents and consequences of elevation, a moral emotion that needs more study. Since the elevation construct was introduced (Haidt, 2000), research has been limited to observer helping as the primary outcome (e.g., Freeman et al., 2009; Schnall & Roper, 2012; Schnall et al., 2010) and benevolent acts as the single antecedent. We have known little about other potential consequences or conditions giving rise to elevation (e.g., Aquino et al., 2011). But now we know that both promotive and prohibitive ethical voice can be elevating to coworkers who observe it. The finding that even prohibitive ethical voice is positively related to elevation goes beyond extant research on elevation that considers elevation to arise from witnessing benevolent ethical behavior (e.g., helping others). It suggests that risky ethical behavior such as speaking up to stop ethical violations may also lead to elevation in observers. This suggests the need to expand theory and research on eliciting conditions and consequences of elevation.

We revealed elevation to be a key mechanism underlying coworker positive responses to ethical voice. Thus, future research should examine what specifically makes coworkers feel more or less elevated by ethical voice, besides promotive and prohibitive language. Because elevation is triggered when witnessing acts of moral excellence, the moral intensity of the voiced ethical issue (i.e., the degree to which an issue involves moral imperatives, Jones, 1991) might influence the level of coworker elevation. A more morally intense issue (i.e., an issue that involves more harm or benefit to society or an issue that is widely agreed upon as morally good or bad, Reynolds, 2006) may more strongly signal the voicer's concern about others or commitment to ethical principles and therefore be more likely to trigger elevation. Furthermore, because research shows that moral intuitions and judgment can be biased to favor actions benefiting the self or one's group's interests (Bocian & Wojciszke, 2014), the degree to which the ethical issue harms or benefits the organization may shape elevation experienced by the coworkers. When the ethical issue harms a coworker's own interests (e.g., gender equality policy might harm male employees' interests) or the organization's interests (i.e., a safer but more costly product may decrease organizational efficiency or profit), coworkers may be less likely to experience elevation. Future research can explore these and other potential moderators.

Strengths and Limitations of the Research

A limitation of our work is that, based upon research in the voice literature, we assumed that ethical voice is perceived to be either prohibitive or promotive. But, in Study 1, the correlation between promotive ethical voice and prohibitive ethical voice was near zero ($r = -.02$), meaning that they are not opposite ends of a continuum. Because voicers often aim to change the status quo, they may highlight both the ethically questionable situation that needs to stop *and* the potential to advance welfare. For example, one participant recalled that a coworker (with the initials PT) approached the Sales Manager to suggest how honesty guidelines should be included for all outward facing departments while also raising concerns about colleagues lying to customers to get in their good

graces. This suggests questions for future research regarding coworker responses to ethical voice that combines promotive and prohibitive in one ethical voice episode.

A major strength of this research is that we combined methods and used multiple adult samples. The critical incident survey enabled us to collect rich data on concrete and wide-ranging ethical voice incidents, strengthening external validity and generalizability. The experimental studies complemented the critical incident survey by strengthening internal validity. By manipulating the messages and presenting the messages prior to assessing participant responses in Study 2, we strengthened causal inferences. By using independent coders to assess verbal support in Study 3, we also minimized concerns about common methods variance associated with self-reported variables. Another strength of our research is that we ruled out alternative affective mechanisms and showed that the mechanisms were unique to ethical voice, providing stronger support for our hypotheses.

Practical Implications

This study has practical implications for employees who consider voicing ethical issues and for managers who wish to encourage ethical voice. First, we found that employees generally respond favorably (or at least not unfavorably) to a coworker's ethical voice, which contrasts with prior research showing unfavorable responses to whistleblowing. In fact, coworkers feel elevated by it. This suggests that voicers should consider raising ethical issues inside their units first if the issues are potentially solvable there. Although voicers may naturally use prohibitive language because ethical voice is often fueled by dissatisfaction with the status quo (Grant & Patil, 2012), our results suggest that (although a prohibitive approach does not hurt the voicer) highlighting positive moral outcomes using a promotive approach may be more likely to elicit unequivocal coworker support. Managers aiming to encourage ethical voice should educate employees on effective voice messaging and let them know that voicing ethical issues can contribute to coworker feelings of elevation and, importantly, coworker support.

Conclusion

In this field and experimental research we advance knowledge about how coworkers respond to ethical voice in their work units. We relied upon the approach/avoidance theoretical foundation to propose that promotive and prohibitive ethical voice would trigger different affective responses in coworkers (moral elevation and threat, respectively) which in turn would produce approach and avoidance reactions (support or lack of support for the ethical voice). As expected, promotive ethical voice triggered moral elevation and support for the voice. However, we found that prohibitive ethical voice led to elevation (not hypothesized) but not always to threat. Thus, prohibitive ethical voice can have positive indirect effects via moral elevation on coworker support. The potential positive effect (coworker support) of *both* promotive and prohibitive ethical voice offers a counterpoint to voice research where prohibitive (traditional) voice has consistently been associated with negative outcomes. Our work contributes to knowledge about ethical voice, and to the behavioral ethics and voice literatures more broadly and, hopefully to the growing dialogue about the consequences of ethical voice in the workplace.

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Appendix A

Measures in Studies 1–3

Variable	Study 1 items	Study 2 items	Study 3 items
Prohibitive ethical voice	3 items: When raising the ethical issue, how much did the coworker emphasize that we (or someone) did something wrong? When raising the ethical issue, how much did the coworker emphasize the need to stop or avoid something wrong? When raising the ethical issue, how much did the coworker emphasize that we (or someone) should stop or avoid doing something wrong? Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$ Anchor: 1 = <i>Not at all</i> , 5 = <i>Very much so</i>	2 items: Pat said that what we are doing is wrong and unfair to Peter. Pat said that we should stop before causing harm to Peter. Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$ Anchor: 1 = <i>Not at all correct</i> , 5 = <i>Completely correct</i>	3 items: How much did the teammate emphasize that our decision could harm someone? How much did the teammate emphasize the need to avoid harm or something wrong? How much did the teammate emphasize that we should stop doing something wrong or harmful? Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$ Anchor: 1 = <i>Not at all</i> , 5 = <i>Very much so</i>
Promotive ethical voice	3 items: When raising the ethical issue, how much did the coworker emphasize that we (or someone) have the potential to improve the situation? When raising the ethical issue, how much did the coworker emphasize an opportunity to make things better? When raising the ethical issue, how much did the coworker emphasize what could be done to make things better? Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$ Anchor: 1 = <i>Not at all</i> , 5 = <i>Very much so</i>	2 items: Pat said that we can be more compassionate toward Peter and do more to help him Pat said that this is an opportunity for the team to go the extra mile to help Peter, a valued team member. Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$ Anchor: 1 = <i>Not at all correct</i> , 5 = <i>Completely correct</i>	3 items: How much did the teammate emphasize that we have the potential to do something more caring for others? How much did the teammate emphasize an opportunity for us to care for others? How much did the teammate emphasize that we can contribute to helping others? Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$ Anchor: 1 = <i>Not at all</i> , 5 = <i>Very much so</i>

(Appendices continue)

Appendix A (continued)

Variable	Study 1 items	Study 2 items	Study 3 items
Feelings of threat	5 items: uncomfortable, nervous, tense, worried, and apprehensive Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$ Anchor: 1 = <i>Not at all</i> , 5 = <i>Extremely</i>	3 items: I would be concerned about being judged negatively by Pat. I would be worried that Pat would look down upon me. I would be afraid that Pat would find fault with me. Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$ Anchor: 1 = <i>Strongly disagree</i> , 5 = <i>Strongly agree</i>	3 items: Worried that this member would judge me negatively. Concerned that this member would look down upon me. Afraid that this member would see me in a negative light. Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$ Anchor: 1 = <i>Not at all</i> , 5 = <i>Extremely</i>
Elevation	4 items: moved, inspired, respectful, and admiring Cronbach's α s = .89 and .89 in Studies 1 and 2 Anchor: 1 = <i>Not at all</i> , 5 = <i>Extremely</i>		4 items: Moved by this member Inspired by this member Respecting this member Admiring this member Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$ Anchor: 1 = <i>Not at all</i> , 5 = <i>Extremely</i>
Verbal support for ethical voice	3 items: 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. Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$ Anchor: 1 = <i>Strongly disagree</i> , 5 = <i>Strongly agree</i>	3 items: I would speak up in the meeting to voice my support of Pat's idea. I would join Pat in voicing the idea in the meeting. I would speak up in the meeting to advocate for Pat's idea. Cronbach's $\alpha = .98$ Anchor: 1 = <i>Strongly disagree</i> , 5 = <i>Strongly agree</i>	Dummy-coded by coders Inclusion criteria: Messages indicate prioritization of or consideration of ethical principles (e.g., caring for Peter a valued team member, fair to Peter who was assumed to return to the job after recovery, company's responsibility/loyalty to employees) are coded as support. The suggested solutions can include but not limited to: not hiring the candidate, hiring a temporary worker but keeping Peter's job, consulting Peter before making any decisions. Exclusion criteria: Respondents suggested not hiring the candidate for legal or business (efficiency) reasons (e.g., We could be sued for firing Peter; training the candidate is more costly), without any ethical consideration. Interrater agreement 94.1%, Fleiss' kappa = .89 Anchor: 1 = <i>Support</i> , 0 = <i>No support</i>

Appendix B**Scripts of the Ethical Voicer in Study 2****Promotive Ethical Voice**

Hiring this candidate might be helpful. But let's think about what more we can do to help Peter. To be more compassionate toward him and give him a say in his future, we can explain the situation and try our best to find a way to let him keep his job. This is our opportunity to go the extra mile to help a valued team member and strive to advance his welfare.

Prohibitive Ethical Voice

Hiring this candidate might be helpful. But let's think about the fact that what we are doing is unethical and unfair to Peter. We are

essentially taking Peter's job away from him without telling him or giving him a say. I don't think this is how we should treat a valued team member. We should stop this immediately before we cause harm to Peter.

Control

Hiring this candidate might be helpful. But let's give it more thought and see what is the best solution. It will take time for us to get to know a new hire and it will also take time for the new hire to get to know our culture and current projects. I wonder how helpful this person would be in the next few months, before Peter comes back.

(Appendices continue)

Appendix C

Study 3 Instructions and Scripts of Messages in the Group Chat

We first asked the participant to type in their preferred username for this study and “matched” them with four other team members: AC, TRX01, Blake, Pat (who is the voicer). We asked the participant to answer a few filler questions in order to “determine the most suitable candidate in the team to coordinate their team discussion.” Despite their answer, we told them that AC is selected as the

coordinator and will moderate their team discussion and always send the first messages. To help make the discussion more efficient, the rest of the team is instructed to follow a randomly generated order of messaging (which is TRX01, Blake, the participant, and Pat). The participant will be prompted to send messages when it is their turn.

Team member:	Control	Prohibitive ethical voice	Promotive ethical voice
AC (coordinator):	Hey guys, I guess they made me the coordinator. Lets take turns to say hi?		
AC (coordinator):	Starting from TRX01, then Blake, [<i>the participant's username embedded</i>], and Pat, if I remembered correctly.		
TRX01:	hi everyone, is this real?		
Blake:	hello! I was wondering that too!		
Participant:	[<i>the participant's typed messages appear here</i>]		
Pat:	haha I'm real! Nice meeting u.		
AC (coordinator):	Cool. Since we don't have much time, let's share our thoughts real quick. I'll share first.		
AC (coordinator):	I think they should replace Peter with this candidate in order to improve team efficiency. That seems to be the key to this decision.		
AC (coordinator):	The team is already behind and facing new demands from new clients. So they really need someone solid like this candidate.		
AC (coordinator):	Would be great to have the person on board to speed things up. Since we don't have the money to support two positions, let's just replace Peter with this candidate.		
AC (coordinator):	What do you guys think? TRX01?		
TRX01:	I agree with AC that the priority is to improve efficiency. This candidate has relevant experience and skills.		
TRX01:	S/he helps move things forward. The earlier we get the person, the better.		
Blake:	Sure. This candidate seems qualified and experienced. I mean I'm ok to move ahead with this person. Thx		
Participant:	[<i>the participant's typed messages appear here</i>]		
Pat:	Well, we should think more about the pros and cons of hiring someone now. I can see both sides.	Well, we shouldn't even be thinking about replacing Peter. The idea is really unethical and would harm him.	Well, we should be thinking first about helping Peter. Let's see how we can be more caring toward Peter.
Pat:	It may help but there are also problems with bringing in someone new. So, it's hard to decide whether to hire this new person.	It's wrong to just take Peter's job away from him without telling him and giving him a say.	This is our opportunity to show compassion for Peter by explaining the situation and giving him a say.
Pat:	Let's take more time to talk about the pros and cons before having to make a decision.	We shouldn't treat a valued team member this way. We should stop such discussion now before harming Peter.	We should really care for our valued team member and do everything we can to help him keep the job.
AC (coordinator):	Well, it seems we have some different opinions here. Hmm . . . Did the discussion change your mind? Anything to say before we vote?		
TRX01:	Again, I'm still for hiring the person ASAP		
Blake:	I understand there are different opinions. I'll think more before I vote.		
Participant:	[<i>the participant's typed messages appear here; we coded verbal support based on these messages</i>]		
Pat:	I still think we need to look more into pros and cons of hiring vs. not hiring.	I still think hiring now would be unethical and harmful to Peter.	I still think we should do our best to care for our teammate Peter.
AC (coordinator):	thx for everyone's inputs. Hope this discussion helps you to decide how to vote. Bye!		

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