MANAGING TO STAY IN THE DARK: MANAGERIAL SELF-EFFICACY, EGO DEFENSIVENESS, AND THE AVERSION TO EMPLOYEE VOICE

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Soliciting and incorporating employee voice is essential to organizational performance, yet some managers display a strong aversion to improvement-oriented input from subordinates. To help to explain this maladaptive tendency, we tested the hypothesis that managers with low managerial self-efficacy (that is, low perceived ability to meet the elevated competence expectations associated with managerial roles) seek to minimize voice as a way of compensating for a threatened ego. The results of two studies support this idea. In a field study (Study 1), managers with low managerial self-efficacy were less likely than others to solicit input, leading to lower levels of employee voice. A follow-up experimental study (Study 2) showed that: (a) manipulating low managerial self-efficacy led to voice aversion (that is, decreased voice solicitation, negative evaluations of an employee who spoke up, and reduced implementation of voice); and (b) the observed voice aversion associated with low managerial self-efficacy was driven by ego defensiveness. We discuss the theoretical and practical implications of these findings, as well as highlight directions for future research on voice, management, and leadership.

Encouraging employees to speak up with improvement-oriented ideas to those with the power to initiate change is one of the most potent ways in which organizational leaders can promote learning, effectively implement change, and ensure superior individual and group performance (Edmondson, 1999; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Extensive research shows that many benefits accrue when managers are open and responsive to the ideas and suggestions of individuals at all levels of the organizational hierarchy. The positive outcomes associated with employees speaking up in this way include better working conditions (Hirschman, 1970), higher employee motivation (Zapata-Phelan, Colquitt, Scott, & Livingston, 2009), reduced employee turnover (McClean, Detert, & Burris, 2013), and improved managerial effectiveness (Morrison, 2011). Given these benefits, one might assume that managers are naturally highly motivated to encourage employee voice. However, a close inspection of managers' behavior in organizations shows that a large number of man-

agers actually engage in actions that indicate an *aversion* to soliciting, rewarding, and implementing voice (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003).

Taking note of this phenomenon, organizational scholars have sought to identify the types of managerial behavior and practice that encourage or dissuade voice, and to document how these behaviors and the resulting level of employee voice influence employee morale and productivity (e.g., Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, Hayes, & Wierba, 1997; Morrison, 2011; Saunders, Sheppard, Knight, & Roth, 1992; Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy, 2002). Although this body of work provides insight into *how* managers may exhibit an aversion to employee voice in the workplace, it is also important to understand *which* managers find employee voice aversive in the first place and *why*. Yet very little research has examined the motivational origins of voice aversion to uncover why some managers limit their solicitation of voice or willingness to reward and implement ideas once they are offered, rather than engage in behaviors that encourage employees to offer im-

provement-oriented ideas. Our research seeks to offer such insight by calling attention to the psychological processes that may lead some managers to become averse to employee voice.

Our perspective on voice aversion comprises three core arguments. First, we draw from role theory and related research on work roles (Biddle, 1979, 1986; Sluss, van Dick, & Thompson, 2011) to suggest that people internalize and feel the need to embody the expectations associated with their roles (Katz & Kahn, 1978). This internalization of role expectations is especially strong when the roles themselves are desirable and provide social advantages, as is the case with managerial roles (Joshi & Fast, 2013; Kahn, 1990).

Second, we argue that a central feature of the managerial role is to demonstrate efficacy—that is, to possess the competence necessary to be effective and influential in one's environment (Cuddy, Glick, & Beninger, 2011). We are particularly interested in the pressure that managers themselves feel to be efficacious (that is, effective and influential) in the context of their managerial roles.

Third, drawing from self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), we propose that managers who feel unable to fulfill their role-based expectations (that is, those who have low managerial self-efficacy) experience ego defensiveness owing to a discrepancy between their own perceived ability to perform their roles successfully and "ought"-related competence standards. In turn, such managers become averse to voice as a way of ameliorating feelings of threat associated with the challenging nature of employee voice. Recent findings offer indirect support for our position that managers with low managerial self-efficacy feel personally threatened by, and react defensively to, employee voice. For instance, the self-perceived failure of individuals in high-power roles to fulfill high competence expectations threatens self-worth and triggers defensive tendencies (Cho & Fast, 2012; Fast & Chen, 2009). Building on these core ideas, we posit that managers with low managerial self-efficacy become voice averse because they feel threatened (see Figure 1).

Our research aims to contribute to the literatures on voice and leadership. First and foremost, we seek to offer insight into why some managers actively reach out to employees for their suggestions and input, and why others are voice averse. In other words, we examine these manager behaviors as an *outcome* of importance rather than solely as a *predictor* that determines voice. Specifically, we posit that managerial self-efficacy plays a vital role in prompting manager behaviors that ultimately discourage employee voice. We focus on voice aversion as manifested in managers' tendencies to solicit less employee voice, to evaluate negatively those employees who speak up, and to implement fewer employee ideas.

Second, we seek to highlight the psychological process underlying this maladaptive tendency—namely, that the prospect of employees speaking up about possible improvements may add fuel to

FIGURE 1
Conceptual Model of Managerial Self-Efficacy, Ego Threat, and Voice Aversion
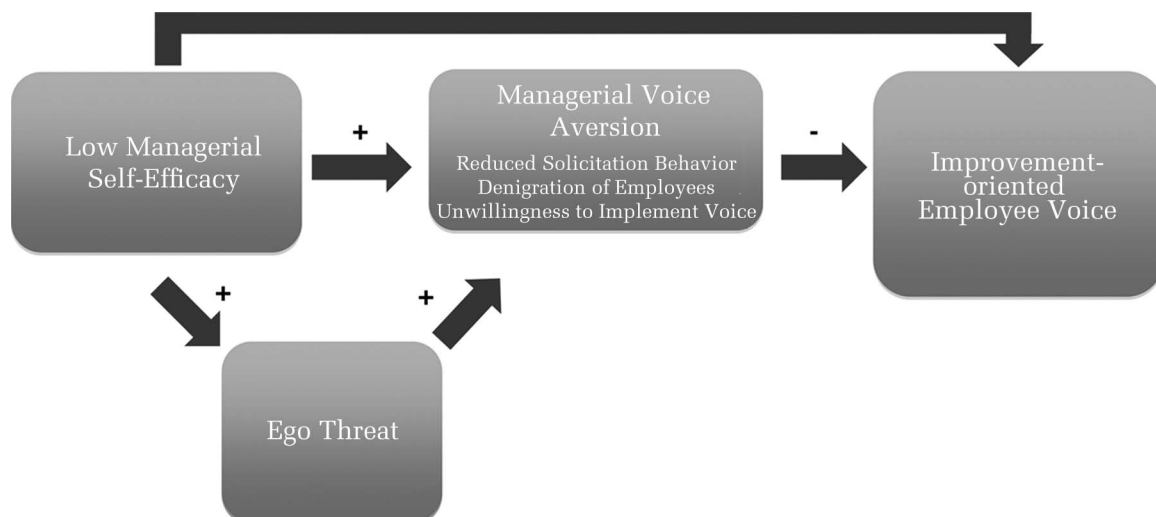
the fire of the already-threatened egos of managers with low managerial self-efficacy and that, as a result, such managers will exhibit greater aversion to employee voice. Thus we propose that ego defensiveness is a mechanism responsible for voice aversion.

Third, we contribute to the leadership literature, which has invested considerable effort in understanding the consequences of various leadership behaviors, but has generated less knowledge about the *determinants* of these behaviors. The arguments and studies described in this paper implicate managers' self-perceptions as a critical factor that determines leadership styles and behaviors. For as long as individuals with varying efficacy come to occupy managerial positions (Atwater, Ostroff, Yammarino, & Fleenor, 1998), understanding the psychological processes that shape their leadership styles and aversion (or otherwise) to voice is an important endeavor.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

"Improvement-oriented voice" refers to speaking up in ways that seek to challenge or replace the established practices, policies, or strategic directions that comprise the status quo among those individuals who created or otherwise sustain those aspects of the organization (Burris, 2012). In most instances, employees direct improvement-oriented ideas to their immediate manager. How managers view and respond to such voice has primarily been studied from the perspective of employees. Indeed, an impressive body of research documents how employees use managers' behaviors as important indicators of the extent to which speaking up will be welcomed. When employees feel that managers display behaviors that support voice, they are more likely to engage in it. For instance, Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) showed that employees who perceived their leaders as inclusive were more likely to speak up. Detert and Burris (2007) found that leader openness and transformational behaviors were positively related to employees feeling psychologically safe to speak up and, in turn, to their subsequent voice behavior. And Burris, Detert, and Chiaburu (2008) concluded that abusive supervision and the quality of leader–member relationships influenced the frequency of employee voice. This stream of research is quite rich with studies documenting the concerns of employees in speaking up to managers who have some power

over the employees' careers (Milliken et al., 2003). However, fewer studies have examined the managerial viewpoint, including managers' motivations for displaying behaviors that encourage versus discourage voice or their actual reactions to employee voice once it is offered. As a result, why some managers welcome and purposely seek out employees' improvement-oriented ideas while other managers do not is not well understood.

Managerial Views of Employee Voice

Despite the benefits that improvement-oriented voice offers managers and the units that they lead (McClean et al., 2013; Morrison & Milliken, 2000), there is a potential for managers to find the feedback personally threatening and to react defensively (Argyris & Schon, 1978). Since employees voice their ideas and suggestions voluntarily (Van Dyne, Cummings, & McLean Parks, 1995), managers may recognize that employees are in fact going out of their way to offer critiques that challenge the status quo. Indeed, scores of studies have noted that individuals are quite reluctant to attend to and take action on input from others, especially when the feedback is unsolicited and offered by those with less power (Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006). For instance, Burris (2012) found that managers are especially reticent to support employee ideas that directly challenge the status quo. Additional work indicates that individuals who feel powerful tend to ignore advice from both experts and novices alike (See, Morrison, Rothman, & Soll, 2011; Tost, Gino, & Larrick, 2012). In short, openly discussing problematic work processes and the behaviors of people that contribute to these problems can be viewed not only as unnecessary, but also, in many cases, as a direct critique of the managers responsible for those aspects of the organization (Beer, 2009; Detert & Edmondson, 2011).

Based on these findings, managers may find improvement-oriented voice difficult to hear. In particular, voice can be perceived as personally threatening because speaking up implicitly points out problems with the manager (Burris, 2012). Upward feedback, like improvement-oriented voice, often implicitly criticizes a manager's performance, or is interpreted by that manager as a commentary or reflection on his or her character or ability (Kluger & Denisi, 1996). Feelings of threat may ensue when these challenges are viewed as attempts to draw attention to managers' shortcomings—a lack of knowledge of the problem, if nothing else—that

have yet to be addressed. This fits well with the observation that, "To some leaders, allowing employees to participate is viewed as an abdication of authority" (Beer, 2009: 174), a commentary on the role of a leader who should be able to make strategically appropriate decisions and direct the efficient execution of tasks (Fenton-O'Creevy, 1998; Lord, Foti, & DeVader, 1984). As a result of this implied blame, managers have a tendency to see employees who speak up with constructive, yet change-oriented, suggestions as particularly threatening (Burris, 2012).

Although this difficulty in receiving voice exists, to some extent, for all managers, some might experience greater difficulty than others in being open to and seeking out employee feedback. We suggest that managers' self-perceptions provide a powerful lens through which they make sense of and take action in their work contexts. Critically, how managers understand their role, along with their sense of efficacy in performing that role, is likely to affect how threatened they feel when employees speak up. As we outline below, managers' role-based self-efficacy should impact on their solicitation of, and responses to, improvement-oriented voice from employees.

Managerial Roles and Pressure to Demonstrate Competence

We draw from role theory to suggest that the expectations associated with the managerial role produce a great deal of pressure for managers to demonstrate competence, leading to implications for voice solicitation. Building on seminal work in sociology (e.g., Mead, 1934; Merton, 1957; Parsons, 1951), role theory focuses on the social positions that people occupy in particular contexts and seeks to explain what causes people in such roles to acquire certain expectations for their own and others' behaviors (Biddle, 1979, 1986). Although perspectives on role theory span multiple academic disciplines, an underlying theme that cuts across these different streams of research is that people are greatly influenced by their roles and, indeed, experience a great deal of pressure to meet the expectations associated with their roles (Biddle, 1986). For instance, work roles specify people's social positions in organizations, and define their sense of personal and professional identity in that context, such that "the more salient the role identity, the more meaning, purpose and behavioral guidance the individual should derive from its enactment"

(Thoits, 1991: 106). The role of "manager" is one such salient role within the organizational setting that comes with a number of expectations (Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Although managerial roles have specific task-based expectations that often vary from organization to organization, all managers face remarkable pressure to demonstrate personal efficacy—that is, to possess the skills and abilities necessary to be effective and influential in the context of their managerial roles (e.g., Fiske et al., 2002; Mintzberg, 2009). This need for efficacy comes from multiple sources. First, people generally view hierarchical roles as merit-based (e.g., Adams, 1965; Chen & Tyler, 2001), and therefore expect and demand that role occupants possess elevated abilities relative to others. Expectations for superior efficacy also emerge as a result of the tendency to place leaders on a pedestal, attributing overall group or organizational performance to their individual efforts (e.g., Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985; Pfeffer, 1977). People often expect leaders singlehandedly to drive their organizations to succeed, and tend to praise or blame leaders depending on whether organizational performance is strong or weak (Zemba, Young, & Morris, 2006). Consequently, managers face strong expectations from internal and external stakeholders, prescribing that they have the personal capacity to be influential at the individual, group, and organizational levels (Mintzberg, 2009).

Such role expectations are reflected in organizational research that establishes efficacy as an important managerial prerequisite. Hollander (1958) revealed that a manager's legitimacy in the eyes of others flows partly from the perception that the manager is sufficiently competent to achieve success in a variety of particular tasks or goals. Research on implicit leadership theories (e.g., Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Gioia & Sims, 1985; Lord et al., 1984) has established that observers possess distinct expectations regarding appropriate leader characteristics based on the context and type of position, with task- or goal-relevant efficacy being an expected characteristic for task-focused leaders (Judge, Piccolo, & Ilies, 2004). Further evidence of the importance of efficacy for managers comes from an emerging area of organizational research examining the psychological pressures that those holding power generally experience. Managers have "power" over their subordinates—defined as disproportionate control over valued resources, resulting in a state of disproportionate dependence (e.g., Emerson, 1962; Magee & Galinsky, 2008).

Thus, above and beyond expectations associated with particular managerial roles, managers also face expectations associated with power more broadly. Notably, individuals in high-power roles are expected to exhibit greater merit, in the form of competence, than those in less-powerful roles and, moreover, the powerful tend to *internalize* this expectation as a standard for the self (Fast & Chen, 2009). Elevated power, then, is another reason why managers are expected by others, and expect themselves, to be personally efficacious.

In sum, compelling evidence supports the idea that managers, as occupants of roles with formal power over subordinates, experience a strong need to demonstrate superior personal competence at work. Thus the extent to which managers perceive that they are efficacious in the context of their roles should influence how they approach their work and specific ways in which they interact with others. Building on these foundational ideas, we propose and test the idea that self-perceived competence in the managerial role, which we refer to as "managerial self-efficacy," will have important implications for the extent to which managers solicit and/or respond positively to improvement-oriented employee voice.

Managerial Self-Efficacy and Voice Aversion

While managers generally experience pressure from organization members to be efficacious, not all managers feel successful in meeting this expectation. Indeed, managers differ in terms of their perceived managerial self-efficacy—that is, their belief in their own ability to complete tasks and to reach goals in specific situations (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy has notable overlap with other constructs, such as personal mastery (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978) and agency (James, 1890). However, here, we refer to managerial self-efficacy as the perceived capacity to be effective and influential within the organizational domain in which one is a manager, whereas the overlapping constructs are more generic and not limited to a particular domain. Importantly, managers can have a low sense of managerial self-efficacy even when they are actually competent in their managerial roles, as assessed by some objective measure (Atwater et al., 1998). Indeed, subjective and objective levels of competence often diverge (Kruger & Dunning, 1999).

Assuming that managers are motivated to perform well on the job, one might reasonably expect that those with low managerial self-efficacy would try harder to capitalize on the ideas and recommendations of others. Indeed, subordinates' improvement-oriented ideas can increase overall unit performance (Morrison, 2011), and managers, in turn, are often praised for and credited with this success (Zemba et al., 2006). By implication, it seems sensible for managers with low self-efficacy to welcome employee voice as a means of improving their unit's performance and, in so doing, demonstrating to others a measure of competence in their work role.

Rather than seeking voice, however, we posit that managers with low managerial self-efficacy are actually motivated to *avoid* employee voice. Such voice aversion stems from feelings of threat associated with perceptions of the self as unable to demonstrate effectively the competence that the managerial role requires. In particular, managers who believe that they ought to be competent, but who perceive themselves as unable to be effective in their role, are likely to feel threatened by their perceived inability to fulfill a critical role expectation (see Cho & Fast, 2012; Fast & Chen, 2009). Lacking managerial self-efficacy is therefore a threatening psychological state that is likely to have a profound impact on managers' reactions to improvement-oriented employee voice—an act potentially carrying negative personal implications for managers. As a result, managers with low managerial self-efficacy are likely to be especially threatened by the negative self-relevant implications underlying employee voice.

One way in which such managers protect themselves from challenging input is simply by failing to seek out or solicit employee feedback proactively. Whereas managers who feel highly efficacious may expect employees to interpret voice solicitation as an expression of confidence and an act of leadership, managers with low managerial self-efficacy may fear that soliciting voice will be seen as an admission of personal inadequacy (Lee, 1997) or will result in particularly critical feedback. Indeed, managers often view ideas originating from employees within their own organization as less valuable than outside ideas because of the threat associated with those ideas (Menon & Pfeffer, 2003). We therefore predict that managers with low managerial self-efficacy will be less, rather than more, likely to solicit employee voice:

Hypothesis 1. Managers with lower managerial self-efficacy are less likely to solicit voice from

subordinates than managers with higher managerial self-efficacy.

Managers' perceptions of their efficacy in their role may also affect the likelihood that employees will actually speak up, partly because of the extent to which managers solicit employees' ideas. First, managers can signal that employee voice is welcome or not by means of their reactions to voice after it has surfaced (Burris, 2012). Managers who lack managerial self-efficacy may be more attuned to the potential threat associated with voice and may therefore engage in harsher reactions to voice when it is offered.

Second, managers can also influence voice proactively, by directly soliciting employees' feedback on a variety of issues. When managers solicit voice, they create an overall climate that encourages employees to speak up and offer improvement-oriented ideas. For example, a great deal of research has demonstrated that when leaders foster a climate marked by psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), members feel freer to take risks, propose changes, and learn from mistakes (e.g., Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009). In contrast, when managers send signals that they are not interested in receiving ideas for improving their unit or organization, employees are much less likely to speak up (Detert & Burris, 2007; Edmondson, 1999). Thus a decreased tendency to solicit voice among self-protective managers with low managerial self-efficacy is likely to be largely responsible for the reduced amount of voice offered by employees.

We therefore posit the following predictions:

Hypothesis 2. Subordinates are less likely to speak up to managers with lower managerial self-efficacy than to managers with higher managerial self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 3. Managerial solicitation of voice mediates the relationship between managers' managerial self-efficacy and subordinate voice behavior.

To test our predictions that lower managerial self-efficacy is associated with voice aversion, we employed a comprehensive approach by, first, studying naturally occurring phenomena in the field, and then moving into the laboratory to manipulate the proposed mechanisms driving these observed relationships (Chatman & Flynn, 2005). Study 1 describes a field study, conducted in the context of a large, multinational oil and gas exploration and refinery corporation, to test predictions about how managerial self-efficacy relates to employee voice and how managerial solicitation of voice is a behavioral mechanism mediating this relationship. Study 2—an experiment—builds on these ideas, focusing on the psychology behind managers' aversion to employee voice, as well as managers' willingness to implement voice and their reactions to those who speak up.

STUDY 1

Method

Context and sample. We collected data from four divisions within a large, multinational oil and gas exploration and refinery organization. These divisions included two geographical divisions in which potential exploration sites are analyzed, engineered, and eventually drilled, and two corporate administration divisions involved in centralized planning and budgeting. In all divisions, we surveyed highly educated and trained individuals in the hard sciences (such as chemists, geologists, geophysicists), engineers charged with drilling (for example, petroleum engineers, environmental engineers, drillers), and support staff (including procurement officers, accountants, etc.). We collected different sets of variables from three non-overlapping sources: web-based surveys of employees, web-based surveys of their managers, and internal human resources (HR) databases from company records. We also took precautions to protect confidentiality and communicated those measures to the respondents (for example by using unique identification numbers in the dataset, reporting only aggregated reports to the sponsoring organization, etc.).

Managers provided self-assessments of their managerial self-efficacy. Out of a possible 93 within the organization, 54 managers (58.1%) provided usable responses. Additionally, 304 employees out of a possible 544 (55.9%) provided responses to all of the items for perceived managerial solicitation of voice, employee voice behavior, and all of the control variables. After matching across these two sources and against the available control variables from the HR records, our final sample consisted of 148 employees matched with 41 managers for a final overall response rate of 27.2%. Thus each manager in the final sample had an average of 3.61 employees providing survey assessments. Employees in the final sample did not differ

in terms of any demographic variables from those not in the final sample (that is, in terms of age, gender, and organizational tenure). In addition, employees whose managers also provided survey responses did not differ from those employees whose managers did not provide survey responses in terms of their perceptions of managerial solicitation of voice ($t_{(303)} = .02$, *ns*) nor the amount of voice that they provide ($t_{(303)} = .63$, *ns*).

Managerial solicitation of voice. Our two dependent variables were perceived managerial solicitation of voice and employee voice behavior. We created a scale for perceived *managerial solicitation of voice*, because there are no existing scales for this construct. To provide construct validation for this new measure, we collected data for three studies using the recommendations outlined by Hinkin (1998) and MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Podsakoff (2011). First, we administered a survey containing an initial 12 items to 201 working professionals. After removing items that did not load strongly on the primary factor of an exploratory factor analysis, four items remained.

In a second study, we conducted a comprehensive expert rating investigation to examine quantitatively the content adequacy of our four-item voice solicitation measure (Schriesheim, Cogliser, Scandura, Lankau, & Powers, 1999). We asked 30 faculty and doctoral students in management to be content raters to discriminate voice solicitation from two other prominent positive, leader behaviors: the "consideration" dimension of leadership behavior (Judge et al., 2004), and the "inspiring of a shared vision" dimension of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The items for solicitation meaningfully separated from the other leadership behaviors, indicating that our measure sampled the appropriate content domain.

Finally, in a third study, we tested the discriminant and convergent validity of voice solicitation using survey responses from 205 employees from a small financial services organization. Correlational and confirmatory factor analyses suggested that our solicitation measure was related to, but displayed discriminant validity from, several related constructs such as supervisor openness (Detert & Burris, 2007), leader–member exchange (Scandura & Graen, 1984), abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), and proactive personality (Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999). Taken together, the results across these three studies provided support for the content domain and measurement quality of the voice solicitation scale, by illustrating the process for item selection, and demonstrating convergent validity with similar constructs and discriminant validity from related constructs.

We assessed perceived solicitation using four items on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Always*):

(1) "Asks me personally to tell him/her about things that I think would be helpful for improving this organization,"
(2) "Asks me personally to tell him/her about how things have been done in my previous job(s),"
(3) "Seeks out task-related knowledge from me," and
(4) "Asks me personally what skills I have that s/he may not know about that might contribute to our performance here."

The estimated reliability was $\alpha = .91$.

Employee voice behavior. We measured our second dependent variable, *improvement-oriented voice*, using the three-item measure from Detert and Burris (2007). We assessed voice on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Almost never*) to 5 (*Almost always*). The three items were:

(1) "I give [manager's name] suggestions about how to make this work unit better, even if others disagree";
(2) "I challenge [manager's name] to deal with problems around here"; and
(3) "I speak up to [manager's name] with ideas to address employees' needs and concerns."

The estimated reliability was $\alpha = .81$.

Managerial self-efficacy. To assess *managerial self-efficacy*, we used the measure of perceived self-efficacy developed by Chen, Gully, and Eden (2001), which assesses the perception that one can competently perform tasks and accomplish objectives. This is an eight-item measure, assessed on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). To ensure that the measure assessed sense of competence in the managerial role, we specifically asked participants to answer the items as they related to their own job and work domain. Sample items include: "When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them"; "I will be able to successfully overcome many challenges"; "I am confident that I can perform effectively on many different tasks"; and "Compared to other people, I can do most tasks very well."

The estimated reliability was $\alpha = .90$.

Controls. We assessed a number of control variables that allowed us to account for possible alter-

native explanations for our results. We first assessed demographic variables, because a number of studies have found that certain demographic categories such as *gender* (e.g., Detert & Burris, 2007) and *organizational tenure* (e.g., Liang, Farh, & Farh, 2012) influence the extent to which members speak up. We obtained data about employee gender and tenure from the HR records. We also included a measure of the pay grade of the employee (*hierarchical level*), because this generically accounted for job type and sophistication, both of which could influence the frequency of voice.

We also accounted for alternative explanations for why employees may systematically rate their managers higher or lower on voice solicitation behavior, and consequently the frequency with which they offer voice. We first accounted for general employee attitudes toward the organization with a three-item measure of *job satisfaction*: employees who are more satisfied with their employment may also feel that their manager solicits their input more frequently and may consequently offer voice more frequently (Withey & Cooper, 1989). These three items comprised:

(1) "All in all, I like working on this job";
(2) "Generally speaking, I am very satisfied with this job"; and
(3) "Overall, I think I'm as happy as I could be with this job."

The estimated reliability was $\alpha = .90$.

We also included employees' general attitudes toward their leaders to account for the possibility that the more positive an employee feels about his or her manager, the more that employee may feel his or her voice to be solicited by that manager. Previous research has found that transformational leadership positively influences the frequency of employee voice (Detert & Burris, 2007). We assessed *transformational leadership* with a four-item measure of inspiring a shared vision taken from Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, and Fetter (1990):

(1) "Paints a compelling vision of the future for our unit,"
(2) "Is always seeking new opportunities for the organization,"
(3) "Inspires others with his/her plans for the future," and
(4) "Is able to get others committed to his/her vision."

The estimated reliability was $\alpha = .91$.

We accounted for voice-specific attitudes by including a three-item measure of the *futility* of speaking up, because previous research has noted that futility negatively influences the prevalence of employee voice (Burris et al., 2008):

(1) "Trying to improve things around here by speaking up is a waste of time,"
(2) "It is useless for me to suggest new ways of doing things here," and
(3) "Nothing changes even if I speak up to managers."

The estimated reliability was $\alpha = .93$.

Additionally, we included a measure of *turnover intention*, because previous research has shown that withdrawal cognitions can influence the willingness of employees to speak up (Burris et al., 2008). We used three items:

(1) "I often think about quitting this job,"
(2) "I intend to leave [this organization] in the near future," and
(3) "I plan to try getting a job elsewhere (another company) before too long."

The estimated reliability was $\alpha = .93$.

Finally, we measured employee *perceptions of manager effectiveness* with a four-item measure adapted from the measure of self-efficacy of Chen et al. (2001) by changing the referent from the self to the manager. This allowed us to account for how competent managers are in the eyes of their employees. The items comprised:

(1) "Compared to others, my supervisor can do most tasks very well";
(2) "My supervisor is able to achieve most of the goals that s/he has set";
(3) "My supervisor is able to successfully overcome many challenges"; and
(4) "Even when things are tough, my supervisor can perform quite well."

The estimated reliability was $\alpha = .94$.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables. Consistent with past research (Detert & Trevino, 2010; Withey & Cooper, 1989), job satisfaction is positively related to both managerial solicitation and voice behavior, while perceptions of futility are negatively related to solicitation and voice behavior. Additionally, both managerial self-efficacy and solicitation behavior

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (Study 1)[a]

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Gender[b]	1.07	.25										
2 Organizational tenure (years)	9.98	8.43	.01									
3 Hierarchical level	16.90	.64	−.08	.01								
4 Job satisfaction	5.92	1.12	.04	.16	.14							
5 Transformational leadership	3.69	.97	.01	.05	−.05	.45**						
6 Futility	2.57	1.45	.02	−.18*	.02	−.52**	−.48**					
7 Turnover intention	2.50	1.56	−.10	−.10	−.03	−.64**	−.36**	.38**				
8 Perceptions of manager effectiveness	4.13	.77	−.08	.08	.02	.55**	.69**	−.36**	−.42**			
9 Managerial self-efficacy	4.46	.47	−.17*	.06	.03	−.12	−.10	.13	.14	−.14		
10 Managerial solicitation of voice	3.24	1.04	.02	.27**	−.04	.48**	.54**	−.44**	−.35**	.43**	.08	
11 Employee voice behavior	3.43	.76	.04	.13	.09	.23**	.08	−.19*	−.14	.09	.17*	.39**

[a] $n = 148$.
[b] 1 = male, 2 = female.
 * $p < .05$
 ** $p < .01$

are positively related to employee voice behavior. We also note that the raw correlation between managerial self-efficacy and solicitation behavior is not statistically significant ($r = .08$, *ns*), opening up the possibility of statistical suppression if the effect of manager self-efficacy were to become significant in the multilevel models (Conger, 1974).

To assess the factor structures of the job satisfaction, transformational leadership, futility, manager effectiveness, turnover intention, and managerial solicitation of voice measures obtained from employees, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (Bentler & Dudgeon, 1996). We specified a seven-factor structure, using the comparative fit index (CFI), normed fit index (NFI), and root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) to assess fit. The structure achieved good fit with the data ($\chi^2(70) = 268.21$, CFI = .98, NFI = .96, RMSEA = .03). All factor loadings were statistically significant and ranged from .81 to .94 for job satisfaction, .78 to .90 for transformational leadership, .90 to .91 for futility, .88 to .93 for manager effectiveness, .80 to .92 for turnover intention, and .84 to .86 for managerial solicitation. Chi-square difference tests showed that all alternative nested models achieved significantly poorer fit. For example, constraining the transformational leadership and managerial solicitation (the two variables describing leadership behaviors) to load on one factor produced a significantly worse fit to the data ($\chi^2(75) = 661.28$, CFI = .91, NFI = .88, RMSEA = .08). These analyses provided support for the expected factor structure of the variables.

Because employees are nested within managers and these managers provided assessments of their own managerial self-efficacy, the data were not independent. We calculated the intra-class correlation coefficients (ICCs) for both of our dependent variables to assess whether our data violated assumptions of independence owing to the nested structure. We found that the ICCs for both employee voice and managerial solicitation of voice were negligible and not significant (voice: $F(50, 147) = .91$, *ns*; solicitation: $F(50, 147) = .82$, *ns*). Nonetheless, we proceeded to use multilevel analyses to account for the nested structure of the data in testing our hypotheses.

In Model 1 of Table 2, we entered the control variables predicting managerial solicitation of voice. We found that tenure ($t(140) = 2.67$, $p < .01$), job satisfaction ($t(140) = 2.61$, $p < .01$), and transformational behaviors ($t(140) = 4.03$, $p < .01$) were positively related to solicitation of voice. In Model 2, we entered our independent variable, managerial self-efficacy, to test our first hypothesis that managers' efficacy at work would be positively related to their solicitation of employee voice (Hypothesis 1). Entering this variable significantly increased the explanatory power of the model ($\Delta -2$ log likelihood = 4.27, $p < .05$). In support of Hypothesis 1, we found that managerial self-efficacy is positively related to solicitation of voice ($t(139) = 2.13$, $p < .05$).

As shown in Model 3, we tested the relationship between the control variables and employee voice behavior. We did not find any significant

TABLE 2
Multilevel Analyses Predicting Managerial Solicitation of Voice and Employee Voice (Study 1)[a]

Variables	Managerial solicitation of voice		Employee voice		
Control variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Constant	1.20	−.08	1.55	−.05	−.11
	(1.88)	(2.02)	(1.81)	(1.88)	(1.78)
Gender[b]	.06	.12	.11	.23	.19
	(.27)	(.27)	(.26)	(.26)	(.24)
Organizational tenure (years)	.02**	.02**	.01	.01	−.01
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Hierarchical level	−.07	−.08	.08	.07	.10
	(.11)	(.11)	(.10)	(.10)	(.09)
Job satisfaction	.24**	.23*	.13	.13	.06
	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)	(.08)
Transformational leadership	.41**	.41**	−.02	−.03	−.16
	(.09)	(.10)	(.10)	(.09)	(.09)
Futility	−.07	−.08	−.06	−.07	−.05
	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.05)	(.05)
Turnover intention	.01	−.01	.01	.01	.01
	(.06)	(.06)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)
Perceptions of manager effectiveness	.06	.05	−.04	−.01	−.01
	(.13)	(.13)	(.12)	(.12)	(.12)
Independent variable					
Managerial self-efficacy		.35*		.35*	.23
		(.16)		(.14)	(.13)
Mediator variable					
Managerial solicitation of employee voice					.31**
					(.08)
Leader-level variance[c]	.08	.04	.00	.00	.00
	(.07)	(.07)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)
−2 log likelihood	387.66	383.39	369.37	365.24	352.19
Δ −2 log likelihood		4.27*		4.13*	13.05**

[a] *n* = 148; unstandardized coefficients are reported, with standard errors in parentheses.
[b] 1 = male, 2 = female.
[c] Estimate of the random variance between leaders.
  * $p < .05$
  ** $p < .01$

relationships. In Model 4, we entered managerial self-efficacy, which significantly increased the variance explained by the model (Δ −2 log likelihood = 4.13, $p < .05$). In support of Hypothesis 2, we found that managerial self-efficacy is positively related to employee voice behavior ($t(139) = 2.52$, $p < .05$).

We next tested for the presence of mediation (Hypothesis 3). As shown in Model 5, we entered solicitation of voice into the model predicting employee voice behavior. We found that solicitation of voice is positively related to employee voice behavior ($t(138) = 4.16$, $p < .01$) and that adding this variable increased the variance explained in the model (Δ −2 log likelihood = 13.05, $p < .01$). Additionally, managerial self-efficacy was no longer

significantly related to employee voice behavior ($t(138) = 1.77$, $p > .05$). We used bootstrap procedures to construct bias-corrected confidence intervals based on 1,000 random samples with replacement from the full sample (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). The 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect through managers' solicitation behaviors excluded zero (0.02, 0.26), indicating statistical significance and supporting mediation.

The results of Study 1 support our hypotheses. Managers who felt a lack of self-efficacy on the job were less likely to solicit voice (Hypothesis 1). Subordinates were less likely to speak up to managers with lower managerial self-efficacy than those with higher managerial self-efficacy (Hypothesis 2). Further, managerial solicitation behavior explained

the relationship between managerial self-efficacy and employee voice behavior (Hypothesis 3).

Although these results are consistent with our proposed model, features of the research design offer some limitations. For instance, the correlational nature of the data precludes us from assessing causality in this study. We cannot rule out the possibility that managerial self-efficacy is an outcome, rather than a predictor, of employee voice: if subordinates, for whatever reason, do not perceive that their managers solicit voice and subsequently do not offer that voice, then managers lacking access to subordinate insights may consequently have less access to valuable information and may feel less efficacious in their managerial roles. Our results also open up the possibility of statistical suppression wherein the relationship between managerial self-efficacy and solicitation is stronger when a set of control variables is present than when examining the raw correlation (Conger, 1974). Perhaps a contributing factor was a relatively high mean and a lack of variance in managerial self-efficacy ($M = 4.46$, $SD = .47$). Additionally, our dependent measures assessed employee perceptions of leader behaviors (solicitation) and reports of their own behavior (voice); we did not capture managers' own assessments of their approach to voice, nor did we capture other forms of voice aversion—particularly how managers respond to voice once it has already been offered by employees. By expanding our dependent variables to include additional forms of voice aversion, as well as recording individuals' own ratings of these dependent variables, we would obtain a fuller picture of how a manager's self-perceptions affects his or her stance toward employee voice. Finally, although our theory hints at the role of perceived threat as a primary reason why managers who lack managerial self-efficacy are disinclined to solicit employee voice, we have not investigated the psychological mechanism(s) underlying why such managers may avoid voice and react more negatively to it.

To address these issues, we conducted an additional study using experimental methodology.

STUDY 2

Our second study develops additional hypotheses associated with voice aversion and the psychological mechanism(s) underlying these effects. We used an experimental method to demonstrate that low managerial self-efficacy causes voice aversion. Specifically, we assessed the degree to which managers experiencing low managerial self-efficacy not only solicit voice less, but also react less favorably to voice once it is raised, as evidenced by the managers evaluating less positively those employees who speak up and being less willing to implement suggestions. Further, this experimental design allows us to assess the psychological mechanism of ego defensiveness as a possible explanatory mechanism for managers' aversion to employee voice.

Hypotheses

We have implicated "ego threat" as an explanation of why managers with low managerial self-efficacy are voice averse. Psychological research on the self has established that ego threat often triggers an internal state of defensiveness (e.g., Maner et al., 2005). Self-discrepancy theory suggests that this defensive state is especially likely to emerge when people experience a discrepancy between their *actual* self and their *standards* for the self (Carver, Lawrence, & Scheier, 1999; Higgins, 1987, 1989). This is precisely the type of discrepancy that managers with low managerial self-efficacy are likely to feel—a gap between their actual views of the self (that is, as lacking high levels of competence in their managerial role) and their "ought"-based standards for the self (that is, as needing to feel highly competent in their work role). Thus feelings of low managerial self-efficacy that threaten managers' self-worth (by establishing a discrepancy between their actual and ought selves) may activate ego defensiveness in the workplace.

It is this state of ego defensiveness that is likely to explain why such managers respond negatively to employee voice. Such defensive tendencies will make managers especially sensitive to the potentially negative self-relevant implications that underlie improvement-oriented acts of voice, thereby leading them to solicit fewer employee ideas. Whereas managers with a strong sense of self-efficacy may be comfortable interpreting voice solicitation as helpful input, managers with a weak sense of self-efficacy may fear that soliciting voice will be seen by others as an admission of personal inadequacy (Lee, 1997). Consequently, managers experiencing ego defensiveness may preemptively take self-protective action by soliciting less employee voice. Thus we argue that ego defensiveness functions as a critical mechanism in explaining why managers with low managerial self-efficacy are more averse to employee voice:

Hypothesis 4. Ego defensiveness is the underlying mechanism explaining the relationship between managerial self-efficacy and voice solicitation.

Managers low in managerial self-efficacy may not only exhibit aversion to employee voice through a lack of solicitation, but also through reactions to voice *after* it is offered. As noted earlier, expressions of employee voice can be threatening, especially to those in a defensive state. One self-protective reaction displayed by those who feel the need to defend themselves when threatened is to harm and/or denigrate the competence or worth of others (Cho & Fast, 2012; Fast & Chen, 2009). In the case of employee voice, this would mean negatively evaluating employees who speak up (Burris, 2012). Accordingly, we suggest that managers with low managerial self-efficacy are more likely than other managers to offer unfavorable evaluations of employees who speak up. Whereas a manager who feels highly efficacious may interpret employee voice as a vote of confidence ("My subordinate thinks I'm willing and able to help"), managers who feel less efficacious may see voice as a threat ("My subordinate thinks I can't do a good job"). As a result, such managers are likely to engage in ego protection by denigrating employees who speak up:

Hypothesis 5a. Managers with lower managerial self-efficacy are less likely to assign positive ratings to subordinates who speak up than are managers with higher managerial self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 5b. Ego defensiveness is the underlying mechanism explaining the relationship between managerial self-efficacy and employee denigration.

We now turn from a focus on reactions to employees who speak up to consider what managers actually do with the suggestions that are offered by employees. One self-protective response to voice is an unwillingness to implement employees' ideas for improvement (Burris, 2012). Thus we suggest that, to the extent that managers who feel less efficacious are more likely to view employee voice as an affront to their abilities, they will be less inclined to implement employees' suggestions. Whereas managers who feel highly efficacious might more easily see the value of an idea for improving individual or unit performance, managers who lack managerial self-efficacy might believe that adopting employees' ideas serves as an admis-

sion of personal inadequacy, making their lack of efficacy loom even larger. As a result, such managers are likely to engage in ego protection by implementing fewer employee ideas. This leads to our final two predictions:

Hypothesis 6a. Managers with lower managerial self-efficacy are less likely to implement subordinates' suggestions than are managers with higher managerial self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 6b. Ego defensiveness is the underlying mechanism explaining the relationship between managerial self-efficacy and willingness to implement employee voice.

Method

We conducted an experiment to test our predictions in a highly controlled setting, as well as to assess ego defensiveness as the proposed psychological mechanism. A total of 131 adult participants (46 men, 84 women, 1 unidentified) took part in the study in exchange for a US$5 gift certificate from an online retailer. Participants, who came from a wide variety of professions, were recruited through an online national database maintained by a large West Coast university. Ages ranged from 18 to 70 (M = 35.17; SD = 11.43) and the average income level was US$39,038. Of the sample, 39% had supervisorial roles (but whether or not participants were presently in a supervisorial role did not lead to differences in the dependent variables or moderate the pattern of effects, indicating generalizability).

Participants read and engaged in a managerial scenario asking them to adopt the role of a manager with 65 subordinates in the context of a commuter airline. The scenario involved the need to respond to increasing customer complaints. Participants read that the complaints were primarily in two areas: (a) planes were routinely overbooked during the morning and rush hours, leading passengers to be bumped from their flights; and (b) flight attendants were rude, but, when confronted, claimed that they were trying only to keep the flights on schedule. The participants went on to read that, after two months of studying the routes, interviewing passengers, and analyzing passenger loads, they (as manager) had concluded that the routes and maintenance schedules needed to be restructured, and in response had created a strategic plan to do so. Then, during a weekly staff meeting, a maintenance chief ("Spencer") spoke up and raised a con-

cern about the plan. He proposed a completely new plan that called for more maintenance time and personnel. He claimed that incorporating his proposed changes into the plan would lead to resounding success for the division.

We employed a research design that experimentally manipulated both feelings of managerial self-efficacy and ego security. We elected not to use explicit self-report measures of ego threat because social desirability concerns may deter people from admitting that they feel psychologically threatened and, more importantly, because doing so could alert participants to the true purpose of the experiment. The tool that researchers predominantly use to overcome these challenges is a self-affirmation manipulation of ego security (Cohen, Aronson, & Steele, 2000; Fein & Spencer, 1997; Steele, 1988). If a particular behavior presumed to be a reaction to ego threat disappears among participants who have affirmed their self-worth, one may infer that the said behavior was driven by ego defensiveness (Cohen et al., 2000). Recent arguments support this approach, pointing to a number of advantages associated with experimentally manipulating—rather than measuring—the mediating variable (Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005). We therefore used a 2 (managerial self-efficacy manipulation: high, low) × 2 (ego security manipulation: self-affirmation, no self-affirmation), between-subjects design.

Managerial self-efficacy manipulation. In the high self-efficacy condition ($n = 65$), participants read that, "To date, things are working out just as you had planned. During the last 2 years, profits have grown and employee morale has improved. Your supervisors have recognized that you are a highly competent area manager." They went on to read, "One thing you have recently noticed is that, within the past year, there have been increasing complaints among the customers in your area."

In contrast, in the low self-efficacy condition ($n = 66$), participants read, "However, things are not working out as you had planned. During the last 2 years, profits have declined and employee morale has deteriorated. Your supervisors have begun to question whether you have what it takes to be a competent area manager." They went on to read, "To make matters worse, within the past year, there have been increasing complaints among the customers in your area."

A pretest demonstrated that the managerial self-efficacy manipulation was effective at creating high (low) levels of managerial self-efficacy ($t(48) = 13.40$, $p < .001$). Participants in the high self-

efficacy condition scored higher in managerial self-efficacy (M = 4.45, $SD = .49$) than those in the low self-efficacy condition (M = 2.25, $SD = .67$, $t(48) = 13.40$, $p < .001$), using a five-point scale.

Self-affirmation. Previous research has shown that self-affirmation manipulations (i.e., affirming values that are central to one's self-concept) reduce ego defensiveness by providing people with a sense that the self is valuable, important, and secure (see Cohen et al., 2000; Sherman & Cohen, 2006). If voice aversion among managers who lack managerial self-efficacy results from ego threat, then voice aversion should decline when managers have an opportunity to affirm their self-worth (Cohen et al., 2000; Fein & Spencer, 1997; Steele, 1988).

In order to manipulate the ego security of half of the participants before reading the scenario, participants were randomly assigned via computer to a self-affirmation condition ($n = 66$) or a no self-affirmation condition ($n = 65$). In the self-affirmation condition, participants selected the one core value from a list of four (i.e., "business/economics," "art/music/theater," "social life/relationships," or "science/pursuit of knowledge") that they considered *most* important to them, personally, and wrote a paragraph about why this value was important (see Fein & Spencer, 1997). In the no self-affirmation condition, participants selected the one value from the same list that was *least* important to them, personally, and wrote a paragraph about why the value might be important to someone else. This ensured that all participants completed a similar task, while affirming only those in the self-affirmation condition (i.e., those who selected a value that was central to their own sense of self) (see Fein & Spencer, 1997). A separate pretest ensured that the self-affirmation manipulation did not influence participants' levels of managerial self-efficacy.

Solicitation of voice. We assessed whether or not participants would engage in *solicitation of voice* with the following two items: "To what extent would you ask for further help/advice from Spencer on this issue?" and "To what extent would you encourage other employees to speak out the way that Spencer did?" The items ($r = .56$) were rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Very much*). These items, although based on the definition of solicitation behavior, differ from the items used in Study 1 in order to fit the context of the vignette.

In a follow-up study, exploratory factor analyses (maximum likelihood with oblique rotation) using surveys from 201 working adults showed that these two items loaded with the four items used in Study 1 on a single factor explained 67% of the variance, with all loadings above .70. This suggests that these items also adequately assess managerial solicitation behavior.

Denigration of subordinate. We assessed whether or not participants would denigrate the competence of the employee who spoke up. Although participants all had the exact same information about the employee, we predicted that those in the low self-efficacy condition would perceive him as a threat and, as a result, would denigrate his competence. We assessed *denigration of subordinate* with four items adapted from the competence dimension of trustworthiness (Elsbach & Elofson, 2000; Mayer & Davis, 1999):

(1) "Spencer is knowledgeable with regard to the maintenance schedule,"
(2) "Spencer is qualified to provide useful suggestions regarding the maintenance schedule,"
(3) "Spencer is well informed on the subject of maintenance schedules," and
(4) "Spencer is a reliable source of information regarding maintenance schedules."

Items were rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*). The scale was reliable ($\alpha = .89$) and the scores were reverse-scored to create a measure of denigration.

Willingness to implement voice. We followed the same construct development procedures (MacKenzie et al., 2011) as those noted above to create a four-item measure of *willingness to implement voice*:

(1) "I would revise my plan and incorporate Spencer's comments,"
(2) "The comments from Spencer would cause me to have second thoughts about my plan,"
(3) "I would take Spencer's comments to my supervisors," and
(4) "Spencer's comments about the maintenance schedule are valuable."

The items were rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*). Estimated reliability was $\alpha = .80$.

Results and Discussion

Table 3 reports the descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables. *Age* was not significantly correlated with any of the variables, nor did it moderate our findings. *Gender* was positively correlated with willingness to implement voice and solicitation of voice, so we conducted all analyses with and without gender as a control. We obtained the same patterns of results regardless of whether gender was included and thus do not discuss this variable further.

To assess the factor structures of our dependent measures (voice solicitation, employee denigration, and willingness to implement voice), we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis. We specified a three-factor structure, which achieved good fit with the data ($\chi^2(32) = 46.81$, CFI = .96, NFI = .93, RMSEA = .08). Chi-square difference tests showed that all alternative nested models achieved significantly poorer fit. For example, constraining the

TABLE 3
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (Study 2)[a]

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Gender[ab]	1.65	.48						
Age	35.17	11.43	.18*					
Manipulated managerial self-efficacy[c]	.50	.50	.03	−.02				
Manipulated self-affirmation[d]	.50	.50	.10	.06	−.02			
Denigration of subordinate	2.64	1.04	−.15	−.10	.06	−.04		
Willingness to implement voice	5.22	1.06	.20*	.04	−.12	.01	−.71**	
Solicitation of voice	5.48	1.26	.18*	.10	−.16	.01	.68**	.77**

[a] $n = 131$.
[b] 1 = male, 2 = female.
[c] 0 = low self-efficacy condition, 1 = high self-efficacy condition.
[d] 0 = no self-affirmation condition, 1 = self-affirmation condition.
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

denigration and solicitation to load on one factor produced a significantly worse fit to the data ($\chi^2(34)$ = 99.49, CFI = .92, NFI = .88, RMSEA = .12), as did the single-factor solution ($\chi^2(35)$ = 115.15, CFI = .89, NFI = .86, RMSEA = .13). Thus, although our dependent measures are highly correlated as expected, these analyses provided support for the expected factor structure of the variables.

First, we assessed the prediction that lacking managerial self-efficacy would lead managers to refrain from soliciting voice (Hypothesis 1), as well as the prediction that this effect would be driven by ego defensiveness (Hypothesis 4). As predicted, a two-way self-efficacy condition × self-affirmation condition emerged ($F(1, 130)$ = 3.80, p = .05) (see Figure 2). Among participants who did not self-affirm, those in the low self-efficacy condition were less likely to solicit voice (M = 5.07, SD = 1.48) than those in the high self-efficacy condition (M = 5.89, SD = 1.00; $t(64)$ = 2.61, p = .01). In contrast, among participants who did self-affirm, those in the low self-efficacy condition were just as likely to solicit voice (M = 5.52, SD = 1.26) as those in the high self-efficacy condition (M = 5.48, SD = 1.17; $t(63)$ = 0.10, p = .92). Additionally, a planned contrast test demonstrated that participants in the low self-efficacy, no self-affirmation condition were less likely to solicit voice than those in the other three conditions ($t(127)$ = 2.25, p = .03).

We next assessed the prediction that low managerial self-efficacy would lead managers to assign negative ratings to employees who speak up (Hypothesis 5a), as well as the prediction that this effect would be driven by ego defensiveness (Hypothesis 5b). As predicted, a two-way self-efficacy condition × self-affirmation condition interaction emerged ($F(1, 130)$ = 7.99, p = .01) (see Figure 3). Among participants who did not self-affirm, those in the low self-efficacy condition rated the employee who spoke up more negatively (M = 2.99, SD = 1.23) than did those in the high self-efficacy condition (M = 2.36, SD = .85; $t(64)$ = 2.39, p = .02). In contrast, among participants who did self-affirm, those in the low self-efficacy condition evaluated the employee just as positively (M = 2.41, SD = 1.05) as did those in the high self-efficacy condition (M = 2.79, SD = .89; $t(63)$ = 1.58, p = .12). Additional analyses demonstrated that participants in the low self-efficacy, no self-affirmation condition rated the employee who spoke up less positively than those in the other three conditions ($t(127)$ = 2.31, p = .02).

Finally, we assessed the predictions that low managerial self-efficacy would lead managers to refrain from implementing voice (Hypothesis 6a) and that this effect would be driven by ego defensiveness (Hypothesis 6b). As predicted, a two-way self-efficacy condition × self-affirmation condition emerged ($F(1, 130)$ = 6.06, p = .02) (see Figure 4). Among participants who did not self-affirm, those in the low self-efficacy condition were less likely to implement voice (M = 4.88, SD = 1.14) than those in the high self-efficacy condition (M = 5.57, SD = .88; $t(64)$ = 2.75, p = .01). In contrast, among participants who did self-affirm, those in the low self-efficacy condition were just as likely to implement voice (M = 5.34, SD = 1.11) as those in the high self-efficacy condition (M = 5.14, SD = .99; $t(63)$ = 0.42, p = .45). Finally, a planned contrast test demonstrated that participants in the low self-efficacy, no self-affirmation condition were less likely to implement voice than those in the other three conditions ($t(127)$ = 2.28, p = .02).

The results of this experiment bolster the findings from our field study (Study 1). First, they

FIGURE 2
Effects of Managerial Self-Efficacy and Self-Affirmation Manipulations on Voice Solicitation (Study 2)
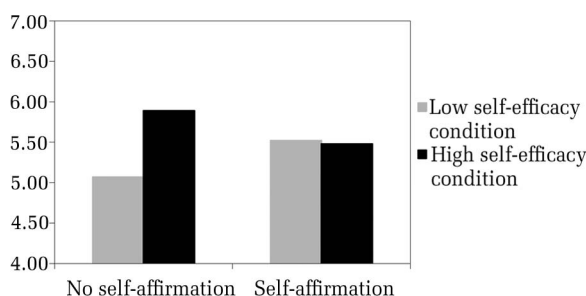
FIGURE 3
Effects of Managerial Self-Efficacy and Self-Affirmation Manipulations on Negative Evaluation of Employee Who Spoke up (Study 2)
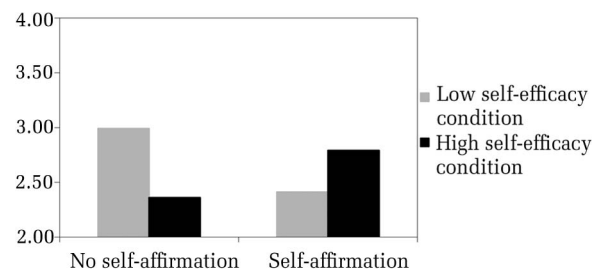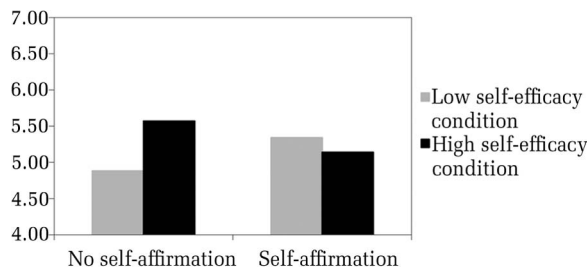
FIGURE 4
Effects of Managerial Self-Efficacy and Self-Affirmation Manipulations on Intentions to Implement Voice (Study 2)

demonstrated causality for the effects observed in that study. Randomly assigning participants to a manipulation that introduced a perceived lack of managerial self-efficacy led those in the no self-affirmation condition to refrain from soliciting voice (Hypothesis 1), mirroring our previous findings from the field. Additionally, feelings of low managerial self-efficacy led participants in the no self-affirmation condition to respond defensively to voice once it was offered: they were less likely to assign positive ratings to the employee who spoke up (Hypothesis 5a) and less likely to implement the suggestions (Hypothesis 6a). Offering even more direct evidence that ego defensiveness is responsible for the observed effects, when participants were allowed to self-affirm before engaging in the study—thus creating a psychological buffer from threat—they no longer responded to low managerial self-efficacy by refraining from soliciting voice, instead evaluating employees who speak up positively and implementing voice (Hypotheses 4, 5b, and 6b). This suggests that the effects in the no self-affirmation condition were driven by feelings of ego defensiveness (Cohen et al., 2000; Fein & Spencer, 1997; Steele, 1988).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

One of the unfortunate realities of organizational life is that employees are often reluctant to speak up to managers (Detert & Burris, 2007). Withholding improvement-oriented voice denies the organization access to ideas that fuel growth, learning, and adaptation. Research on voice, however, has shown that employees are more likely to engage in voice when managers display behaviors that welcome it. Our research extends beyond this line of inquiry to expose why some managers are averse to

employee voice and display behaviors that signal a lack of receptiveness, while other managers are highly receptive and encouraging of voice. In particular, we posit that managers with low managerial self-efficacy are the least likely to receive employee voice because they send signals that voice is unwelcomed, owing in large part to their feeling of being personally threatened by those who speak up. Supporting these ideas, working managers in a large multinational organization (Study 1) who lacked managerial self-efficacy were less likely to solicit voice from employees, which, in turn, led employees to speak up less often. To illuminate the psychological mechanism behind these effects, and to demonstrate that subjective, rather than objective, managerial efficacy is responsible for voice aversion, an experiment (Study 2) showed that lacking managerial self-efficacy is an ego threat that triggers a defensive stance toward voice, including a reduced tendency to solicit voice, an increased tendency to denigrate employees who speak up, and a reduced willingness to implement voice.

Theoretical Implications

The present research offers several contributions to theory and practice. First, our findings advance the literature on employee voice by providing new insight into *which* managers discourage employee voice, and *why* these managers are less likely to reach out actively to employees for their suggestions and input. Previous research has shown that when employees perceive managers to display behaviors that welcome voice, such as openness (Detert & Burris, 2007) or inclusiveness (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006), employees will be more likely to speak up and that, conversely, when employees perceive that managers are hostile or abusive, employees will withhold their voice (Burris et al., 2008). Scholars who have studied actual managerial behaviors and reactions to voice (as opposed to how employees perceive these behaviors) have also noted that managers sometimes respond positively to voice (Whiting, Podsakoff, & Pierce, 2008), while they may respond negatively at other times (Burris, 2012; Seibert et al., 1999). Our research extends these lines of study by articulating what psychological conditions lead some managers and not others to display behaviors that are welcoming and supportive of voice. Ironic as it may seem, our results suggest that those managers who feel the most insecure about their ability to meet expectations associated with the managerial role are the most

likely to avoid improvement-oriented input from employees.

Our research also illuminates the psychology behind this maladaptive tendency. We found that when employees speak up about possible improvements, it adds fuel to the fire of the already-threatened egos of managers who lack managerial self-efficacy. The results of our experiment indicate that ego defensiveness can account for the fact that managers who feel less competent are more likely to show voice aversion. Our findings not only reveal a mechanism underlying managers' negative stance toward voice (see Whiting et al., 2008), but also inform a practical solution for employees looking to mitigate these defensive responses. Our self-affirmation manipulation operated as an intervention to mitigate managers' defensive responses arising from ego threat, breaking the link between feelings of incompetence and voice aversion. Thus if employees engage in actions that authentically reduce the threat managers feel (for example by providing positive feedback to managers), they may stimulate less defensive and more productive managerial responses to their suggestions for improvement.

Our research also contributes to the leadership literature, which has invested considerable effort into understanding the *consequences* of various leadership styles and behaviors, but has generated less knowledge about the *determinants* of these behaviors. For example, research on leadership style has shown that leaders who engage in openness behaviors are generally more effective in eliciting voice from employees than those who are not open (Dutton et al., 1997)—yet it is unclear what mindsets predispose managers to display openness behaviors in the first place. Our research answers this call (Ashford, Sutcliffe, & Christianson, 2009) and suggests that leaders' ego-related perceptions can influence the extent to which they welcome or avoid employee voice. These findings suggest that research on leadership could benefit from moving beyond a focus on the consequences of leadership style to include an emphasis on how leaders' feelings about their roles serve as an important determinant of leadership style selection.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

The aim of our research has been to demonstrate the vital role of managers' personal characteristics—their feelings of managerial self-efficacy and ego defensiveness—in influencing employee voice

in organizations. Given that this is a new approach, there are limitations in our studies, as well as ample opportunities for future research on the topic. One of the limitations in our field study (Study 1) is the correlational nature of the data and our inability to test adequately for the proposed ego threat mechanism. To address this limitation, we conducted an experiment to demonstrate causality (Study 2). Participants randomly assigned to a low managerial self-efficacy condition were less likely to solicit and respond positively to voice. Moreover, including a self-affirmation manipulation allowed us to demonstrate the mechanism for these effects: ego threat.

Our experiment, however, is not without limitations. In order to control fully the variables introduced in the study, we made use of vignette methodology. While this approach provides greater control and precision, it compromises external validity. It is noteworthy that the patterns in our experiment matched those observed in the field, giving us reason to feel confident in our findings. Additionally, the fact that the self-affirmation by participants moderated the effects of low managerial self-efficacy showed that participants were fully invested in the scenario; otherwise the affirmation would not have had an impact. Thus although there are some limitations to our studies, we feel confident in the findings.

The present research opens up a number of additional research questions. While we focused on improvement-oriented voice, which is inherently challenging, additional work could explore the impact of managers' ego-related perceptions on supportive forms of employee voice (Burris, 2012). Specifically, managers who feel less efficacious may be more likely to welcome voice that is supportive in nature, because it would help to reduce these feelings of inadequacy. It would also be useful if future research were to identify which types of managers are most likely to feel a lack of managerial self-efficacy. Perhaps younger or first-time managers will feel less efficacious than others, with implications for their aversion to employee voice. Future research could also explore contextual conditions that amplify or mitigate feelings of low managerial self-efficacy. For example, managers operating in foreign organizational and/or national cultures may feel insecure in their abilities as a result of the uncertainty associated with working in novel or ambiguous settings. Additionally, a manager's positive orientation to feedback (Ashford, 1986) or a high-quality relationship with the sub-

ordinate (Scandura & Graen, 1984) may lessen the relationship between managerial self-efficacy and solicitation behavior. Finally, the prevalence of destructive workplace politics, along with the tendency to be concerned primarily with personal gains over and above organizational performance, represent additional possible moderators that could be examined in future work.

There are also possible work-related constraints—above and beyond managerial self-efficacy—that can lead managers to be averse to voice. Such constraints could arise from organizational policies and/or organizational and cultural norms regarding participation, innovation, and change. Power distance, for example, is a cultural norm that differs across various contexts and has implications for employee voice. An additional constraint for managers could include having a superior (that is, the manager's own manager) who restricts participation, the sharing of ideas, and/or organizational change. Thus future research should aim both to identify and tease apart the various factors that may lead to an aversion to employee voice among managers.

Additional work is also needed to explore other pathways through which managers' self-perceptions relate to their responses to employee voice. Our rationale offers a decidedly cognitive explanation: managers' feelings of incompetence trigger ego defensiveness, which affects their openness to and support for employee voice. Alternative explanations could center on the dynamic social processes set into motion by managers' self-perceptions. For instance, feelings of low managerial self-efficacy may, in fact, lead to low-quality decisions or suboptimal actions that trigger improvement-oriented voice, if not explicit criticism, from employees. Having received such voice, managers therefore may find it unnecessary or undesirable to solicit additional voice from employees. Other investigations might center on aspects of managers' social relationships with subordinates that may ameliorate or exacerbate the impact of low managerial self-efficacy (and related feelings of ego defensiveness) on managers' tendencies to become voice averse.

Practical Implications and Conclusion

Beyond the theoretical implications already highlighted, there are a number of practical strategies that employees and executives can use to deal with managers who are voice averse. For example, speaking up in private, rather than in front of others, is one way of helping managers to "save face" and thus minimizing potential feelings of threat. Another approach that savvy employees use is to engage in flattery just before making recommendations. This serves as an affirmation for the manager and may increase his or her capacity to remain unthreatened by the voice. Similarly, inserting one's recommendation between two compliments would seem prudent. Offering some initial support for these strategies, Cho and Fast (2012) found that subordinates' use of gratitude expression helps to assuage threatened supervisor's defensive tendencies. Other means of reducing managers' feelings of threat could, instead, center on minimizing the feelings of responsibility that voice can trigger. For instance, employees can frame improvement-oriented ideas in ways that reduce managers' liability and instead implicate personal or role-related features of the employee to explain why a situation exists and/or how it can be improved. Finally, creating a climate marked by psychological safety and positive organizational norms (such as a norm of learning from mistakes and risk-taking) could increase the tendency for managers who lack managerial self-efficacy to solicit voice. If managers feel that it is the norm to ask for regular feedback and that people are not chastised for mistakes, they may feel safer in soliciting voice than those in organizations that are marked by high levels of blame and defensiveness. Organizational policies, particularly accountability measures (such as performance evaluations and promotion reviews), which incorporate employee participation and support for voice can go a long way toward establishing such a work environment.

Employees generally have a sense that speaking up carries personal costs. In this research, we have shown when (and why) voice is risky to those speaking up by focusing on which managers are more welcoming of voice and identifying the psychological dynamics underlying that level of receptivity. Interestingly (and ironically), voice appears to be particularly risky when it could be most beneficial—that is, when the manager lacks managerial self-efficacy. Needless to say, this is unfortunate for all involved, and it seems clear that organizations would do well to develop strategies to overcome the tendency for insecure managers to stifle voice. As long as managers with low self-efficacy find their way into managerial positions, organizations must take concrete steps to help those managers to develop their sense of competence in their roles.

Otherwise, the managers who could perhaps benefit the most from improvement-oriented input will strive to avoid it—and everyone involved will suffer the consequences.

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