

When Does Anger Boost Status?

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Abstract: A substantial literature asserts that anger expressions boost status. Across seven studies ($N = 4,027$), we demonstrate that this assertion is often wrong. Rather than boosting status, many anger expressions predictably diminish status. Prior claims linking anger with status are predicated on studies that have used a very narrow set of anger stimuli. We find that the intensity of expressed anger profoundly influences social perceptions and status conferral. We contrast anger expressions with sad expressions across different levels of intensity. We find that at low levels of intensity, anger expressions boost status conferral compared to sad expressions, but at high levels of intensity anger expressions harm status conferral compared to sad expressions and a neutral control condition. Taken together, our findings reveal that the relationship between expressed emotion and status is far more nuanced than prior work has assumed, and that the magnitude of an emotion can substantively moderate its effects.