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Electronic Journal of Communication

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The Electronic Journal of Communication/
La Revue Electronic de Communication

The First Peer Reviewed Electronically Distributed Journal in the Social Sciences

Volume 25 Numbers 3 & 4, 2015

The Positive Outcomes of Negative Emotional Displays: A Multi-Level Analysis of Emotion in Bureaucratic Work

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Abstract: Organizational scholarship often frames negative emotional displays as disruptive and problematic. However, in certain organizational contexts, for instance, bureaucratic institutions, negative emotions may be particularly useful. Bureaucratic work involves high levels of tedium, quantitative and qualitative overload, and a lack of autonomy for employees that can contribute to feelings of frustration. This study combines participant observation and interviews to explore negative emotional displays in two highly regulated public bureaucratic systems—municipal courtrooms and airport security checkpoints. We explain how employee negative emotional displays including the use of anger, frustration, sarcasm, and intimidation can have counterintuitive, yet positive, outcomes at individual, dyad or team, and organizational levels. Our findings reveal that negative emotional displays can help employees engage in role-distancing behaviors, generate collaboration and camaraderie among coworkers, and actually facilitate critical organizational processes. Theoretically, we discuss the importance of subtlety when employing negative emotional displays in bureaucratic work environments as well as several considerations for practice.

“Accept that some days you are the pigeon and some days the statue,” –Dilbert.

Bureaucratic work is characterized by complex structures, hierarchy, rules, laws, top-down decision-making, formal job descriptions, and roles. In popular culture—evident in satirical cartoons like *Dilbert* and television shows such as *The Office*—this structure is derided for its red tape, sluggish decision-making, and high cost. However, bureaucracy persists due to efficiency and clear coordination of activities (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Although bureaucratic organizations are known for rules, they are also filled with human emotions, many negative.

Tedium and frustration often permeate members’ worklives in bureaucratic organizations. Due to hierarchy, front-line employees work separately from management, which makes providing and receiving feedback difficult. Bureaucratic occupations also involve quantitative and qualitative work overload (Pines, Aronson, & Kafry, 1981). Quantitative overload refers to the amount of work an employee needs to do in a specified period of time such as meeting quotas. Qualitative overload refers to an employee’s feelings that they have too much work or the work is too difficult often leading to self-perceptions of inadequacy and burden. Likewise, employees in bureaucratic organizations usually experience a lack of autonomy due to the many policies they must enforce and

obey.

Many, perhaps most, government agencies feature bureaucratic structures that affect the thousands of employees embedded in them and the citizens who receive services. In addition to regulating work processes, these structures prompt intriguing emotional experiences for organizational members. For instance, past research demonstrates how correctional officers manage paradoxes in their work through emotional labor (Tracy, 2004), municipal court judges deviate from professional emotional norms to control their courtrooms (Scarduzio, 2011), airport security officers exact payment of “emotional taxes” by passengers passing through airport security (Malvini Redden, 2013), and teachers strategize emotional displays to manage and discipline students (Sutton, Mudrey-Camino, & Knight, 2009). What these studies and others focused on emotion in organizations (e.g., Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Elfenbein, 2007; Fredrickson, 1998; Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008; Kramer & Hess, 2002; Tracy, 2005) have in common is an emphasis on the deleterious impacts of negative emotion. These studies argue that negative emotions such as anger, frustration, and tedium contribute to issues such as stress, burnout, and identity challenges for those experiencing and expressing emotions, as well as disempowerment and angst for those on the receiving end of emotional displays. Understanding the potentially positive effect of negative emotions is equally crucial for appreciating the complexity of emotional worklife.

In this study, we concentrate on two highly regulated, public bureaucratic systems—municipal courtrooms and airport security checkpoints—to explain, somewhat counter-intuitively, the *helpful* impacts of negative emotions in bureaucratic organizations. We chose these settings because they represent varied bureaucratic working experiences, rendering the findings more accessible and transferable (e.g., municipal courtrooms, a professional context where power differences are accentuated and limited numbers of people visit annually; airports, public but highly regulated space that masses travel through each day). The two contexts are similar in terms of bureaucratic work but offer marked differences that allow us to speak more broadly to the effects of negative emotional displays.

Using data generated from large, independent, but compatible studies, we demonstrate how employees manage negative emotions, and what *affirmative* and useful outcomes stem from negative emotional displays for individuals, dyads and groups, and organizations. Two research questions guided our analysis:

> **RQ1**: How do bureaucratic workers (Transportation Security Officers (TSOs), bailiffs, judges) display and manage negative emotions?
>
> **RQ2**: What affirmative and useful outcomes for individual employees, dyads andgroups, and organizations emerge from negative emotional displays in bureaucratic organizations?

Emotional Consequences and Asymmetrical Outcomes in Emotion Research

To lay a foundation for discussing the effects of negative emotional displays in bureaucratic organizations, we begin by defining emotion management and discussing briefly how scholars have investigated negative emotional displays in organizations.

Emotion and Emotion Management

Emotion is a multi-faceted psychological construct (Scherer, 2005) associated with physiological, behavioral, and experiential “response tendencies” that influence actions (Gross, 2002, p. 181). Emotions are relatively brief sensations that take place in response to specific incidents or experiences. For instance, someone might feel boredom *as a result* of performing the same task repeatedly or anger *remembering* rude behavior from a customer.

Although emotions occur within people, they are essentially social and have social consequences (Lutgen-Sandvik, Riforgiate, & Fletcher, 2011). Emotions can influence how others respond when people display particular feelings during an interaction. Emotion display can also be considered strategic or goal-directed, as they generate others’ behavioral and attributional responses (Metts & Planalp, 2003). Expressing sadness at a round of layoffs, for example, is likely to engender support from coworkers, and sharing happiness through humor can increase affinity among peers. Social outcomes, whether positive or negative, often depend on how and to whom people communicate emotion.

Effective emotional displays are context-driven and influenced by social norms (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995), which means people typically believe that they must appropriately control both their felt and expressed emotions in given contexts. Ekman and Friesen (1975) suggest five emotion management techniques people use to control how they communicate emotion: (1) *simulation* or displaying emotions that are not felt; (2) *inhibition*, or suppression which involves showing no emotion even though emotion may be

felt; (3) *intensification*, or exaggerating felt emotion; (4) de*intensification*, or minimizing the display of felt emotions; and (5) *masking*, or showing one emotion while feeling another. In organizations, emotion management training is common (Hochschild, 1983; Kramer & Hess, 2002; Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988) and purposefully shapes interactions between organizational actors. However, emotion management is often difficult for employees (Tracy, 2005) and some types of emotion regulation such as emotional suppression can lead to physical and mental consequences over time (Gross, 2008).

Negative Emotion in Organizations

Organizational research paints an interesting picture of how emotional displays and emotion management influence organizational settings. Since Hochschild's (1983) groundbreaking work studying emotional labor, many have investigated employee challenges with emotion management. Past scholarship describes increased organizational conflict due to negative emotional expression (Waldron & Krone, 1991), drastic prioritization of rationality and professionalism when making sense of emotion at work (Dougherty & Drumheller, 2006), consequences of masking negative emotions in the workplace (Kotchemidova, 2010), and ways emotion management can lead to employee stress (Vecchio, 2005).

A considerable body of research demonstrates the difficulties connected with negative emotions at work. For example, negative affect is associated with "counterproductive work behaviors" (Penney & Spector, 2005), work-related depression (Heinisch & Jex, 1997), burnout (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002), and ineffective leadership (Waldman, Balthazard, & Peterson, 2011). Negative emotions because of emotional abuse or workplace bullying can result in depression and employee turnover (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2013) and contribute to difficult organizational environments for customers and organizational stakeholders (Burns & Neisner, 2006; Malvini Redden, 2013). Consistent concentration on negative emotions has also raised counter-voices focused on positive emotions (for instance Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003; Fredrickson, 1998; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005), including a somewhat new field called Positive Organization Scholarship (see Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012, for an overview).

However, recent research questions the "dominance of symmetrical assumptions" in emotion studies (Lindebaum & Jordan, 2014, p. 3), casting doubt on the preponderance of research that suggests positive emotions equate solely to positive outcomes and negative emotions to negative outcomes. A 2014 special edition of **Human Relations** themed "When it can be good to feel bad and bad to feel good" illustrates important opportunities to theorize when dominant symmetrical assumptions are set aside. This perspective echoes Fineman's (2008) critiques about the artificial and unproductive separation of positive and negative emotions, and the privileging of one over the other.

Considering negative emotions in particular from an evolutionary perspective suggests they are linked to response tendencies that offer protection (e.g., fight or flight instincts can protect people in conflict situations) (Plutchik, 2001). Likewise, certain difficult emotional processes like emotional labor can in fact be fun (Tracy, 2000), contribute to compassion (Way & Tracy, 2012), or break the monotony of tedious work (Shuler & Sypher, 2000). Important findings also illustrate how people make good out of bad emotional situations whether that be resistance to bullying behavior at work (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006), the development of friendships in the face of hostile work environments (Odden & Sias, 1997), or redemption from the guilt of alcohol addiction through organizational discourses (Ford, 1989).

Although some research does consider asymmetry in workplace emotion outcomes, even if inadvertently, most studies examine one level of analysis such as individual (van Kleef, 2014), dyadic (Chi & Ho, 2014), team (Hadley, 2014) or organizational (Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988). Our work contributes to existing literature by examining the affirmative outcomes that emerge from negative emotions using a multi-level perspective, which enables a complex look at the interplays between levels. In other words, we consider when negative emotions are good for organizations, but bad for individuals, and good for individuals but perhaps bad for teams, and so on. We do so by answering our aforementioned research questions: "How do bureaucratic workers (TSOs, bailiffs, and judges) express and manage negative emotions?" and "What affirmative and useful outcomes for individual employees, dyads and groups, and organizations emerge from negative emotional displays in bureaucratic organizations?"

Methods

We completed 307 hours of participant observation, 71 in-depth interviews, and approximately 224 ethnographic interviews which resulted in 1345 single-spaced pages of data. We observed 3 occupations in 20 different organizations. We initially collected the data for two larger, independent projects, and then together re-analyzed data to increase explanatory power.

Data Collection and Sources

The first author gathered data at the Equitas and Curia municipal courthouses, located in a large Southwestern city in the U.S.[1] Over 13 months, she spent more than 107 hours shadowing employees and observing court proceedings. She transcribed fieldnotes within 48 hours of observation, which resulted in 212 single spaced pages of typed data. She also conducted 24 ethnographic interviews to gather clarifying information from participants and casually interact with members of the scene. Twenty-six semi-structured audio-recorded interviews were conducted with municipal court judges and bailiffs. The semi-structured interviews were transcribed by the researcher within a week of completion, yielding 229 single-spaced pages of data.

The second author collected data in 18 airports across the U.S. and in Canada and Germany, with focused observations in West Coast locations (primarily California and Arizona). Over 30 months, she spent 110 hours studying airports, not including travel time, closely focused on interaction in security checkpoints. She took 133 one-way flights, often with multiple passes through security each trip. Fieldnotes were created soon after observations, typically within 12 hours of travel, and resulted in 327 single-spaced pages of data. She also conducted semi-structured interviews with 30 passengers and 14 TSOs. Averaging 59 minutes each, the interviews yielded 577 single-spaced pages of data and were professionally transcribed. Additionally, the second author spoke with 200 people informally during ethnographic interviews.

Data Analysis

We collected airport and courthouse data while considering the sensitizing concepts of emotional expression and emotion work. We found interesting overlaps in the emotional experiences of bureaucratic workers, especially where aspects of the occupation or interactions with customers or defendants triggered employees' negative emotional responses. We also noted that the employees' negative emotional displays often had positive effects on individuals, groups, or organizations. We analyzed our data together to see if we could find commonalities across both types of bureaucratic organizations.

We started by compiling all of the data before reading and re-reading to understand what was going on in relation to negative emotional expression (Charmaz, 2001). After this data immersion, we each individually engaged in first-cycle or primary coding (Saldaña, 2012; Tracy, 2013) in which we reread the data line-by-line and created descriptive codes. After coding individually, we collectively narrowed the codes to three specific types of negative emotional displays including anger, sarcasm, and intimidation, a blended emotional performance. Then we engaged in secondary cycle coding (Tracy, 2013). During this stage, we identified patterns among the three negative emotional displays, looking for individual, group, and organizational effects. The following sections detail our key findings.

How Bureaucratic Employees Experience and Manage Negative Emotions

Bureaucratic work involves a variety of challenging interactions with the public. In our analysis, we noticed that when TSOs and court employees performed negative emotions, those displays resulted in interesting and useful outcomes at individual, dyad and group, and organizational levels. These findings detail the intricacies of negative emotional displays and organizing processes in airport security lines and municipal courtrooms.

Negative Emotional Displays in Bureaucratic Work

Our dataset was full of rich examples of negative emotional displays by both TSOs and courtroom employees including anger, contempt, boredom, bewilderment, resignation, annoyance, and disgust. Yet, there were three specific emotional displays that, when performed, resulted in affirmative individual, dyad/group, and organizational results: anger, sarcasm, and intimidation. We describe these emotional performances in turn, noting where they connect to emotion management training (as in the case of passenger intimidation training for TSOs), and where they connote resistance to the constraints of bureaucratic work. It is important to note that throughout this paper, we focus primarily on *displays* of emotion, rather than internal feelings, and the *effects* of emotional performances, rather than the intent behind them unless specified in interview quotes.

Anger. One prominent emotional display involved anger, which we defined as a reaction to a perceived threat to person, belongings, or identity, and can range in intensity from mild irritation to frustration to rage (American Psychological Association, 2014). Angry behavior typically manifested verbally in yelling, censorious language, and clipped tones, and nonverbally in actions such as slamming passenger belongings on security tables, glaring, crossed arms, and closed off body language. Bureaucratic employees displayed anger in response to a wide range of customer behaviors. Reflecting on occasions that make her angry, Judge Darson stated:

> Every once in a while I feel compelled to tell someone that they are an idiot. And I think the ones that really make me

> angry are those individuals who have had a lot of advantages and have blown them and then they are standing there whining.

In other words, Judge Darson was likely to display angry behaviors as a response to defendants who have had several chances to correct their behavior. In her opinion, the repetitive need to be seen in court and the tendency to not follow directions could be frustrating. Unfortunately, judges dealt with what they called "frequent flyers" in the courtroom, repetitive work reflective of both quantitative and qualitative overload (Pines, et al., 1981).

Likewise, TSOs discussed feeling and demonstrating anger at "idiot" passengers who they felt should be more prepared for travel. Security specialist Greg described passengers who "Check their brains with their baggage" while TSO manager Rick lamented, "It does get a bit frustrating though. You'd think that with the media harping on it, and the forest of signage in front of the airport, some people would get the message. Apparently not." Angry behaviors appeared obvious when TSOs yelled at passengers to comply with directions, slammed carts or baggage when conducting searches, and spoke loudly to coworkers about passengers who do not "get it," typically in close proximity to offending passengers.

Intriguingly, bureaucratic employees seemed to be aware that some ways of expressing anger were more acceptable than others, depending upon specific circumstances. Judge Hocum explained:

> I have gotten so angry that I had to get off the bench because I knew I was going to lose it. I never ever think it's appropriate to yell, unless you are seriously trying to control your courtroom, like something has gone on and you need to raise your voice to get back control.

In this instance, Judge Hocum mentioned that yelling is not an appropriate way to manage the courtroom, unless control is lost. However, later in the interview she discussed how the tone of voice that judges use is important to convey a message which suggested that a judge's tone of voice needs to be stern without yelling.

Similarly, TSOs described being limited to subtle displays of anger and frustration. Talking about an experience where a passenger screamed at the top of her voice at him, causing the entire checkpoint to stop and look, TSO Lucky referred to his training:

> I wouldn't say we're not allowed to get mad. . . . On the inside, I can be very mad for what a passenger does or says, but according to my operating procedure, I have to say [and do] certain things. . . . If a passenger does something to get me really mad or irritated or aggravated to the point where I can't deal with them anymore, I'll be like "Excuse me, sir, I understand what you're saying. Let me go ahead and get my lead. . . ." Then I walk away. . . . I get to keep my job and someone else deals with [them].

TSOs were aware that most of the time, if they articulated the level of emotion they actually experienced, they might be at risk of losing employment.

Numerous TSOs described the process of controlling anger and other emotions as being "calm, cool, and collected," a phrase that comes directly from their emotion management training. For instance, TSO Cat explained managing her feelings while confiscating property such as water bottles from irate passengers: "I can tell right off the bat if I'm going to need backup, because they train you. They have a whole eight hour class on this, on putting up with somebody yelling at you." That TSOs are specifically trained in emotion management techniques to control passenger-induced anger speaks to the prevalence of experienced anger in airport settings. That a vast amount of passenger anger manifested in response to organizational rules and structures that control *both* TSOs and passengers, is telling. Whereas frontline TSOs are specifically trained to manage anger, judges decided on performance rules for themselves. It is somewhat unexpected that a profession lauded for impartiality would also be marked by anger.

Although more extreme emotional displays like yelling are taboo in bureaucratic settings like the courtroom and airport security, judges and TSOs described other negative emotional performances that are accepted and even encouraged. Rather than risk being unprofessional by demonstrating anger, both judges and TSOs discussed employing sarcasm and intimidation.

Sarcasm. Bureaucratic employees displayed sarcasm, which is the use of irony to mock or convey feelings indirectly (Shamay-Tsoory, Tomer, & Aharon-Peretz, 2005), frequently in their interactions with passengers and defendants. Sarcasm served to express negative feelings such as annoyance, frustration, and contempt, and to discipline patrons. Often, employees leaked sarcasm in response to name-calling or antagonism from the public. Defendants and passengers often acted angry at constraining organizational rules (e.g., long wait times to see the judge, limitations on the quantities of liquids allowed in carry-ons).

Consequently, defendants and passengers would take out frustration about the larger rules of the organization on the employees, sometimes in egregious language. Although limited in responses by professional decorum and training, employees freely demonstrated sarcasm instead.

Some employee uses of sarcasm seemed personally cathartic and lacking in empathy. For instance, TSO Skeet admitted he likes when security queues are long “like the lines at Disneyland” so that time passes more quickly and supervisors are not as “nitpicky” about TSO performance. Acknowledging passenger anxiety about long lines, Skeet said, snickering, “I’m sorry that you came to the airport late and you need to get through. Sorry. [Laughter.] Plan ahead!” An example from field notes in the Curia municipal court revealed a moment where Judge Monroe employed a sarcastic response at a defendant’s financial troubles:

> She asked, “Why haven’t you paid your fine?” “I am working on it, I called and tried to work something out,” the defendant replied. The judge looked at the bailiff and asked her to print a payment history. The bailiff obliged with quickness and a blank look at the defendant. With the report, the judge explained, “You have a $110 late fee and another charge of 150 dollars on here.” “Yeah, the 150 dollars is from a parking ticket – the last time I came to court my meter expired and I got a ticket.” The other individuals in the courtroom laughed. Judge Monroe smirked, “Maybe you will pay the court on time now.”

In this example, the judge’s comment and smirk demonstrated a lack of concern about the defendant’s financial situation and a degree of Schadenfreude[2] regarding the parking ticket.

Employees also used sarcasm to reinforce identity positions and facilitate work. A courtroom observation at Equitas courthouse revealed this interaction between a bailiff and defendant:

> The judge read the rights and asked the defendant to step to her left. The defendant began to ask several questions. “Relax,” Bailiff Jamie said, “I have been doing this for 27 years. I should know what I am doing.” “Okay sorry ma’am,” replied the defendant.

In this example, Bailiff Jamie used sarcasm to reinforce her ability to do her job effectively. Additionally, her response quieted the defendant’s incessant questioning which allowed her to finish his paperwork in a timely manner.

Sometimes workers used sarcasm in reaction to perceived misdeeds or to shape behavior. For example, going through an impacted security line, the second author interacted with a TSO after asking to “opt out” of advanced imaging. Instead, she requested a full body pat-down, which requires more labor for TSOs:

> The TSO replied in a snotty tone that seems meant to dissuade: “Well, it may be awhile because we’re understaffed.” I said, “That’s fine.” While I wait, he made several snide comments to other passengers about liquids and gels in baggage, and glared at me.

Here, the TSO used a sarcastic threat to try and persuade a passenger not to pursue a pat-down, and employed a tone also reflecting widespread TSO stereotypes that passengers are stupid. Similarly, another TSO demonstrated his annoyance at a pat-down request:

> Instead of directing me to wait as usual, the TSO curled an index finger at me. His eyes bore into me as he said, “If you opt out, you know what we’re going to do to you?” “Yes,” I replied. “We’re going to pat you down—head, chest, waist, legs, breast, buttocks, ground, and sensitive areas?” “Yes.” “You know this is a millimeter wave scanner and doesn’t have the radiation?” “Yes,” I said, annoyed, and ignoring his incorrect[3] claim.

The TSO used sarcasm to attempt to shape behavior—emphatically describing the pat-down in detail, which is outside of normal protocol. The nonverbal motion, close proximity, and detailed description also seemed like attempts at intimidation which is discussed further in our third category of negative emotional displays prevalent in bureaucratic environments.

Intimidation. We recognized that intimidation was a complex emotional performance incorporating nonverbal displays of assertiveness, sternness, suspicion, and occasionally contempt through tone of voice and physical presence. The purpose of intimidation was to provoke submission and in the case of airport passengers, sometimes anxiety and fear. Bureaucratic workers, especially TSOs and courtroom employees, were expected to remain in control of their respective work areas and the people in them. In analyzing our data, we noticed that employees used certain intimidating emotional displays to maintain order.

Retaining control was especially critical in security settings because of safety protocol and also the sheer number of people who must coordinate action in a small space. As airport security tends to be a highly emotional environment, filled with passenger anxiety and frustration, tensions often run high. As discussed, TSOs receive emotion management training including staying "calm, cool, and collected" to manage their feelings, as well as those of passengers. In addition to emotional suppression, TSOs are trained to manifest an intimidating presence. TSO Roger shared that security officers are trained to portray a "commanding presence"—to be verbally and nonverbally intimidating so that passengers will see officers as "figures of authority" and comply with directions.

According to TSOs, a "commanding presence"—which involves aggressive or brusque speech and nonverbals—is required to keep lines moving and keep people in order. These fieldnote excerpts depict what a commanding presence looks like in security:

> The TSOs do not engage with passengers, except to bark orders or give trivial greetings. They direct traffic primarily with nonverbal gestures such as a "come forward" wave of fingers or a "stop" raise of the hand. Some officers seem assigned specifically to passenger surveillance. I observed a female officer who stands 5'9" and strutted around the security line. She hawked the crowd, grimacing, looking completely unapproachable.

TSO Jeff admitted it was difficult to learn how to be authoritative when questioning passengers. Jeff said he felt "uncomfortable and nervous" at first, but that reactions to his behavior enabled him to identify people who might be trying to hide something. Critically, for officers like Roger, manifesting a commanding presence meant burying more natural emotional performances like cheerfulness. Roger and another TSO, Carrie, described transgressing emotional norms that ask officers to appear constantly on guard and suspicious, to instead be friendly.

Although not an extension of organizational training, intimidating emotional performances also allowed judges to control courtrooms, kept proceedings moving, and set standards for behavior. Judge Major described:

> A judge needs to behave in a way that presents themselves as in control of what's happening in the courtroom. And I think parties respect a judge more when a judge has control over the courtroom. But that's also a balance of not coming off as some sort of dictator in there.

Indeed, courtroom employees needed to demonstrate they were in control through their demeanor and presence, without being rude or outrageous. This was an interesting contrast to airport security checkpoints, which maintain a stigma of negativity and unprofessionalism.

Judges also displayed intimidation by not allowing defendants to act out though nonverbal hand gestures that asked for silence (e.g., index finger to mouth) or told them to stop (e.g., hand raised). Judge Darson stated:

> I think one important thing, particularly in the jail court setting, is that you must absolutely not let the first defendant act out without checking them because defendants in that setting are like a room full of elementary children that take cues from each other. If you let one get away with disrupting the proceedings one time, it builds.

Judge Darson's comments suggested that employees engaged in certain emotional displays and behaviors to not only control people they were immediately interacting with but also to shape the behavior of others.

In this section, we described three specific negative emotional displays that TSOs and court employees utilize at work—anger, sarcasm, and intimidation. In the following section, we explore the positive outcomes of these negative emotional displays for individual employees, dyads and groups and the organization.

The Positive Outcomes of Negative Emotional Displays

Given the proliferation of research on the destructive side of certain emotional performances, and recently, an emphasis on considering and fostering positive emotion in organizations (e.g., Cameron et al., 2003), categorizing negative emotional displays as inherently disruptive is a pattern of thought that deserves rethinking. However, our data suggested that the negative emotional displays of anger, sarcasm, and intimidation served a variety of useful purposes at individual, dyad-team, and organizational levels. In this section, we explain the prominent positive or useful implications, three at the individual level, four at the dyad and group level, and two at the organizational level. As with other multi-level analyses (Way, 2012), we recognize and discuss where some of the implications overlap. Additionally, although there are other effects of the three negative emotional displays in our data, we

chose to focus on the useful and affirmative.

Individual-level Outcomes

Individual-level outcomes of negative emotional displays by TSOs and courtroom employees included: (a) putting role distance between self and defendant/passenger, (b) acting professionally or being “good” employees, and (c) enabling employees to enforce rules they do not necessarily agree with by providing some emotional distance (e.g. “hiding” behind certain emotional performances).

Role-distancing. First, emotional displays of anger, sarcasm, and intimidation allowed employees to engage in role distancing techniques (Goffman, 1961). By displaying negative emotions, employees were clearly able to mark the differences between themselves and the public they serve which is important for personal and professional identity. Judges, for instance, may choose to distance themselves from defendants who are lower class, involved with crime and drugs, or use uncouth language, as Judge Smith demonstrates:

> I ruled against a defendant, and as I was standing up to leave the bench, he called me an asshole. I was just going to give him a fine, and I was thinking a hundred dollar fine, and he said yes I do want to say something, “I called you an a**hole because you are one.” And I said, “Oh, make it a two hundred dollar fine.”

Judge Smith distanced himself from the defendant and his inappropriate behavior through sarcasm and by enforcing a harsher punishment. This type of distancing demonstrated power differences between judges and defendants, and enabled Judge Smith to maintain professional identity despite the fact that he serves those who may be beneath him in terms of class, education, and social standing. Unlike some bureaucratic employees who use humor as a role-distancing technique (e.g., Tracy, Myers, & Scott, 2006), the use of negative emotion is specifically sanctioned and in the case of TSOs, required in the organizations we studied.

TSOs also used negative emotional displays for role distancing, and in particular an “us/them” mentality when dealing with passengers. However, the power differences are reversed in the airport with TSOs stereotypically portrayed as uneducated, thuggish, unskilled, and having to serve airline clientele, almost the opposite of the courtroom dynamic (Malvini Redden, 2013). In the airport, TSOs used negative emotions to establish dominance and authority over passengers who in other organizational settings have more social capital and control over interactions. Intimidation, coupled with intense bureaucratic structures, enabled TSOs to control passengers, enforce rules arbitrarily, and on occasion, take advantage of passenger emotions. Role distancing also served another important purpose for TSOs. As security officers, they must maintain constant vigilance and be on the lookout for potential criminals. Having a clear demarcation between “us”/officers and “them”/passengers enabled officers to view the otherwise innocent traveling public with suspicion.

Professionalism. A second individual-level effect of negative emotional displays was related to acting professionally or being “good” employees. In the case of courtroom employees, the data revealed how controlling one’s courtroom and avoiding putting defendants in contempt were viewed as qualities of a “good” judge or bailiff. Similarly, TSOs were simultaneously praised for being “calm, cool, and collected” and demonstrating an intimidating, commanding presence. Employees displayed intimidation in order to demonstrate their ability to perform their jobs effectively. For example, Judge Major stated: “I think parties (defendants) respect a judge more when a judge has control over the courtroom.” Likewise, TSOs were viewed by colleagues and, importantly, managers, as professional when they keep emotions in check and passengers in line.

Although “good” bureaucratic employees in the courtroom and airport could be identified by certain negative emotional displays, employees must negotiate conflicting meanings of what “good” and “professional” mean and to whom. For example, TSO Carrie complained about being labeled “unprofessional” for acting outwardly friendly towards passengers:

> *TSO Carrie:* [Managers] don’t like people [officers] who are nice. [They] don’t like people who go out of their way to help [passengers]. I’ve been told I am unprofessional, unprofessional, unprofessional, unprofessional. That’s all they keep telling me because I help old ladies with their carts. I tie people’s shoes for them. I help people with their coats when they need it, and that’s being unprofessional.
>
> *Interviewer:* You’re being punished for being helpful and kind?
>
> *TSO Carrie:* Yes, I am being punished. Yes.

Later in the interview, TSO Carrie described how deviations from Standard Operating Procedures—of which these emotional rules are a part—resulted in officers losing their jobs. Although difficult to deal with for officers like Carrie who wished to be outwardly friendly, the rules demonstrated the relationship between negative emotional displays and professionalism clearly. Specifically, certain negative emotional displays like intimidation were necessary to be deemed professional and competent, at least from an organizational and team level, or in the case of judges, from colleagues. However, it was not hard to see how this type of professionalism would be difficult to experience as a passenger or defendant. As we discuss below in the organizational impacts, deciphering who or what benefits from negative emotional displays was a complex and sometimes counterintuitive project.

Emotional distance. The third individual-level outcome of negative emotional displays was the ability for employees to establish emotional distance between themselves and the emotional performances of others. This distance also facilitated performing work employees find difficult or disagreeable. In some instances, this means "hiding" behind performances of intimidation or a controlled persona, even while feeling something different ("masking" according to Ekman and Friesen (1975)). Hiding behind emotional performances can be positive for employees because it allows them to be less adversely influenced by the emotional reactions of customers. For instance, TSO Jonathan discussed how he responded to outraged passengers:

> I get all stoic and let the passenger have their rude time. I get paid by the hour, not by the passenger, so if they want to waste their time with negativity, they are more than welcome. But I don't let them get a rise out of me. I just stand there and let it happen. Good customer service and all that.

Performing emotion management in this way enables employees to shield themselves, and considering the discussion of professionalism above, save face and retain power while interacting with customers who would rather see them lash out and get in trouble.

Furthermore, employees viewed emotion management as "just part of the job" rather than an expression of their true feelings. For example, Judge Adams explained a situation where he was called a horse's ass by a defendant and he responded by saying, "Thank you." Similarly, Judge Hocum stated that, "I don't have sympathy. I mean it's like that's your job, your job is to pay your bill, and my job is to make sure that you pay your bill. Yesterday I got called a bitch, it's like okay well you still got to pay." In two examples, the judges laughed off or responded politely in the face of name-calling—performing emotionally in ways that benefit both their own well being and suppressed or ignored the responses of defendants.

In some instances, negative emotional displays enabled employees to deal with enforcing policies or rules they did not necessarily agree with or find onerous. For instance, a TSO the second author met during fieldwork described being called a "Nazi" for conducting a routine baggage search. Later, the passenger dissolved into tears and accused her of rape when completing a full body pat-down. That TSO discussed understanding the passenger's perspective, and not exactly wanting to conduct the search, but felt compelled because of her work's strict protocols. She described "shutting down" her emotions and getting into "business mode" to complete the screenings. This TSO and others, including Roger, Carrie, Jonathan, and Peter discussed using emotional screens or "masks" to perform work and enforce policies that went against their personal beliefs. Although this seems like a negative personal impact—indeed, participants described this emotional management as personally difficult—it enabled officers to do their work, be seen as professional by colleagues, and, critically, keep their jobs.

As judges and TSOs work in close proximity with customers/defendants, and other organizational members, negative emotional displays influence not only the individuals performing them, but others at the team/dyadic level, which we turn to next.

Dyad and Team-Level Outcomes

Displays of negative emotion also generated four dyad/team-level positive outcomes including: (a) building camaraderie between colleagues, (b) generating collaboration between colleagues (c) reducing work burdens for colleagues, and (d) controlling interactions between employees and customers.

Camaraderie among colleagues. The first dyad and team-level outcome was building camaraderie with colleagues through the use and acknowledgment of negative emotional displays. TSOs in particular discussed comparing "crazy passenger stories" with each other; reframing negative interactions with passengers in ways that helped sustain friendship and camaraderie. Similarly, TSOs described being "in the trenches" with passengers in ways that built a sense of togetherness for colleagues, emphasizing the "us versus them" mentality mentioned above. In checkpoints, TSOs often used sarcasm with each other to make fun of and discipline passengers, as demonstrated in this fieldnote excerpt inside a security checkpoint:

> A TSO in his late 50s came up to relieve a colleague in his mid-20s who was complaining about passengers not being prepared for security. The older TSO said mockingly, “Don’t be so negative. These are *seasoned* travelers.” The younger man laughed and replied derisively, “They aren’t seasoned. At 5 p.m.? At 6 a.m. they’re seasoned…” They joked sarcastically about apparently inept evening passengers.

The sarcasm and inside joke about types of passengers (a reference to well-prepared business travelers who take the first flights of the day) served to reinforce role differences, provide fodder for a laugh, and also mildly insulted passengers standing within earshot.

In the courtroom, judges and bailiffs also used sarcasm to build camaraderie. For example, the data revealed how Judge Yorker and Bailiff Penelope laughed when one defendant did not follow directions. Additionally, Bailiff Jamie mentioned that she and some of her coworkers were going to “make a book of defendant excuses.” These two examples show how coworkers often bonded over experiences with difficult defendants and how sarcasm and humor helped them navigate these challenges.

Collaboration among colleagues. The second dyad/team-level outcome involved assisting colleagues with “problem” passengers or defendants. In these situations, employees used intimidation or “commanding presence” to de-escalate emotional displays they received from the public. TSO Neecie described coworkers as “having each other’s backs,” while TSO Skeet emphasized how colleagues collaborated to take care of difficult passengers:

> I’ve even seen a couple passengers that I thought were going to be a problem and told somebody else to go over there, “Hey, go over there and watch them.” We back each other up a lot, so it helps us all stay calm.

In some cases, simply the presence of another officer standing nearby and watching had a “calming effect,” according to TSO manager, Rick.

Similarly, judges and bailiffs worked together to control courtroom behaviors. This fieldnote excerpt demonstrates how the team dealt with a disgruntled defendant:

> Judge Major got up to leave the courtroom. As she did, Bailiff Adam tried to explain to a defendant that he must be back in 30 days for his pre-trial conference. The defendant tried to convince Bailiff Adam otherwise, asking, “Can I just come back in 40 days?” Bailiff Adam said, “No, the judge said it had to be 30.” The defendant shrugged, “It’s not that much difference.” Judge Major overheard this and said, “You will be back in 30, you are only coming from California,” and she walked out.

Here, displaying a commanding presence allowed the judge and bailiff to work together to deal with the defendant’s request. Judge Major ended the discussion with her comment and presence, while avoiding rude behavior. For both courtroom and airport security employees, negative emotional displays directed towards customers/defendants served to build camaraderie and reinforced working relationships.

Reducing workload. The third dyad and team-level outcome involved moving passengers and defendants in and out quickly by using negative emotional displays, thereby reducing work burdens for other colleagues. Moving customers quickly translated into less hassle for other employees downstream in the respective chain of work. Intriguingly, if employees were friendly and chatty—although this sounds like good customer service and professionalism—friendliness possibly meant holding up security lines or case processing. For example, during a number of trips through security, the second author found that excess chatting or joking that held up the line would result in passengers and TSOs demonstrating irritation evidenced by disgusted nonverbal displays (sighing, rolling eyes, glaring) and complaining. Line or process slow-downs can translate to disgruntled passengers or defendants whom other colleagues then have to deal with, which can generate conflict or irritation between colleagues. Therefore, negative emotional displays that keep processes moving can actually *help* other colleagues move passengers or process cases more quickly, and reduce the burden of managing unhappy customers.

Controlling interactions. The fourth dyad and team-level outcome is that negative emotional displays kept passengers and defendants controlled and primed to move through the organizational systems quickly and effectively. A number of passenger interviewees discussed feeling apprehensive around and afraid of TSOs, and discouraged from asking questions or making conversation. When asked why, passengers described TSOs as aggressive, intimidating, mechanical, and full of the power to punish passengers. Provoking fear and apprehension kept some passengers focused on tasks immediately in front of them in order to get through security. This correlated with response tendencies related to negative emotions that included focusing or limiting attention to certain immediate stimuli (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Consequently, keeping passengers and defendants focused on security

and case processing, even if that meant they felt anxious or angry, actually kept them from asking questions, resisted requests, and held up the line. Although detrimental to individual customer agency and comfort, it helped to simplify interactions between employees and customers.

As negative emotional displays offer positive outcomes at the individual and dyadic/team level, they also prompt a number of organizational-level outcomes that are important to consider.

Organizational-level Outcomes

Many of the multi-level outcomes were nested, meaning that what was useful for the team/dyad also had important implications at the organizational level, and vice versa. Therefore, to avoid repetition, we focused broadly on the organizational level, briefly revisiting important claims from the team and dyad section, and considering the influence of negative emotional displays for the overall organizational system. As such, we explored more closely the ideas of organization efficiency and discipline.

Organizational efficiency. As demonstrated, certain negative emotional displays kept bureaucratic organizations moving efficiently which was critical for sensitive systems like the courtroom and airport security. Although performing negative emotions—in particular emotion management and simulated intimidation—may be difficult for employees, and encountering negative emotional displays certainly adds difficulty for passengers and defendants, these emotions kept the organizational system moving well.

Discipline. Thus, negative emotional displays at the expense of employees and customers greatly benefited the organization by disciplining both parties (Foucault, 1976). For example, when Judge Darson did not let defendants "act out" who were before her in jail court, she did not enjoy expressing that intimidation. Yet, her emotional display sent a message to the defendants who were watching her communicate. Similarly, while TSO Roger admitted "doing a commanding presence sucks," his actions kept passengers in line. Critically, negative emotional displays that appeared and are described as difficult to perform served to control employees as much as customers. As discussed above, negative emotional displays discouraged dissent, questions, and resistance from passengers and defendants which allowed for more effective organizing. Similarly, the mandate for such performances kept employees under control as well. Nearly every TSO interviewed acknowledged "the rules" and "standard operating procedures" as a rationale for difficult emotional performances. Similarly, judges acknowledged discourses of professionalism and image-related concerns that kept them walking the line between professional demonstrations of intimidation and sarcasm, and less appropriate demonstrations of anger.

In fact, it was the ongoing management of negative emotions that generated affirmative purposes. What we mean is that subtle demonstrations of intimidation and sarcasm offer utility whereas blowing up at passengers or defendants quickly becomes problematic. For instance, when TSOs lashed out at passengers or too harshly "mess with" passengers as Skeet described, negative emotional displays that would otherwise keep the system moving efficiently became cause for work stoppage and sometimes, national news (CNN, 2012; Mann, 2011). With these findings in mind, we now turn to our discussion and implications.

Discussion

Our findings revealed three specific negative emotional displays common in two different bureaucratic occupations—anger, sarcasm, and intimidation. Angry behavior manifested in response to a range of reactions including defendants who had chances to change their behavior and chose not to, and passengers who were not prepared for security procedures. Employees used sarcasm to discipline passengers and defendants, and also as a mechanism to leak pent up negative emotions. Finally, intimidation displays helped employees control and maintain order in their respective roles. TSOs and court employees also discussed using anger and frustration in subtle ways—suggesting that there is a wrong and a right way to display anger in both settings.

In addition to illustrating the three negative emotional displays, we explored some of the useful outcomes that displays of anger, sarcasm, and intimidation had at various levels of organizing. To summarize, individual-level implications of negative emotional displays involved: 1) putting role distance between self and defendant/passenger, 2) acting professionally and/or being "good" employees, and 3) enabling employees to enforce rules they do not necessarily agree with by providing emotional distance (e.g. "hiding" behind certain emotional performances). Dyad/team-level implications of negative emotional displays included: 1) building camaraderie between colleagues, 2) generating collaboration between colleagues 3) reducing work burdens for colleagues and 4) controlling interactions between employees and customers. Lastly, the results ended by explaining how negative emotional displays at the micro-level keep security lines moving and court cases processing faster at a macro-organizational level.

We recognize that some of these affirmative outcomes have appeared in past research. For example, we know that friendships

emerge in hostile work environments (Odden & Sias, 1997) and that organizational culture builds around shared experiences like difficult customers/clients (Kang, 2003). However, past research also suggests that bureaucratic environments hinder the development of workplace friendships due in part to rigid hierarchy and the lack of informal interaction (Matheson, 2007; Narayana, 1992). Therefore, it is interesting to look at these phenomena in bureaucratic contexts where people/cases are processed en masse and where employees are "front stage" without a lot of opportunity to interact informally. Indeed, our findings complicate past research that suggests bureaucracy is negatively related to workplace friendship (Mao, Chen, & Hsieh, 2009).

Critically, our study also extends current knowledge by considering the *interplay* between various levels of analysis where displays of negative emotion occur. For instance, what is good for dyadic-level employee friendships, such as sarcasm and bonding over customer stories, does not necessarily cultivate a good environment for business at the organizational level. Likewise, emotional performances that involve masking and simulation may be beneficial for organizational outcomes like fast lines and control, but are personally difficult both for employees performing emotions and passengers/defendants experiencing the performances. A multi-level approach enables more sophisticated theorizing, as we discuss further.

Theoretical Implications

An important theoretical implication of this study is recognizing the understated aspect of effective and intentional negative emotional displays at work. In other words, negative emotional displays can have useful outcomes when they are manifested by employees in *subtle*, not extreme ways. Displays by judges, bailiffs, and TSOs typically did not yield positive outcomes when they involved blowing up at passengers or defendants. Instead, extreme negative emotional displays resulted in organizational consequences from administrators, dissatisfied passengers and defendants, and--especially with airport security backlash from the media. However, subtle displays of negative emotion created benefits for the individual, dyad-team, and organization.

Furthermore, this study demonstrates that researching emotional expression in organizational settings demands complex consideration of the continuum of emotional experiences and outcomes. Answering Lindebaum and Jordan's (2014) call to question "symmetrical assumptions" in emotion research, we demonstrate that, on their face, negative emotional displays are not always destructive. Rather, outcomes depend on standpoint, or in this case, level of analysis. For example, while we somewhat cheekily argue that negative emotions can indeed be helpful, we pointedly ignore the organizational stakeholders at whom those emotions are expressed, whose experiences may not have clear positive outcomes (stances we consider in other projects). What may be good and helpful for employees to do to survive the qualitative and quantitative loads associated with bureaucratic work, keep their jobs, maintain good face, and keep organizations running smoothly can be extremely hurtful to customers. Yet, it is necessary for researchers to study emotional experiences complexly in order to reveal how differently valenced emotional displays influence various levels of analysis.

The findings also highlight how power and prestige relate to emotional displays and emotion management training. Both judges and TSOs reflected a tacit awareness that demonstrating anger is not professional or smart, and that subtle forms of negative emotional expression such as annoyance, sarcasm, and intimidation are more accepted and tolerated by administrators. However, status differences between judges and TSOs suggest different identity-related motivations for choosing which emotions to display. Specifically, judges are compelled by the norms of their prestigious profession to control emotion in order to establish or preserve a particular identity position—that of a "good" and "neutral" judge—which is reflected in the eyes of peers and is similar to what Wieland (2010) describes as idealized selves. Meanwhile TSOs are specifically *taught* emotion management techniques like being "calm, cool and collected" or having a "commanding presence." Although some TSOs rationalize these trainings as part and parcel of being a "good" and "professional" TSO, the actual purpose is purely an organizational one—to control passengers (and at the same time, TSOs). Indeed, the power and status of employees influences their ability to express negative emotion and in many cases moderates the organizational consequences they will face for those expressions. Judges at the top of the food chain in their courtrooms will likely not receive censure for acting improperly, whereas TSOs under the watchful eye of multiple managers and passengers with video-enabled phones might.

These findings may seem like common sense, but they only emerged when considering the contexts from a multi-level perspective. For example, the ability to make good out of emotionally difficult situations is paramount in helping bureaucratic workers navigate the material realities of work environments fraught with qualitative and quantitative overload, lack of autonomy, and endless streams of cases and passengers. However, the employees we interviewed did not explicitly extol the virtues of sarcasm and intimidation as strategic tools. Sarcasm seemed like a defense mechanism and intimidation, for some, a hassle or burden. It was only by considering the impacts of negative emotions to individuals, dyads and teams, and organizations in concert, and seeing how

outcomes converged and conflicted that we were able to identify as many affirmative results. By doing so, this analysis provides keen insight on emotional expression bureaucratic work environments that may be transferrable to other occupations such as health care and law enforcement. For instance, a similar dynamic might emerge between high status doctors and lower status nurses or aides in terms of the ability to perform negative emotions.

Practical Implications

Practical implications include ideas for improving employee training and subtly performing negative emotions. Courthouse administrators should be made aware of the useful outcomes of subtle negative emotional displays. Although it appears that TSA employees are trained to display intimidation, court employees are not. Also, both types of employees receive less training on how to effectively use anger and how certain emotional displays are more disruptive than others at work. For example, administrators could schedule short training sessions about how to use negative emotions to manage the courtroom. Likewise, Transportation Security Administration administrators would do well to clearly communicate to passengers about appropriate demeanors in security such that TSOs' gruff countenances might be considered part of professional security and not simply rude.

Perhaps more critically, an active discussion of how to perform negative emotions subtly can enable employees to express difficult feelings in ways that are less disruptive for themselves and organizational patrons. It is important to note that this suggestion means to help employees succeed in organizations as they currently function. We recognize and indeed argue in other articles that managing and suppressing negative emotions over the long term may have significant health and emotional consequences (Malvini Redden, 2013; Kemeny & Shestyuk, 2008). Bureaucratic organizations may be better served to find ways to accomplish organizational goals without trafficking in employees' negative emotions. However, since this one study will not change how bureaucratic systems function outright, we hope that the findings can equip employees with knowledge about how to be more successful right now. Although somewhat controversial given other organizational scholars' emphasis on workplace wellbeing, teaching employees about responsible uses of negative emotions acknowledges the difficulties associated with bureaucratic work.

Limitations and Future Research

There remain many research opportunities in highly regulated organizations such as the ones in this study. As mentioned, in bureaucracies where it is hard to locate a "boss," employees frequently experience quantitative and qualitative overload, and a lack of autonomy (Pines et al., 1981). These aspects of work likely contribute to the prevalence of negative emotional displays and related useful outcomes. More research in other types of organizations would be useful to see if negative emotional displays result in similar affirmative outcomes. For example, if customers have agency to shop at particular stores versus being summoned to court or forced to enter a mandatory security line, are there still useful and affirmative outcomes of negative emotional displays? Or are employee negative emotional displays solely related to decreases in customer satisfaction and sales, as past research indicates (Burns & Neisner, 2006)?

Also missing from this study are the voices of defendants and passengers, who contribute to employee emotional performances and indeed shape interactions. Holding scenario-based focus groups where defendants and passengers watch video of court employee and TSA behavior, and then provide their opinions and feedback would offer provocative insight on emotional performances. Researchers could also interview defendants and passengers immediately following negative emotional displays from employees to garner their responses.

Finally, future research would do well to examine gender differences in the expression of negative emotion and the resulting outcomes. In other words, do female employees who display negative emotions, such as intimidation, experience the same types of useful outcomes as male employees displaying similar emotions? For example, a few female judges explained during their interviews that when they expressed anger they were often labeled as rude or "bitchy" when their male colleagues were not. Exploring the acceptability of and response to negative emotional displays depending upon employee gender performance would be an important contribution.

The area of negative emotional displays in organizations is ripe for future research. Employees face a variety of challenges at work and their expression of emotion in response to those challenges helps regulate behavior and assists with organizing. Researchers should continue to explore the nuances of how various types of emotional displays can have sometimes unexpected but still useful outcomes for individuals, teams-dyads, and organizations.

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End Notes

[1] The names of the organizations have been changed to protect confidentiality.

[2] Schaudenfreude is a German word that refers to taking pleasure or enjoyment from the troubles of others (Bryner, 2011).

[3] Millimeter wave scanners utilize non-ionizing radiation, not no radiation at all, as the TSO claimed (Moulder, 2012).

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