

Emotional and Behavioral Responses to Workplace Incivility and the Impact of Hierarchical Status

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Using appraisal theory, this research examined targets' emotional responses to workplace incivility, and how these responses impact targets' behavioral responses. Targets who reported greater incivility reported greater anger, fear, and sadness. Targets' anger was associated with more direct aggression against the instigators; targets' fear was associated with indirect aggression against instigators, absenteeism, and exit; and targets' sadness was associated with absenteeism. Status moderated the effects of fear and sadness. Our results underscore the need for organizations to manage civility so that they and their employees can avoid substantial direct and indirect costs associated with workplace incivility. At a broader level, our results suggest the importance of developing greater awareness about the harmful effects of fear and sadness in the workplace.

I was hurt and angry and a little scared. At first I wanted to get even, but there was too much at stake.

I tried to respond in a calm, logical way and that set him off more. As he blew up again, I knew that he had crossed a line—things wouldn't be the same. I stayed another two years, but I never worked as hard again.

I just didn't care as much. (Manager)

Many employees see themselves as targets of incivility at work regularly (e.g., Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Pearson & Porath, 2009). *Incivility*, which is defined by Andersson and Pearson (1999) as “low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect” (p. 457), takes many forms. Uncivil employees may use demeaning language and voice tone, disparage others' reputations, or ignore others' requests. When employees perceive themselves as targets of incivility, they need to decide how to react. Appraisal theory suggests that when people encounter a potential stressor, a cognitive-emotional process unfolds to evaluate the stressor (e.g., Lazarus, 1999;

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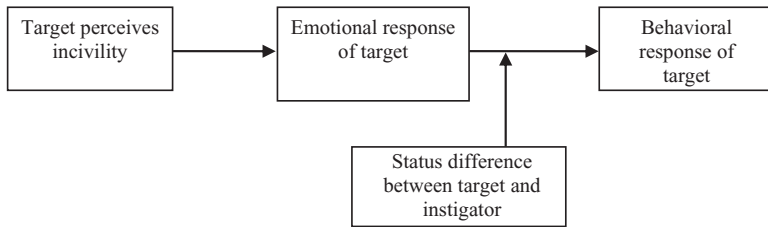


Figure 1. Relationship between emotional and behavioral responses to workplace incivility.

Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). People appraise the situation to determine the degree of potential harm, threat, or challenge to the self (e.g., Lazarus, 1999), which, in turn, guides their response. In the case of incivility, theory suggests that this appraisal leads to an emotional reaction, which guides targets' behavioral responses (see Figure 1; Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008).

However, appraisal processes and responses depend on features of the person and the environment (e.g., Compas & Orosan, 1993; Cortina & Magley, 2009). Specifically, the target's perception of power (which we define as his or her relative status) may be a key moderator in the target's responses (Cortina, 2008). Power affects one's experience and behavioral options (see Kim, Pinkley, & Fragale, 2005).

Appraisal theory suggests that to understand how an organizational or interpersonal stressor affects employees, we must understand their appraisals of the stressor (see Cortina & Magley, 2009). As a result, appraisal theory is being used increasingly to understand incivility, aggression, and antisocial behavior at work (e.g., Cortina & Magley, 2009; Douglas et al., 2008; Porath, MacInnis, & Folkes, 2010; Sinclair, Martin, & Croll, 2002). At the core of cognitive appraisal theory is the initial evaluation for relevance to well-being of an event in positive or negative terms (cf. Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). The initial evaluation also contains an importance evaluation that influences the intensity of the emotional reaction. Initial appraisal leads to more specific appraisals, which focus on consequences, attributions, and coping potential (Lazarus, 1999). Following Figure 1, we focus on understanding the emotional impact of an uncivil encounter. We then examine how three different negative emotions stemming from an appraisal of an uncivil organizational interaction are associated with different responses, including aggression, displacement, and withdrawal, and how relative status affects these responses.

The contributions of this research are threefold: (a) to focus on fear and sadness at work; (b) to test each of the three emotional responses of incivility on specific outcomes, including hidden forms of displacement and withdrawal; and (c) to examine how the status differential between target and offender

affects the target's emotional response and subsequent behaviors. Workplace incivility is a burgeoning topic of organizational research; theories and results are beginning to affect business practices (cf. Pearson & Porath, 2009). The most important contribution of this study is the focus on fear and sadness at work. These primary negative emotions are of extraordinary importance to human beings, yet their experience and expression are generally shunned in the workplace and are largely overlooked in organizational research. Our efforts here demonstrate the high prevalence and costly impact of fear and sadness as a result of everyday experiences of incivility at work.

Organizational scholars have documented the revenge-driven tit-for-tat nature of incivility, where intensity of negative interaction rises in subsequent rounds between target and instigator. But, scant attention has been given to the experience and repercussions of incivility when feelings evoked are other than anger. Although targets do share common experiences of negative feelings, their responses will vary dramatically with experiences of anger, as compared to fear or sadness. Here, we untangle these negative emotional reactions to incivility and link each to specific behaviors. Doing so has practical advantages, informing tailored organizational responses to curtail spirals of incivility or to address specific emotional offenses.

Studies have shown that incivility tends to be a downward phenomenon: Generally, the target has less legitimate power than does his or her offender (Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Hjelt-Back, 1994; Johnson & Indvik, 2001; Pearson & Porath, 2005). However, no research of which we are aware has examined how status differential between target and offender affects the target's emotional response and subsequent behaviors. The differences may carry important implications. For example, research has shown that many employees who are treated uncivilly aggress directly against their offenders, but is the prevalence of this outcome consistent across all hierarchical levels? Might direct aggression be the exclusive domain of powerful targets? Might lesser powered targets be more likely to choose covert responses? Are targets at all levels equally likely to exit, or does power play a role in determining who leaves? Understanding the specifics of power as related to incivility will provide significant cues for organizational expectations and actions to more precisely curtail and manage uncivil encounters.

Uncovering mistreatment at work—especially when it is of relatively mild forms or when it is delivered by higher status instigators—is challenging because such mistreatment often goes unreported (Cortina & Magley, 2009; Pearson & Porath, 2009). Our work provides organizations with insight as to how people respond to mistreatment in the form of incivility. The results encourage organizations to take action against incivility. By linking incivility to anger, fear, and sadness—as well as costly negative behavioral consequences—this study legitimizes organizational attention to incivility.

Appraisals and Emotions

Appraisal theory posits that negative emotions are evoked in situations appraised as unpleasant and goal-incongruent, controllable, unfair, and caused by another person for which blame can be externally attributed. We anticipate that experiencing incivility induces negative emotions, including anger, fear, and sadness because incivility evokes many of the appraisal dimensions described (see Porath et al., 2010). Specifically, experiencing incivility is likely to be regarded as inherently unpleasant and incongruent with goals of the employee (e.g., to work productively, to maintain good relationships with coworkers, to feel satisfied with the job and organization). Further, the notion that people should behave considerably toward one another is central to fairness (Porath et al., 2010). Targets are likely to feel harmed and that they have been treated unjustly. Furthermore, targets may hold the company, the instigator, or both accountable for these unpleasant outcomes.

In this study of workplace incivility, we focus on three types of negative emotional responses: anger, fear, and sadness. We chose these emotional responses, in particular, because anger, fear, and sadness (a) have been identified consistently by psychologists and sociologists as three fundamental, basic, or primary negative emotions (e.g., Ekman & Friesen, 1975; Frijda, 1993; Izard, 1972; Kemper, 1981, 1991; Plutchik, 1980); (b) have been identified as reactions to workplace incivility (e.g., Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2004; Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000); and (c) have been theorized to have important implications for organizations (e.g., Brief & Weiss, 2002; Pinder, 1997).

Emotional Responses to Workplace Incivility

Anger

Anger is a response to a perceived misdeed (Averill, 1983) that is energized by an offense or an injury for which another is viewed as responsible (Greenspan, 1988; Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994). The workplace setting can be an anger-inducing environment, and the most common predictor of anger at work is uncivil behavior by others (Domagalski, 1999). Targets may be angry that someone violated interpersonal norms of behavior, their identity was threatened or challenged, or their self-esteem was bruised (cf. Porath, Overbeck, & Pearson, 2008). Thus, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 1. Targets who experience stronger perceived personal impact of incivility will be more likely to experience greater anger.

Fear

Fear is an existential threat (Lazarus, 1991). *Fear* responses occur when someone senses impending evil or feels threatened or discomforted at the fact or presumption that danger looms (DeBecker, 1997; Greenspan, 1988). Only recently have organizational researchers begun to examine fear in the workplace, and they have focused on exceptional, dramatic events, such as workplace violence (Barling, 1996, 2003; Dietz, Robinson, Folger, Baron, & Schulz, 2003; Leather, 1998). Barling, Rogers, and Kelloway (2001) found that fear follows dramatic deviance. We posit that fear will also follow low-intensity deviance in the form of incivility. Support for this relationship exists in social psychology. In several studies that examined determinants of fear of neighborhood crime, incivility was found to contribute significantly (Mays, 2002; Riger, 1985; Taylor & Covington, 1993). Hunter (1978) found that incivilities led residents to conclude that formal and informal forces maintaining public order were increasingly powerless; thus, risks of victimization were perceived as higher.

In a workplace context, when incivility occurs, employees may believe that their expectations about interpersonal interaction have been violated, along with their assumptions about the responsibilities of the organization to maintain those expectations (Pearson, Andersson, & Wegner, 2001). As a result of such violations, there may be increasing levels of fear (MacKinnon, 1994). Thus, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 2. Targets who experience stronger perceived personal impact of incivility will be more likely to experience greater fear.

Sadness

Sadness is the emotional experience of negative events that are appraised as uncontrollable (Frijda, Kuipers, & Terschure, 1989). The organizational literature is nearly devoid of studies of sadness. An exception is Roseman and colleagues' (Roseman, Dhawan, Rettek, & Naidu, 1995) findings that sadness was related to appraisals of powerlessness. Sadness might be expected when work-related deaths and other traumas occur, but it can be argued that sadness in the workplace may also arise from the relatively innocuous context of an uncivil experience. We base this argument on the observation that when targets experience incivility, their expectations are shattered. As a result, they may feel a sense of hopelessness.

Generally, targets perceive uncivil acts as unexpected disruptions of routine (Pearson et al., 2001). With incivility, the interaction ritual has been

broken (Goffman, 1982). As a result, there may be a sense of loss, embarrassment, or humiliation as the target's sense of self-worth is upended (Tedeschi & Felson, 1994; Vogel & Lazare, 1990). Targets may feel isolated, ashamed, and responsible (Pearson et al., 2001). The target's personal identity as a moral being deserving fairness, consideration, and respect (Bies, 1999; Lind & Tyler, 1988), as well as his or her social identity as a valued organizational member (Lind, 1997) may be shattered (cf. Aquino & Douglas, 2003). Workplace incivility often damages the relationship between target and instigator (Pearson et al., 2001), undermining the target's inner scheme about self, vulnerability, and social support (Herman, 1992). With these losses, the target may feel helpless and sad. Thus, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 3. Targets who experience stronger perceived personal impact of incivility will be more likely to experience greater sadness.

Emotional Responses and Behavior

Having hypothesized potential connections between targets' perceptions of incivility and their emotional responses, we turn next to potential links between these negative emotional responses and behavior, including aggression (Averill, 1983), displacement (Tedeschi & Felson, 1994), and withdrawal (Pelled & Xin, 1999). Following Figure 1, negative emotional experiences—such as those linked with incivility—are likely to lead to specific responses (Lazarus, 1991). Our predictions follow Weiss and Cropanzano's (1996) theory that work events are intricately tied to appraisal of that event and, therefore, lead to affective experiences, which may lead to spontaneous, affective-driven behavior.

According to Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), people in an emotional state tend “to be preoccupied by the emotion, and there is a persistence to behaviors designed to deal with the emotion . . . emotions ‘organize’ behavior around the demands of the precipitating situation” (p. 54). Emotions invoke changes in action (behavioral) readiness or impulses to change one's relationship with the object (Mesquita & Frijda, 1992). In the case of the target's experience of incivility, we consider three categories of behavioral responses that likely focus on more specific appraisals of consequences, attributions, and coping potential (Lazarus, 1999): (a) those aimed at getting even with the instigator (i.e., aggression); (b) taking out one's frustration on others, including individuals and the organization (i.e., displacement); and (c) removing oneself from the situation (i.e., withdrawal).

Status and Its Effects on the Target's Emotional Response and Subsequent Behaviors

Organizational scholars have underscored the importance of considering the effect of organizational status as it influences emotions and its consequences (e.g., Fisher & Ashkanasy, 2000; Fitness, 2000; Kemper, 1978; Tiedens, 2000). Job status influences the way people are treated at work (Jackson, Schuler, & Rivero, 1989). Those of higher status hold the formal organizational power to delegate rewards, punishments, and other desirable or undesirable outcomes to those of lesser status. In the workplace, this initial imbalance of control may self-perpetuate by making subordinates unlikely to take revenge or to aggress in other ways toward their superiors (Aquino, Lewis, & Bradfield, 1999). Over time, it follows that higher status individuals would have the ability to define fair treatment and to set emotion display rules; that is, the habits regarding who can exhibit which emotion to whom and when (Ekman, 1984; Hochschild, 1983). Sociologists suggest that, generally, people of high status are allowed to express different emotions than those of low status (Conway, DiFazio, & Mayman, 1999; Lively, 2000).

Status is also one cue that is used to determine agency; that is, who is responsible for the outcome (Tiedens, Ellsworth, & Mesquita, 2000). In the case of incivility, in which the behavior is ambiguous with respect to intent to harm, status has been found to be crucial in appraising (Cortina & Magley, 2009) and interpreting the event (Porath et al., 2008). Targets weigh the level of status challenge, the legitimacy of the challenger's actions (given his or her status), and potential consequences of their responses (Porath et al., 2008). When instigators possess greater power than the target, the target may feel helpless to fend off the mistreatment (Thacker, 1996). Target appraisals become more negative as harassers become more powerful (Cortina, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 2002; Langhout et al., 2005). A target's social power can determine how manageable he or she perceives the mistreatment to be (cf. Cortina & Magley, 2009). Greater power fosters a greater sense of control over the situation (Pfeffer, 2010). Therefore, power may be associated with different emotional responses to incivility.

Behavioral Responses to Workplace Incivility

Acting on Anger

Anger has been conceptualized as a "hot" emotion (Aquino, Douglas, & Martinko, 2004). It has been found to correspond to negative events caused by others that elicit an action tendency to move against an object or

individual. Angry emotions invoke antagonistic tendencies, such as punishing, hurting, or insulting another (Bougie, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2003; Frijda et al., 1989).

Averill (1983) has demonstrated empirically that anger is associated with (a) aggressing directly or indirectly toward the offender; (b) displacing the aggression on another person other than the offender or on some nonhuman object or thing; and (c) responding non-aggressively (e.g., discussing the incident or engaging in calming activities). Based on these typical expressions of anger, we expect that targets of workplace incivility who feel angry will attempt to discharge their anger in similar ways. When angered, targets of incivility may retaliate directly or indirectly against the instigator, or they may displace negative affect on other individuals or on the organization to avert the risk of repercussion from the instigator (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Porath & Erez, 2007, 2009).

We expect that these responses may vary, based on status. Higher status targets who have been angered have the power, organizational discretion, and force to retaliate. They may have greater means of retaliation, and they may be more likely to try to retaliate against the instigator, directly or indirectly (Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2006). Armed with fewer options to leverage power, lower status targets may displace their anger on the organization or on others (see Brass, Butterfield, & Skaggs, 1998). Thus, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 4a. Targets' experiences of anger will be positively associated with direct aggression toward the instigator, indirect aggression toward the instigator, displacement on the organization, and displacement on others.

Hypothesis 4b. Lower status targets will engage in greater displacement, and higher status targets will engage in greater direct and indirect aggression.

Acting on Fear

Fear invokes an action tendency to protect oneself from danger, which tends to be associated with behaviors such as withdrawing or avoiding (Frijda et al., 1989). When fear occurs, organizational outcomes suffer (Barling et al., 2001). Fear associated with workplace stressors predicts perceived unfairness, reduced affective commitment, diminished interpersonal job performance, and cognitive difficulties (Barling, 1992, 1996; Barling et al., 2001; MacEwen & Barling, 1991; Rogers & Kelloway, 1997; Schat & Kelloway, 2000). Studies of fear among public school employees have also demonstrated negative effects on employee job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Sinclair et al., 2002).

Generally, employees who experience fear (i.e., the sense of threat or endangerment) tend to avoid direct confrontation (Lazarus, 1968; Roseman, 1984). Rather, they tend to seek indirect or covert means of addressing or correcting the situation (Frijda, 1986). To restore their identities, those who fear tend to take action against someone or something other than their offenders (Tedeschi & Felson, 1994). When fear is experienced and employees have no way to diffuse that fear effectively, the theory of exit and voice (Hirschmann, 1970) suggests that some targets will leave the environment.

Given the debilitating nature of fear, we expect that targets of incivility who experience fear will not aggress directly against the source (i.e., the instigator; Bies & Tripp, 1995; Bies, Tripp, & Kramer, 1997). Rather, fearing potential repercussion from the individual who has already threatened or depleted their well-being, fearful targets of incivility will be likely to aggress indirectly, displace their fear, or withdraw from the uncivil context through absenteeism and exit. Withdrawal may be even more likely for those of lower status since they possess fewer response resources and are more vulnerable (cf. Aquino et al., 1999). Those with lower power may feel a greater sense of learned helplessness (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989; Thacker & Ferris, 1991). With fewer means to correct the situation, lower status targets may be especially likely to respond with absenteeism and exit (Pearson & Porath, 2005). Thus, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 5a. Targets' experiences of fear will be positively associated with indirect aggression toward the instigator, displacement on the organization, displacement on others, absenteeism, and exit.

Hypothesis 5b. This relationship will be moderated by status such that these reactions will be more likely for those treated uncivilly by instigators holding more organizational power.

Acting on Sadness

Sadness has been associated with helplessness. When sadness is experienced, action readiness is invoked: The individual experiencing sadness wants to do something, but does not know what to do (Frijda et al., 1989). As a result, people who experience sadness generally try to avoid thinking about their sorrow, believing that the unpleasant state is controlled by impersonal circumstances (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Sadness is perceived as unavoidable or irrevocable loss (Kemper, 1991). Crucial to sadness is the notion that nothing can be done to set the situation right (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985).

Sadness tends to adjust people to a new state of lowered expectations (Kemper, 1991). Like fear, sadness may connote weakness (Roseman, 1984).

Whereas strength-reinforcing emotions (e.g., anger) may lead to direct confrontation with the instigator, weakness-reinforcing emotions (e.g., sadness) are likely to act on that emotional response in less direct ways. For example, with regard to feelings of injustice, Gross (1998) suggested that individuals may employ situation modification, whether by discussing the matter with the person who has been unjust (in order to reframe the situation) or by leaving the work area. In an organizational setting, feelings of sadness regarding an uncivil incident may motivate targets to withdraw (e.g., through behaviors such as absenteeism or exit) if they believe that the situation will not get better. Absenteeism and exiting allow targets to avoid their instigators and any reminders of uncivil situations.

Lower status targets who experience greater sadness will be more likely to withdraw through absenteeism and exit because their status inhibits their ability to effectively defend themselves or correct the situation in an organizationally acceptable manner (cf. Pearson & Porath, 2005). Thus, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 6a. Targets' experiences of sadness will be positively associated with absenteeism and exit.

Hypothesis 6b. This relationship will be moderated by status such that this will be more likely for those treated uncivilly by instigators holding more organizational power.

Based on these effects of incivility, as related to anger, fear and sadness, we predict that these emotions will mediate the relationships between incivility and aggression, displacement, and exit. Our moderated mediated model is consistent with appraisal (as outlined previously) and other theory. For example, Andersson and Pearson (1999) discussed how incivility can lead to targets experiencing negative affect, which stimulates the desire to reciprocate in some way (e.g., Bies & Tripp, 1995; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). Consistent with this, Baron and Neuman's (1996) model of aggression describes causal relations among attacks, frustrations, work-related stressors, environmental stressors, and violation of norms, which trigger affect, which is followed by sensemaking and responses to the provocation. Also, Lim et al. (2008) illustrated how supervisor, coworker, and work satisfaction mediated experiences of incivility and greater intentions to quit and poor mental health. Thus, we hypothesize as follows:

Hypothesis 7. The relationships between incivility and aggression, displacement, absenteeism, and exit will be mediated by anger, fear and sadness. Specifically, anger will mediate incivility and direct aggression and indirect aggression toward the instigator, and displacement on the organization and others.

Fear will mediate incivility and indirect aggression against the instigator, displacement on the organization and others, absenteeism, and exit. Sadness will mediate incivility and absenteeism and exit.

Method

Sample and Data-Collection Procedure

We collected data from 137 employed MBA students (41 females, 96 males) who were enrolled in a management class at a large western university. The survey was described as voluntary and was distributed by someone other than the classroom instructor. The participants were assured anonymity, and were enticed to participate with several small prizes (T-shirts and hats from the university bookstore) and a gift certificate to the bookstore. Participants were entered in a random lottery to win those prizes as a token of appreciation for their time and participation. The response rate was 100%.

The average tenure of respondents within their firms was 4.5 years (range = <1 year to >35 years). Respondents' mean age was 30 years (range = 24–59 years). The sample was 48% Caucasian, 23% Asian/Pacific Islander, 7% Hispanic/Latino, 6% African American, and 16% "other." Industry backgrounds include 15% manufacturing; 34% financial services; 8% government; 8% education; 3% transportation; 9% retail; 3% consumer services; 10% consulting; 4% healthcare; 2% oil/gas; and less than 1% from defense, advertising, insurance, and diversified.

Of the uncivilly acting instigators described by these respondents, 70% were male. In addition, 58% had more status than the respondent, 8% had equal status as the respondent, and 34% had lower status than the respondent. Respondents were asked whether they had ever experienced an uncivil, rude, or disrespectful interaction at work. They were then asked to think about this specific interaction and, in separate sections of the survey, were asked a series of questions about their emotional responses, as well as their behavioral responses with respect to the specified uncivil interaction. The participants also answered specific questions about the instigator and the organizational context in separate sections, as will be detailed later.

Measures

We controlled for several variables that might be associated with the emotional and behavioral responses of targets of incivility. We controlled for

target gender and instigator gender, since research has suggested that people may respond to mistreatment differently based on gender (Aquino & Douglas, 2003). We also controlled for hierarchical status, since it has been shown to influence perceptions and responses to mistreatment (Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2001). We measured hierarchical status, as did Aquino and Douglas (2003) and Aquino et al. (2004), by asking participants to indicate whether they were employed in a non-management, line-management, middle-management, or senior/executive-management position. Like Aquino et al. (2004), these responses were coded such that higher values indicate higher status (1 = *non-management* to 4 = *senior/executive management*).

Incivility. To operationally match the description of incivility by Andersson and Pearson (1999) and Pearson et al. (2000) as acts of interpersonal disrespect, we assessed perceived incivility. We asked the respondents to indicate on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) the extent to which they agreed that the perpetrator “was rude to me,” “did not respect me,” “was insensitive to me,” and “insulted me” ($\alpha = .71$).

Targets' relative status. To identify the targets' relative status, we asked them to indicate whether their status was *lower*, *equal*, or *higher* than the instigator's.

Emotional responses of target. We asked respondents to recall specific details of the uncivil encounter, and then indicate how they felt at the time of the incident. Using Watson, Clark, and Tellegen's (1988) Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS), anger was measured with three items (*angry*, *irritated*, *indignant*; $\alpha = .78$), fear was measured with three items (*afraid*, *scared*, *nervous*; $\alpha = .90$), and sadness was measured with three items (*sad*, *disappointed*, *downhearted*). Agreement with the items was rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*; $\alpha = .75$).

Behavioral responses of target. We asked participants (targets) how frequently they had engaged in various behaviors as a result of experiencing this particular incident of uncivil behavior. The response options ranged from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*several times a day*), except in the case of the exit items, which were rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

To measure the concepts that were theorized to follow negative emotions—aggression (direct and indirect), displacement (on the organization and others), and withdrawal (absenteeism and exit)—we scanned existing scales and included 10 behaviors from Neuman and Baron's (1998) aggression scales (obstructionism, hostility, and overt aggression); and 6 behaviors from Skarlicki and Folger's (1997) Organizational Retaliatory Behavior (ORB) scale. We created two items and adapted one (decreased coworker assistance) from the ORB scale to measure how people might displace on others. We also created two additional items to measure displacement on the organization.

Because we found only one item that measured absenteeism from current scales (“called in sick when not ill” from the ORB scale), we created an additional absenteeism item (“decreased the amount of time they spent at work”) and two exit items (“changed jobs as a result of the incident,” “changed jobs within the organization to avoid the instigator”). We performed a confirmatory factor analysis to determine whether the factors representing direct aggression, indirect aggression, displacement on the organization, displacement on others, absenteeism, and exit were distinct.

We used LISREL 8.53 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993) to evaluate the fit of the measurement model. We achieved adequate model fit, with the fit statistics—that is, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), and incremental fit index (IFI)—all falling (Gerbing & Anderson, 1992) in the acceptable range (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; RMSEA = .07; CFI = .94; IFI = .94). We tested competing confirmatory factor analysis models, including a one-factor model of these items (RMSEA = .18; CFI = .75; IFI = .75), but the six-factor model that measured direct aggression, indirect aggression, displacement on the organization, displacement on others, absenteeism, and exit achieved the best model fit and was significantly better than competing models. In order to compare fit indexes across models, we used the standards recommended by Scullen, Mount, and Judge (2003), who suggested that an increase in chi square of 20% and a downward change of .01 to .02 in CFI indicate a significant decrement in model fit.

Direct aggression. We assessed direct aggression using four items that were designed for the present study ($\alpha = .72$). Targets were asked to indicate the extent to which they verbally threatened the instigator, belittled the instigator or his or her opinion, harmed/stole something important to the instigator, and made negative/obscene gestures toward the instigator.

Indirect aggression. We assessed indirect aggression with six items that were designed for the present study ($\alpha = .72$). The targets were asked to indicate the extent to which they spread negative rumors about the instigator, delayed action on the instigator’s needs, withheld information that the instigator needed, gave the instigator the “silent treatment,” avoided the instigator, and told a neutral party about the incident to get back at the instigator.

Displacement on the organization. We measured displacement on the organization with four items ($\alpha = .90$). The targets were asked to indicate the extent to which they decreased work effort, work quality, work performance, and commitment to the organization after experiencing incivility.

Displacement on others. We measured displacement on others with three items ($\alpha = .81$). The targets were asked to indicate the extent to which they took out bad feelings at home, decreased assistance to coworkers, and decreased assistance to customers.

Absenteeism. We measured absenteeism with two items ($\alpha = .68$). The targets were asked to indicate the extent to which they decreased the amount of time they spent at work and called in sick when they were not ill.

Exit. We measured exit with two items ($\alpha = .83$). The targets were asked if they changed jobs as a result of the incident, and if they changed jobs within the organization to avoid the instigator.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the independent and dependent variables are presented in Table 1. To test Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, we conducted hierarchical regression analyses to test if incivility affected emotional experiences of anger, fear, and sadness. As shown in Table 2, we entered the control variables in Step 1, and the main effect in Step 2.

As incivility increases, so do the negative emotional experiences of the targets. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, targets who perceived greater uncivil treatment reported greater anger ($\beta = .31, p < .001$). Consistent with Hypothesis 2, targets who perceived greater uncivil treatment reported greater fear ($\beta = .41, p < .001$). Consistent with Hypothesis 3, targets who perceived greater uncivil treatment reported greater sadness ($\beta = .29, p = .001$).

To test Hypotheses 4a and 4b, we conducted a hierarchical regression analysis, testing whether anger predicted direct aggression, indirect aggression, displacement on the organization, and displacement on others; and how the target's relative status affected these relationships. As shown in Table 3, although targets' anger was positively associated with direct aggression ($\beta = .35, p < .01$), it was not significantly associated with indirect aggression ($\beta = .13, ns$), displacement on the organization ($\beta = -.09, ns$) or displacement on others ($\beta = -.11, ns$). Targets' relative status did not significantly moderate the relationship between anger and direct aggression.

Status did moderate the anger-displacement relationships, though. As shown in Figure 2, targets' relative status significantly moderated the anger/displacement-on-the-organization relationship ($\beta = -.57, p = .05$), such that as anger increased, lower status targets were much more likely than were equal or higher status targets to displace on the organization. Regardless of anger, higher status targets were unlikely to displace on the organization. Similarly, as shown in Figure 3, targets' relative status significantly moderated the relationship between anger/displacement on others ($\beta = -.57, p = .05$), such that at low levels of anger, lower status targets were less likely than were equal or higher status targets to displace on others. However, as anger increased, lower status targets were much more likely to displace on others, whereas equal and higher status targets were less likely to do so.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Incivility	5.25	1.38	(.71)													
2. Target gender	0.72	0.44	-.11	—												
3. Instigator gender	0.30	0.45	-.18	-.01	—											
4. Hierarchical status	2.40	1.35	-.14	.05	.04	—										
5. Target relative status	0.47	0.77	-.27**	-.06	.40**	.14	—									
6. Anger	4.85	1.61	.32**	-.10	-.10	-.06	-.16*	(.78)								
7. Fear	3.45	1.64	.39**	-.10	.00	-.04	-.25**	.33**	(.90)							
8. Sadness	3.42	1.89	.27**	-.07	.05	-.02	-.26**	.31**	.43**	(.75)						
9. Direct aggression	1.94	0.97	-.08	-.04	.14	.03	.04	.33*	.11	.25*	(.72)					
10. Indirect aggression	3.42	1.42	.14	-.11	-.15	-.08	-.12	.19*	.26**	.07	.23**	(.72)				
11. Displace on organization others	2.85	1.61	.16*	.03	-.04	-.10	-.20*	-.02	.22**	.08	.06	.40**	(.90)			
12. Displace on others	2.56	1.44	.13	-.07	-.05	.10	-.07	-.04	.19*	.03	.17*	.44**	.56**	(.81)		
13. Absenteeism	2.29	1.22	.17*	-.01	.02	-.15	-.27**	.17*	.31**	.31**	.24**	.40**	.63**	.40**	(.68)	
14. Exit	2.67	1.83	.27**	-.16	-.09	-.24**	-.35**	.13	.44**	.24**	.02	.36**	.36**	.26**	.60**	(.83)

Note. N = 137.
 *p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 2

Hierarchical Regression Analysis With Incivility Predicting Anger, Fear, and Sadness

	Anger		Fear		Sadness	
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2
Target gender	-.10	-.05	-.09	-.05	-.07	-.04
Instigator gender	-.08	-.02	-.01	.08	.06	.12
Hierarchical status	-.06	-.01	-.06	.00	-.01	.03
Incivility		.31**		.41**		.29**
R^2	.02	.11	.01	.17	.01	.09
F	0.89	3.98**	0.57	6.75**	0.37	3.23*
ΔR^2		.09		.16		.08

Note. The reported statistics are standardized betas (with the exception of R^2 , F , and ΔR^2).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

To test Hypotheses 5a and 5b, we conducted a hierarchical regression analysis, testing whether fear predicted indirect aggression, displacement on the organization, displacement on others, absenteeism, and exit; and how targets' relative status affected these relationships. As shown in Table 4, targets' fear was positively associated with indirect aggression ($\beta = .28$, $p < .01$), displacement on the organization ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$), displacement on others ($\beta = .21$, $p < .05$), absenteeism ($\beta = .28$, $p = .001$), and exit ($\beta = .37$, $p < .01$). Targets' status did not significantly moderate these relationships.

To test Hypotheses 6a and 6b, we conducted a hierarchical regression analysis, testing whether sadness predicted absenteeism and exit, as well as how targets' relative status might affect these relationships. As indicated in Table 5, targets' sadness was associated with absenteeism ($\beta = .25$, $p < .05$), but not exit ($\beta = .15$, *ns*). Targets' relative status significantly moderated both of these relationships. As shown in Figure 4, targets' relative status significantly moderated the sadness-absenteeism relationship ($\beta = -.46$, $p < .05$), such that at low levels of sadness, lower status targets were slightly more likely to be absent than were those with equal or higher status as their instigators. This difference became much more pronounced as sadness increased. Further, as shown in Figure 5, targets' relative status significantly moderated the sadness-exit relationship ($\beta = -.61$, $p < .01$). At low levels of

Table 3
Hierarchical Regression Analysis With Anger and Relative Status Predicting Aggression and Displacement

	Direct aggression			Indirect aggression			Displacement on organization			Displacement on others		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Target gender	-.04	-.01	-.01	-.08	-.07	-.08	.03	.01	.01	-.05	-.06	-.07
Instigator gender	.15	.17	.17	-.17	-.10	-.11	-.06	.05	.03	-.07	-.04	-.05
Hierarchical status	.03	.05	.05	-.03	-.01	-.02	-.10	-.06	-.07	.15	.16	.15
Anger		.35**	.21		.13	.51		-.09	.29		-.11	.28
Relative status		.03	-.14		-.13	.33		-.28**	.18		-.09	.37
Anger × Status			.22			-.56			-.57*			-.57*
R ²	.02	.14	.15	.04	.07	.10	.01	.08	.10	.03	.04	.07
F	1.12	4.28**	3.65**	1.55	1.89	2.27*	0.59	2.10	2.44*	1.21	1.10	1.56
ΔR ²		.12	.01		.03	.03		.07	.02		.01	.03

Note. The reported statistics are standardized betas (with the exception of R², F, and ΔR²). The results are those found in the last step of hierarchical regression.
 *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

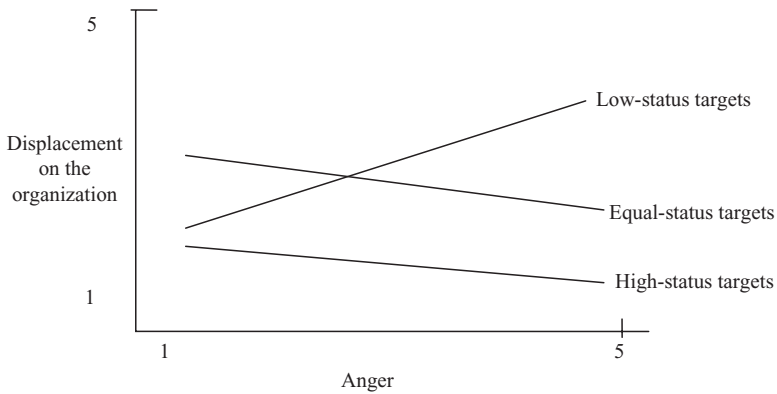


Figure 2. Anger and target status predicting displacement on the organization.

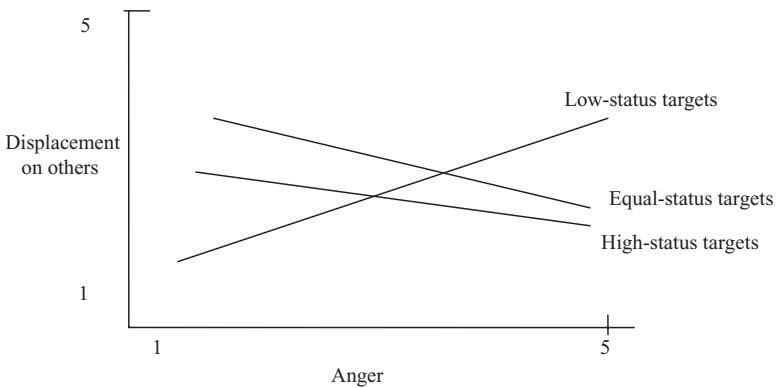


Figure 3. Anger and target status predicting displacement on others.

sadness, lower status targets were slightly more likely to exit than were equal or higher status targets, but this difference became much more pronounced as sadness increased.

To test Hypothesis 7—the mediating effect of emotions on incivility and aggression, displacement, and exit—we followed Baron and Kenny's (1986) three-step mediation regression procedures. The first requirement is that the predictor variables (in this case, incivility) must be related to the mediators (anger, fear, and sadness). As shown in Table 1, this condition was met. Second, the predictor variable must be related to the dependent variables. As shown in Table 1, this condition is evidenced by the positive correlations between incivility and displacement on the organization, absenteeism, and

Table 4
Hierarchical Regression Analysis With Fear and Relative Status Predicting Indirect Aggression, Displacement, and Withdrawal

	Indirect aggression			Displace on organization			Displace on others			Absenteeism			Exit		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Target gender	-.10	-.06	-.07	.03	.05	.04	-.07	-.05	-.05	.00	.02	.02	-.16	-.13	-.14
Instigator gender	-.13	-.13	-.12	-.04	.02	.03	-.03	-.03	-.03	.06	.15	.15	-.07	.03	.04
Hierarchical status	-.05	-.03	-.04	-.12	-.09	-.10	.11	.13	.13	-.12	-.07	-.08	-.22	-.17	-.18
Fear		.28**	.42*		.18*	.33		.21*	.25		.28**	.34*		.37**	.57
Target relative status		.01	.14		-.14	-.01		-.01	.03		-.23*	-.17		-.24**	-.05
Fear × Status			-.19			-.20			-.06			-.08			-.26
R ²	.03	.10	.11	.02	.07	.08	.02	.06	.06	.02	.16	.17	.08	.31	.32
F	1.22	3.01	2.64	0.73	2.18	1.97	0.82	1.68	1.40	0.78	5.34**	4.45**	3.99*	11.66**	10.14**
ΔR ²		.07	.01		.05	.01		.03	<.01		.14	.01		.23	.01

Note. The reported statistics are standardized betas (with the exception of R², F, and ΔR²). The results are those found in the last step of hierarchical regression. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 5

Hierarchical Regression Analysis With Sadness and Relative Status Predicting Withdrawal

	Absenteeism			Exit		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Target gender	.00	.01	.02	-.13	-.16	-.20*
Instigator gender	.06	.13	.14	-.07	.05	.06
Hierarchical status	-.12	-.09	-.09	-.23	-.18	-.18*
Sadness		.25**	.63		.15	.65**
Target relative status		-.24*	.05		-.30**	.08
Sadness \times Status			-.46*			-.61**
R^2	.02	.15	.18	.08	.20	.25
F	0.78	4.74**	4.82**	3.99*	6.69**	7.35**
ΔR^2		.13	.03		.12	.05

Note. The reported statistics are standardized betas (with the exception of R^2 , F , and ΔR^2). The results are those found in the last step of hierarchical regression.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.



Figure 4. Sadness and target status predicting absenteeism.

exit. Third, the mediator must be related to the dependent variables. As shown in Table 1, fear was related to displacement on the organization, absenteeism, and exit; sadness was related to displacement on the organization and exit. Fourth, the effect of the predictor variable on the dependent

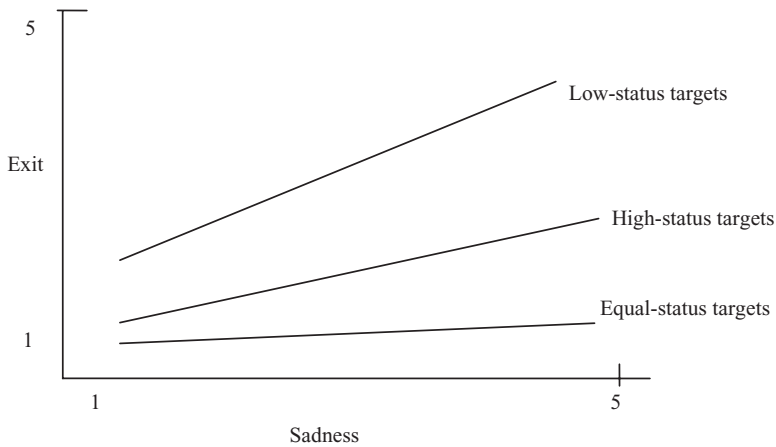


Figure 5. Sadness and target status predicting exit.

variable must be significantly reduced or disappear when included in a regression with the mediating variables. When fear was included in the hierarchical regressions (with the control variables and incivility entered in Steps 1 and 2, respectively), the relationships between fear and absenteeism ($\beta = .32$, $p < .01$) and exit ($\beta = .41$, $p < .01$) were significant; whereas the relationships between incivility and absenteeism ($\beta = .04$, *ns*) and exit ($\beta = .06$, *ns*) disappeared. Thus, fear fully mediated the relationships between incivility and absenteeism and exit. When sadness was included in the hierarchical regressions (with the control variables and incivility, entered in Steps 1 and 2, respectively), the relationship between sadness and absenteeism ($\beta = .29$, $p < .01$) was significant; whereas the relationship between incivility and absenteeism ($\beta = .09$, *ns*) disappeared. Thus, sadness fully mediated the relationship between incivility and absenteeism.

Discussion

The antisocial behavior and aggression literatures document the behavioral responses to various forms of antisocial behavior (e.g., Aquino et al., 1999; Cortina et al. 2001; Lim & Cortina, 2005; Lim et al., 2008). Using appraisal theory as a framework (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), our research begins to untangle the intricacies of how emotional responses affect behavioral responses. Anger in response to incivility and other forms of deviance has been theorized (e.g., Andersson & Pearson, 1999) and documented. However, sadness and fear, particularly with respect to lower

intensity forms of mistreatment (e.g., incivility) are typically not discussed and clearly are understudied. We learned that while most targets are angry (86%), the majority report sadness (56%), and a surprising number report fear (46%).

Consistent with appraisal theories of emotion, the results follow action tendencies linked to anger, fear, and sadness. Retribution against the anger-inducing entity is enacted here through aggression, both direct and indirect; fear plays out through covert and displaced negative behavior, as indirect aggression, displacement on the organization, absenteeism, and exit; and sadness is expressed through withdrawal, as absenteeism.

Importantly, we consider how relative status affects the ways in which people respond out of anger, fear, and sadness. Our results suggest that during this appraisal process, targets weigh consequences, attributions, and coping potential. Specifically, we demonstrated that targets of incivility who experience greater anger will aggress directly, unless they are of lower status than their instigators, in which case they will be more likely to displace their anger on the organization and on others. We also found targets' fear to be associated with indirect aggression against instigators, displacement on the organization and on others, absenteeism, and exit. We found that targets of lower status who experienced greater fear in organizations were the most likely to be absent and to exit, presumably as a result of their appraisal that no other organizationally acceptable options exist. Greater sadness led to absenteeism, but not to exit. Status played a crucial role in responding out of sadness: Lower status targets who experienced greater sadness were more likely to be absent and to exit.

Emotions play an important role in our organizational experiences (cf. Brief & Weiss, 2002). Learning more about how emotions affect behavioral responses and how context shapes emotional responses not only contributes to the literature (e.g., Brief & Weiss, 2002; Tiedens et al., 2000), but also provides practical information for managers and for organizations. For instance, when we looked at anger as related to actual workplace experiences, we found negative consequences for individuals and organizations. Moreover, we found that consequences may be hidden, as angry lower status targets may get even through displacement on the organization and on others.

These findings provide an appreciable counterpoint to a growing stream of experimental research that has associated anger with positive workplace outcomes (e.g., Tiedens, 1999, 2001; Tiedens et al., 2000). According to our findings, fear and sadness as related to actual experiences of incivility are associated with behaviors that could negatively impact individuals and organizations. The consequences of fear and sadness are exacerbated when targets are of lower status. Such findings underscore the importance of raising

awareness about incivility and its effects, as detrimental consequences may be hidden in response to the target's status and contextual factors.

Research Directions

This research provides initial evidence of ways in which employees push their responses to mistreatment underground, as scholars have contended (e.g., Cortina, 2008; Cortina et al., 2001; Fletcher, 1999; Pearson et al., 2000). Whether targets of incivility aggress indirectly against their instigators, when they displace negative behaviors on their organizations and on others, or when they leave their work environments, these behaviors tend to elude organizational awareness. When these behaviors take place, their links to incidents of incivility are often missed. Therefore, important questions remain regarding the most effective means of uncovering and tracking mistreatment at work as it happens, especially when it is of relatively mild forms or when it is delivered by higher status instigators.

Scant organizational research has explored the experience of fear. We find this surprising, especially in regard to studies of workplace deviance. We found negative behavioral effects of workplace fear, but it has been contended elsewhere that fear can have a positive organizational impact (Lerner, 2004). We find this provocative and wonder whether fear serves any useful purpose in separating out the relationally resilient.

Little research has addressed sadness in the workplace. Our findings indicate that the social context—including the uncivil experiences of the target and the pattern of instigator incivility—may have an important impact on people's sadness and, ultimately, their exit. Longitudinal emotion research might explore the long-term impact of repeated experiences of sadness, taking into account contextual factors.

Practical Implications

Uncivil demeanor at work captures relatively little attention in organizational settings. In some work environments, incivility is considered simply a "personal" issue or an interpersonal matter of inconsequential impact (Pearson et al., 2000). However, this study provides a data-based rationale for taking action. Many organizations attempt to enhance employees' emotional intelligence via individual, executive team, and cultural assessment and development. Linking incivility and negative emotions, as well negative emotions and behavioral outcomes opens a path for ferreting out incivility as a potential source of emotional disruption at work. Drawing these connections also opens links to vital biological research into the brain science of emotions.

This path could prove instrumental at the core of understanding incivility; for example, in discerning why very low-intensity affronts among employees can incite volatile outbursts and career-stifling exits.

As we found, targets risk their reputation, efficiency, and sense of engagement in response to their experiences of incivility. When they aggress indirectly against their instigators (e.g., by avoiding the instigator or giving the instigator the “silent treatment”), they may miss career opportunities that, otherwise, could have been facilitated by the instigator. This outcome is especially costly when the instigator is of higher status and, consequently, holds greater access to resources. When targets aggress directly against instigators (e.g., by threatening, belittling, or spreading rumors), their relationships may be strained and their reputations tarnished, or their actions may model a costly game of retribution. Targets who displace their fear on the organization (e.g., by working less time, putting in less effort, being less productive) may not only reduce team or organizational effectiveness, but also may reduce their own opportunities for advancement or learning.

Our results underscore the pressing need to manage civil conduct, especially that of higher status employees. Many targets’ behavioral responses that we have identified could leave even well intended but ill-behaved instigators unaware of their targets’ anger, fear, and sadness, as well as their targets’ behavioral repercussions. These findings support the need to appraise organizational civility, especially among high-status employees, as perceived across all hierarchical levels (e.g., via 360-degree feedback tools) and to screen out chronic-instigator applicants through thorough reference checks. Further, to contain the costs of incivility, incidents should be curtailed and corrected when they occur, regardless of the status of the instigator. Of final note, post-departure interviews may be invaluable to organizations seeking to ascertain the extent to which incivility contributed to former employees’ decisions to exit.

Study Limitations

As we attempted to learn more about workplace incivility, we faced several limitations that warrant caution. First, this study is correlational; thus, we can only speculate causality. Second, in relying on self-report, this study lacks triangulation of data, which could yield stronger validation of findings, even though the added value of observers or organizational records concerning workplace deviance may be questionable (Aquino et al., 1999). Third, although our use of critical incidents may increase accuracy of recall (e.g., Harlos & Pinder, 2000; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Weick, 1995), self-reports may still be biased by people’s beliefs about their own and others’ psychology. Finally, although we captured the responses of employees from

a wide variety of industries in different hierarchical positions, the MBA population is more professional and of higher socioeconomic status than the average population. Additional studies may test and compare our results with those from other types of samples.

To minimize limitations in our approach, we took as many precautions as possible. For example, to eliminate the likelihood of common method variance, we followed many recommendations by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003), and included separate measurement of predictor and criterion variables psychologically, protected anonymity, and reduced evaluation apprehension. In addition, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and obtained support for the measurement of our constructs (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

By demonstrating individual and organizational costs associated with incivility, we hope that leaders will act in ways that curtail or redress such behaviors. We caution academics and practitioners that these efforts may prove challenging. The phenomenon of incivility can be difficult to detect, and emotional and behavioral responses to incivility may elude even watchful eyes. As we have shown, targets may respond to incivility in discrete or covert ways, thus complicating detection and remediation. Nonetheless, we have demonstrated that employees who behave uncivilly evoke anger, fear, and sadness. Feeling angry, fearful, or sad, targets of incivility take actions that are detrimental to their instigators, their organizations, and themselves, and they do so in ways that create divergent challenges that vary by the status of the instigator and target.

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