

Don't rock the boat

The moderating role of gender in the relationship between workplace incivility and work withdrawal

Workplace
incivility
and work
withdrawal

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Abstract

Purpose – There is a vast array of literature which investigates the concept and impact of workplace incivility. Evidence suggests that compared to male employees, female employees tend to experience and put up more with workplace incivility. However, there is limited research on how this affects female employee's willingness to complete work-related tasks. The purpose of this paper is to set out to examine whether gender moderates the role between tolerance for workplace incivility and those behaviours characterised by work withdrawal.

Design/methodology/approach – In total, 317 employees from a range of business industries and governmental agencies completed a quantitative survey of measures relating to their work withdrawal behaviour and their perception of their workplaces' tolerance for uncivil behaviours.

Findings – Results revealed that when females perceived high levels of tolerance for workplace incivility, they decreased their work withdrawal behaviour. No relationship between tolerance for workplace incivility and work withdrawal was found for males.

Research limitations/implications – The homogeneity of the sample, that is, the sample comprised predominantly of white-collar, White Australian workers.

Practical implications – Improve managers and organisations' knowledge and understanding about deviant workplace behaviours – especially between male and female employees.

Originality/value – The paper adds to the work in the workplace incivility, diversity-gender and equity research area. Specifically, it highlights how male and female employees react when they perceive that their workplace tolerates deviant behaviours. This knowledge will inform managers and their organisations of a more effective way of managing conflict.

Keywords Gender, Work withdrawal, Workplace incivility

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Widespread attention in recent years has focused on interpersonal mistreatment in the workplace as a cause for concern. Extensive research has examined those violent and aggressive experiences which appear to have the greatest likelihood of negative impact: workplace violence, bullying, and sexual harassment (Baillien and De Witte, 2009; Lutgen-Sandvik *et al.*, 2007; Parker and Griffin, 2002; Saunders *et al.*, 2007). Despite research evidence which suggests that workplace incivility may be a precursor to



workplace violence (Baron and Neuman, 1996; Kinney, 1995), less research has focused on this milder form of workplace mistreatment (Cortina *et al.*, 2001).

2. What is workplace incivility?

Workplace incivility is defined as “low-intensity, disrespectful or rude deviant workplace behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm the target and is in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect” (Andersson and Pearson, 1999, p. 457). In other words, workplace incivility is the “exchange of seemingly inconsequential words and deeds that violate conventional norms of workplace conduct” (Pearson and Porath, 2009, p. 21). Incivility has been defined in the literature in terms of a “target” (e.g. Andersson and Pearson, 1999) or as a lack of regard for those at whom the behaviour is directed. It is this lack of regard (Andersson and Pearson, 1999) for those at whom the behaviour is directed that is important. Incivility is also described as “treatment that is discourteous, rude, impatient, or otherwise showing a lack of respect or consideration for another’s dignity” (Kane and Montgomery, 1998, p. 266). As a result, the affronted employee’s commitment to his or her job deteriorates over time (Montgomery *et al.*, 2004). Examples of some of these rude behaviours include not saying please or thank you, general gossip, rolling one’s eyes at co-workers’ suggestions, texting or emailing during meetings, making derogatory comments, and ignoring or insulting colleagues (Johnson and Indvik, 2001; Pearson *et al.*, 2001; Pearson and Porath, 2009).

Of significance in the incivility definition is the notion of ambiguity. It does not need to be the intention of the perpetrator to deliberately cause discomfort or distress in those affected (Andersson and Pearson, 1999). In fact, the behaviour could reasonably be presumed to be the result of perpetrator ignorance (not knowing what effect the behaviour would have), or of misunderstanding or extreme sensitivity by the target (Andersson and Pearson, 1999). In other words, one of the greatest challenges to incivility is that it is not an objective occurrence. Rather, it depends on the subjective interpretation of actions, and how some of these “ambiguous intents” make individuals feel. Depending on the participants and the contexts, these incivilities may be perceived as intentionally offensive or not.

A number of researchers have theorised that what is considered offensive or not vary along gender lines (Berdahl and Moore, 2006; Konrad and Gutek, 1986; Montgomery *et al.*, 2004). According to this line of reasoning, women tend to be more sensitive to the nuances of social behaviours than men. Consequently, they may be more likely than men to attend to interpersonal problems such as incivility at work. A number of studies have indeed found that women consistently rate potentially uncivil or harassing behaviours at work as more offensive, inappropriate or insulting than men (Berdahl and Moore, 2006; Konrad and Gutek, 1986; Montgomery *et al.*, 2004).

3. Why should we be concerned about workplace incivility?

Research indicates that incivility is a common occurrence in work settings. In other words, there is no one industry that encourages incivility. For example, a survey of more than 1,000 US civil service workers found that more than 70 per cent of the respondents had experienced workplace incivility in the past five years (Cortina *et al.*, 2001). A poll of 125 white-collar employees in Canada found that half of the respondents had suffered incivility from their co-workers at least once per week and 99 per cent of these respondents reported that they had witnessed incivility at work. Pearson and Porath’s (2009) survey of about 800 employees found that 96 per cent of the

respondents reported experiencing incivility at work and 94 per cent of workers who were treated with incivility said they would “get even” with their perpetrators. In the most recent Civility in America, 2011 study, 43 per cent of respondents reported that they experienced incivility at work, 38 per cent said the workplace is becoming more uncivil compared to a few years ago, 86 per cent of Americans said they have been victims of incivility, and at the same time, 59 per cent admitted that they have also been uncivil themselves. These studies provide important evidence to suggest that incivility is a prevalent and growing problem for many organisations (Trudel, 2009). Research also indicates that work environments which focus on individual, short-term contributions and gains may foster workplace incivility (Pearson and Porath, 2004). Specifically, part-timers, subcontractors, temporary workers, minorities, women, and disenfranchised employees are particularly vulnerable to workplace incivility (Pearson and Porath, 2004).

4. Consequences of workplace incivility

Despite its seemingly low intensity, workplace incivility can adversely affect organisations’ and employees’ psychological as well as physical well-being. Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 19) defined psychological stress as a “relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being.” This definition implies that any event judged by the individual to be stressful can have a negative impact. Regardless of how minor workplace incivility may seem, in the long run, workplace incivility is a form of daily hassle which wears down individuals both psychologically and physically (Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). This can have a greater negative effect on individuals’ well-being than any major, time-confined events (Fisher, 2000). Moreover, the ambiguous nature of workplace incivility makes it difficult to be identified or dealt with effectively. Therefore, workplace incivility may be just as damaging psychologically as harassment or any other form of workplace mistreatment.

Previous research has found a positive association between workplace incivility and work withdrawal (Lim *et al.*, 2008; Pearson and Porath, 2009). Work withdrawal refers to behaviour that dissatisfied employees take to reduce the time spent on their specific work tasks (Hanisch and Hulin, 1990). This includes coming to work late, excusing themselves from work, taking longer breaks, or taking sick leave when they are not really sick (Andersson and Pearson, 1999; Cortina *et al.*, 2001; Lim and Cortina, 2005; Miner-Rubino and Cortina, 2004; Pearson *et al.*, 2001; Pearson and Porath, 2009). Pearson and Porath (2005) found that employees who experienced workplace incivility reduced their work effort and this ultimately reduced the quality of their work. Thus, employees’ withdrawal from work can cause major production and service disruptions for organisations.

5. Power, gender stereotyping and selective incivility

Research on whether workplace incivility is an equal opportunity offence (i.e. whether men are as likely as women to be targets) has been mixed (Pearson *et al.*, 2000, 2005; Pearson and Porath, 2009). For instance, Pearson and Porath (2005) found that men and women were both equally likely to be exposed to workplace incivility. In contrast, Cortina *et al.* (2001) and Pearson and Porath (2009) found that women were more likely than men to be exposed to incivility and to be the targets of mistreatment. For example,

Cortina *et al.* (2002) found 65 per cent of women compared to 47 per cent of men experienced “general incivility” in their workplace. This recalls research conducted in the 1990s by Björkqvist *et al.* (1994) who reported that 55 per cent of female compared to 30 per cent of male university employees they interviewed had experienced harassment at work. Therefore, it is not surprising that workplace incivility persists in modern, egalitarian organisations and is particularly salient across gender and racial lines (Cortina *et al.*, 2013; Pearson and Porath, 2009).

Research over many years has shown that men and women experience the workplace differently and this has been evidenced through the existence of the glass ceiling (e.g. Cotter *et al.*, 2001). Social power theory has speculated that workplace incivility may operate as a means of asserting power (Cortina *et al.*, 2001; Raven and French, 1958). Social power is defined as the measure of influence an individual is able to assert over other people or outcomes (French and Raven, 1959). According to this theory, society confers greater power on particular individuals through social expectations and norms. For example, Pearson and Porath (2005) reported that those with greater power (e.g. a manager) are more likely to be the instigators of incivility than those with lesser power (e.g. a front desk secretary).

Who has power and who does not can be segmented along social gender roles. In masculine societies like Australia (Hofstede, 1980), social gender roles provide the basis on which status and gender stereotypes are formed: Men as authoritative figures and women as submissive figures. Through this process, gender itself becomes an organising principle in hierarchies and authority. Empirical research provides support for such an argument. For instance, Carli (1999) reported that compared to men, women in the workplace do not receive the same pay or promotions entitled to them. If women are unable to achieve these benefits, they are in no position to shape outcomes, command respect, or be as deserving of status as men (Carli, 1999). Salin (2003, p. 1219) found that a “perceived power imbalance is a prerequisite for bullying to occur” and these imbalances can and do occur as a result of traditional gender stereotyping. Rudman and Kilianski (2000, p. 1325), investigating attitudes toward female authority, found there is an inherent tendency for individuals to regard males “as authority figures and women as subordinates”. Consequently, this lack of equal opportunity in the workplace may give rise to what Cortina (2008) and Kabat-Farr and Cortina (2012) call “selective incivility.”

Selective incivility is a recent theory proposed by Kabat-Farr and Cortina (2012) which posits that incivility could be one of the mechanisms by which gender and racial disparities persist in many modern organisations. Unlike isolated theories on feminism, gender roles and/or gender work ethics and norms, selectivity incivility provides an overarching, intersectional perspective based on “simultaneously consider[ing] the meaning and consequences of multiple categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage” (Cole, 2009, p. 170). It is crucial in understanding how social identities vary in power and privilege and how they affect the experiences of minorities and women in the workplace (Browne and Misra, 2003; Greenman and Xie, 2008).

Selective incivilities are evolved, old-fashioned discriminations, but these “old fashioned” discriminations have become more subtle and ambiguous in nature given the political correctness of today’s societies. In other words, selective incivility is a form of modern covert discrimination held by individuals who claim to value egalitarianism and who avoid discriminations of both gender and race. These individuals only discriminate against people of colour or women when the discriminatory nature of their conduct is not evident or if evident, is rationalisable (i.e. can be explained by something

other than race) (Cortina, 2008). As a result of this subtlety and ambiguity, many people misinterpret these discriminations as rude or discourteous behaviour and not what it should have been: racism and/or gender discrimination.

6. Tolerance to workplace incivility

While research has investigated the trademark behaviours inherent in uncivil behaviour and the effects these have on individual well-being, there is a dearth of research on how disparities in work experiences between male and female employees affect their reaction to workplace incivility. In general, Pearson and Porath (2005, p. 9) consider organisations' responses to workplace incivility as "spotty" at best even though it is clearly a problem and a gender divide in the experience of incivility as well as reactions to incivility appear to exist. For example, Collinson (1998) found that an organisation with a tough male-dominated culture can often rely heavily on "embarrassing jokes," "dark humour," or "humorous surprises" in order to ensure conformity to a particular ethos. In the factory shop-floor he investigated, Collinson (1998) found the men were required to swear, joke, and be dismissive of women in order to lionise their working-class masculinity. Thus, this kind of behaviour can become accepted as part of the everyday organisational culture. However, it is important to note that this kind of humour or uncivil behaviour can easily become bullying if for some reason the targets cannot defend themselves (Collinson, 1998; Einarsen and Raknes, 1997).

According to Andersson and Pearson (1999), when individuals disrespect one another, these uncivil exchanges may spiral into outright aggression. If incivility becomes the norm for daily interactions among employees, this can lead to an organisational culture of conflict (Pearson and Porath, 2005). Organisational culture refers to values- stated and implicit beliefs, norms and traditions which govern how the organisation should operate and how its employees should behave (Deal and Kennedy, 2000; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006; Schein, 1992). Such a culture can result in dissatisfaction (Estes and Wang, 2008), lost efficiency (Gonthier, 2002; Pearson *et al.*, 2000; Pearson and Porath, 2005), high turnover (Kane and Montgomery, 1998; Tepper, 2000), absenteeism, and monetary losses (Cortina and Magley, 2009).

More importantly, when organisations do nothing to discourage a perpetrator's uncivil behaviour or in some instances, reward the perpetrator's uncivil behaviours, they may become "role models" for others and this can lead to an organisational climate which tolerates uncivil behaviours. Organisational climate represents a set of workplace properties which are perceived directly or indirectly by the employees; these properties are assumed to be a major force in influencing employees' behaviours (Ivancevich *et al.*, 2004).

In the current study, organisational tolerance for incivility is considered a form of organisational climate. As noted above, when an organisation does nothing to deter uncivil behaviour (i.e. tolerates incivility in the workplace), it can become embodied and perceived by employees as acceptable behaviour in the workplace- and has the ability to influence employees' workplace behaviours.

7. Gender differences in reaction to conflict

Research has generally confirmed that there are gender differences in the kinds of strategies that males and females employ when confronted by conflict. Traditionally, and as shaped by socialisation, females are more likely to adopt a relationship-oriented

position and attempt to use problem-solving discussions to overcome their conflicts (Heavey *et al.*, 1993). Magley *et al.* (2010) make the claim that females have relatively little organisational power compared with males. This awareness of a lack of power may result in an expectation in women that they have limited power to stop discrimination or mistreatment in the workplace. Maltz and Borker (1982), for instance, state that the socialisation to speak and act in feminine ways makes women “as unassertive and insecure as they have been made to sound” (p. 199). Tannen (1999) contended that men are more likely to take an aggressive stance when verbally insulted. Similarly, Cortina *et al.* (2002) found that female lawyers who were sexually harassed or who experienced incivility in the workplace were more likely than male lawyers to rely on passive coping strategies and social support. Consequently, the incompatibility of femininity and gender role requirements in the workplace incapacitate many women’s confidence to more aggressively deal with conflict in the workplace (Fletcher, 1998; Kolb, 1992). Furthermore, according to Jaffee and Hyde (2000), these more passive strategies are the result of a “caring” rather than a “justice” moral orientation used by women. For example, many harassed women are not interested in punishing their offender but simply want the undesirable behaviour to stop; this is suggestive of a “caring” rather than a “justice” orientation (Riger, 1991).

In contrast, male targets are more likely to display direct, overt retribution against their instigators to try to “get even.” Women targets, on the other hand, tend to avoid their instigators (Pearson *et al.*, 2000). Similarly, Porath *et al.* (2008) found that those with higher status and of male gender showed a more aggressive response and resistance to peers. According to Porath *et al.* (2008), this may reflect men’s greater sensitivity to status contest. Other research has suggested that men’s direct and overt responses may be the result of their sensitivity to identity threats with the idea being that the masculine identity of a man is associated with status, toughness, and courage (Felson, 1982; Frodi *et al.*, 1977). Therefore, it is within a man’s legitimate right to retaliate aggressively when under attack. In the workplace, men are more likely than women to use indirect aggression (see Archer and Coyne, 2005) such as work withdrawal. Women, on the other hand, have been socialised to master their anger because active self-defence is seen as antisocial and uncivilised (Rothleder, 1992). Another plausible reason as to why women may be less likely than men to engage in deviant workplace behaviours may be the need to retain the financial security their jobs provide them. Statistical evidence supports this argument and reports that Australian women, for instance, want more, not less, working hours (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2012). Therefore, drawing from the above evidence, we hypothesise that gender will moderate the relationships between tolerance for workplace incivility and work withdrawal; the impact of work withdrawal on workplace incivility will be stronger on men than on women.

8. Method

Participants

Data were collected from 317 participants (male = 102 and female = 215). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 66 years ($M = 41.83$, $SD = 12.91$) for males and 18 to 68 years ($M = 37.33$, $SD = 11.12$) for females. In total, 93 per cent of the participants identified themselves as Australians, four per cent as Australian Aboriginal and three per cent as others. The majority of participants were married (54 per cent). In terms of employment, participants were employed in government administration (28 per cent)

with other significant contributors including the banking sector (10 per cent), health and community services (13 per cent) and retail trade (14 per cent). The mean length of time individuals had been with their current organisation was 7.89 years ($SD = 7.39$), and many (74 per cent) identified as holding non-management positions. The average working week was 35.97 hours ($SD = 10.80$) and most were employed in organisations where their co-workers were either mostly females (57 per cent), or an equal mix of males and females (26 per cent). Finally, the majority of individuals (61 per cent) had some forms of tertiary education.

Measures

Tolerance to workplace incivility. This was measured using a modern version of the Organizational Tolerance for Workplace Incivility Scale adapted from Hulin *et al.*'s (1996) inventory and Martin and Hine's (2005) Uncivil Workplace Behavior Questionnaire. This scale contained four items measured on a five-point Likert scale identical to that of Hulin *et al.* (1996). The items ranged from 0 (Nothing) to 4 (There would be very serious consequences) in response to the question "What would likely happen if you made a formal complaint against a co-worker who engaged in the following behaviour?" Examples of items in the questionnaire include "Repeatedly gossiped about you to other co-workers" and "Regularly withheld important information relevant to your job and/or excluded you from key decisions." The measure has excellent internal consistency with a Cronbach's α for the total scale of 0.90 for this sample.

Work withdrawal. Work withdrawal is defined as the neglecting of work-related responsibilities and was measured using the Work Withdrawal Scale (Hanisch and Hulin, 1990). This scale contains six items measured on a four-point scale ranging from 1 (Once or twice a year) to 4 (Once a week or more). Items on this scale assess the frequency with which individuals shun work-related tasks (e.g. "Neglected tasks that wouldn't affect your evaluation/pay raise" or "Completed work assignments late"?). The Cronbach's α for the summed total score was 0.71 for this sample.

Gender. We classified the gender of participants using a dummy-coded variable. We assigned a value of 0 for the male sample and a value of 1 for the female sample.

Procedure

Data collection commenced once approval from the University's Human Research and Ethics Committee was granted. Participants were informed via an information sheet that the questionnaire would enquire about work behaviour and their experiences of workplace mistreatment. Specifically, incivility was defined as rude, discourteous behaviour or treatment participants experienced at their workplace from their co-workers. The information sheet also assured participants that responses were anonymous and that they had the option to withdraw from the study at any time. Organisations were selected using the following criteria: medium-sized organisations as defined by the ABS as having no more than 200 employees, and both private and public businesses located in regional New South Wales, Australia. Medium-sized organisations were principally chosen because they employed a cross-section of the Australian population and were more likely to hire employees from diverse backgrounds than small-sized organisations. Organisations agreeing to participate included: government agencies (e.g. Centrelink, Telstra), banks (e.g. Commonwealth Bank of Australia, ANZ), retail trade (e.g. K-Mart, Big W), health and community

services (e.g. public hospital). Only two organisations, one from the retail industry and the other a bank, refused to participate. Human resources officers or office managers were approached and asked to help distribute the questionnaires to their staff from low to middle management. Instructions were left via the information sheet that upon completion, the anonymous questionnaire should be placed in the envelope provided and sealed. The completed surveys were then collected by the researcher from either the manager initially approached, or another designated individual a week later. A total of 430 questionnaires were distributed and 317 returned. Thus the response rate for this study was 74 per cent.

Data analysis

As recommended by a number of scholars, Hierarchical linear regression modelling was used to examine the significance of the criterion variance explained by the interaction term, over and above what was accounted for by the independent (i.e. tolerance for workplace incivility) and moderating variables (i.e. gender) (Aiken and West, 1991; Cohen *et al.*, 2003; Preacher *et al.*, 2006, 2007; Whisman and McClelland, 2005). Tolerance for workplace incivility was mean centred (Cohen *et al.*, 2003) but gender was not as it was dummy coded. All significant interactions were then further inspected by simple slopes analysis (Preacher *et al.*, 2006, 2007).

9. Results

Prior to any statistical analyses being run, all assumptions were checked following the guidelines presented in Tabachnick and Fidell (2001). The reader should assume, therefore, that the relevant assumptions were met unless otherwise stated.

Table I presents the correlations between the two measures (i.e. work withdrawal and levels of tolerance for workplace incivility) as well as gender. Additionally, descriptive statistics for the measures are provided in the last rows of this table. As may be observed in Table II, no significant main effect was found. Specifically, gender did not correlate with either work withdrawal ($r = -0.02$, $p = 0.692$) or organisational tolerance to workplace incivility ($r = -0.04$, $p = 0.52$). However, there was a significant interaction effect; the relationship between work withdrawal and the three predictors (gender, tolerance for workplace incivility, and the gender by levels of workplace incivility tolerance interaction) was significant at $p < 0.01$ with a moderate effect size of 0.06.

In order to test the significance of the slopes, unstandardised beta weights from the regression equations were used to plot the effect of the IV (e.g. tolerance for workplace incivility) on the outcome variable (work withdrawal) for both males and females. The results of the simple slopes are presented in Figure 1. As can be observed, as the

Table I.
Descriptive statistics
and correlations
between the
measures

	1	2	3
1. Gender	–		
2. Total tolerance for workplace incivility	–0.04	–	
3. Total work withdrawal	–0.07	–0.17**	–
<i>M</i>	–	7.12	8.63
<i>SD</i>	–	3.84	3.89

Note: ** $p < 0.01$

levels of the tolerance for workplace incivility increases, the levels of work withdrawal also increases for males. However, this increase did not reach statistical significance, $t(313) = 1.03, p > 0.05$. In contrast, as the levels of tolerance for workplace incivility increases, the levels of work withdrawal drop significantly for females $t(313) = -3.93, p < 0.001$.

10. Discussion

The current study aimed to determine whether gender differences exist in terms of the response to workplace incivility when the workplace is seen to condone those actions. Specifically, the study investigated whether women, compared to men, would be less likely to withdraw from their work obligations when they perceive their workplace to be more tolerant of uncivil behaviours. The simple slopes analysis suggests that as the levels of tolerance for incivility in the workplace increases, men tend to also increase their work withdrawal behaviours (e.g. completing work assignments late, being late for work, thinking about quitting because of work-related issues, etc.). However, this trend did not reach statistical significance. As predicted, as the levels of perceived

DV and predictors	<i>R</i>	Adj <i>R</i> ²	<i>B</i>	95% CI for <i>B</i>		<i>r</i>	<i>sr</i> ²
				Lower	Upper		
DV: work withdrawal	0.21**	0.03					
Gender			-0.18	-0.98	0.62	-0.02	0.00
Centred tolerance for workplace incivility			0.02	-0.14	0.18	-0.15**	0.00
Gender by tolerance for workplace incivility interaction			-0.25*	-0.46	-0.05	-0.21***	0.02

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table II. Summary of moderation regression analysis for gender, tolerance for workplace incivility, and work withdrawal

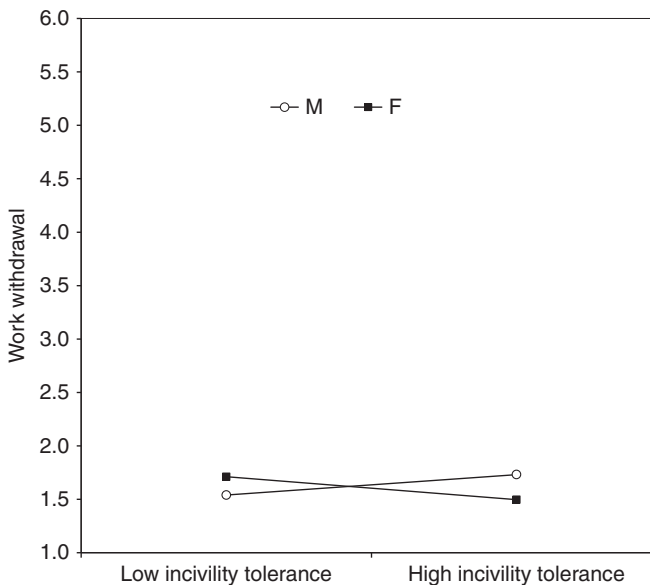


Figure 1. The relationship between tolerance for workplace incivility and work withdrawal for males and females

tolerance for workplace incivility increases, women significantly drop their levels of work withdrawal. Thus, our result partially supported our prediction.

Employees who experience incivility in the workplace may express anger in subtle acts of retaliation against their employers, including withdrawal from work or sabotaging the abuser in a covert manner (Skarlicki and Folger, 1997). Pearson *et al.* (2001) revealed that there are gender differences associated with responses to incivility. For example, male targets tend to retaliate in a more overt and direct manner (e.g. via confrontation or passive aggressively, such as withdrawing from work tasks) whereas female targets tend to do so in a more covert way (e.g. gossiping about it in their social network). Similarly, Belenky *et al.* (1986) found that male targets were less afraid to confront or to “spread the word” about their instigators than women targets. Past research has also found that males are more prone to violence (Cairns *et al.*, 1989; Eagley, 1987). Consequently, males may display this violence either through direct confrontation with their instigators or pulling away from their work effort and attention.

Response to incivility may differ on the basis of power between instigators and targets. According to Aquino *et al.* (2006), instigators tend to have more social and resource power (e.g. supervisors, men) than lower status targets (e.g. subordinates, women). Targets are generally not motivated by revenge, although a general ill will is expressed towards them (Aquino *et al.*, 2006). One may speculate how targets would respond to female CEOs who were uncivil to them or how they would react to rude female co-workers. It is suggested that regardless of whether the instigators are male or female, individuals who have more social and resource power would be more prone to power abuse.

Past research indicates that women tend to perceive and experience more uncivil experiences at work than men (Cortina *et al.*, 2013; Lim *et al.*, 2008; Montgomery *et al.*, 2004). According to Rothleder (1992), when women are victimised, they defend themselves by “silencing themselves, making themselves dumb” (p. 176). Tannen (1999) argued that women are inclined to hide their conflict, rather than retaliate. Wilson (2003, p. 99) makes the claim that “socialisation prepares women for their current roles, not for challenging those roles.” This suggests that females are socialised from an early age to know their “place” in society and to learn to “put up” with more life injustices. Consequently, women may have become somewhat accustomed to uncivil behaviours and learned not to react too negatively. Thus this may partially explain why women are less likely than men to withdraw from workplaces that tolerate incivility.

The need for financial security may be another plausible reason why women may be less likely to withdraw from work than men. In 2010-2011, 41.3 per cent of Australian males were employed full time and 37.2 per cent of Australian females were employed full time (ABS, 2012). However, full-time employed females worked, on average, fewer hours than their male counterparts (37.2 hours compared to 41.3 hours). Many more women worked part time than men (43.2 per cent compared to 13.5 per cent). The rate of underemployment is twice as high for women (8 per cent) than for men (4 per cent). According to the ABS (2012), many women want more paid work. Consequently, the need for financial security may be what prohibits women from engaging in deviant workplace behaviours such as work withdrawal. This may represent one way women “get back” at their perpetrator. In other words, instead of focusing on retaliation, which may cost women their jobs, they focus instead on working hard and possibly in doing so, improve their career opportunities.

11. Limitations

There are a number of limitations that need to be acknowledged and considered. First is the issue of representativeness. This sample comprised predominantly of white-collar, White Australian workers with the Organizational Tolerance for Workplace Incivility Scale somewhat biased towards their experiences. One may query how this finding would generalise to a more diverse sample comprising a greater number of blue-collar workers, in addition to higher numbers of minority group members. Next, whether an individual was a full-time or part-time employee was not included as a variable in this study. Another limitation is the small sample size in our organisations which may have contributed to the inconsistency of the results we obtained. In addition, there may have been unequal male vs female participants in our sample. This may have led to the low power level (0.715) for the interaction effect in our study. It is advisable that future study of this comparative nature recruit approximately equal number of male and female participants.

Other researchers, however, have claimed that it is more important to increase sample size at the higher level (i.e. sampling more organisations) than increasing the number of individual participants in the group (Maas and Hox, 2004, 2005). While Cohen (1988) recommends a power level of 0.80, there appears to be consensus that power should be above 0.50 and would be judged adequate at 0.80 (Kline, 2005; Murphy and Myers, 2004). This makes the power level of our study acceptable at 0.715. Recently, Larson-Hall (2010) reiterated this and stated that rather than accepting power only at the 0.80 level, the subject matters and fields of study should all be considered when estimating the power level needed for a particular study. All these issues would need to be addressed in future investigations.

Second, the study only recruited workers aged 18 years and over. In order to comprehensively investigate mistreatment, it is imperative that the experiences of all workers, regardless of age, be examined. Adolescent employees' experiences may or may not be congruent with those of adults and it is, therefore, uncertain how their inclusion may have affected the results. For instance, the Civility in America, 2011 study found that uncivil behaviour is on the increase in the classroom, not just at work. In fact, 50 per cent of American parents reported that their children have experienced incivility with peers at school and 45 per cent of individuals 20 years and older reported that they would be afraid to be teenagers today because of the increase in incivility. This begs the question as to how teenage workers may be affected by incivility and more importantly, what, if any, is the carry-on effect of incivility from teenage workers to working adults? Thus, it may be important to conduct a longitudinal study to see the long-term impact of incivility on teenage to adult workers. Similarly, the long-term impact of workplace incivility, gender, and work productivity should also be investigated longitudinally.

12. Conclusion

The present study highlights the importance of workplace incivility and the potential impact it had for both men and women in terms of work withdrawal behaviour. The findings of our study also confirm previous studies' findings that women tend to be the targets of workplace incivility and, more importantly, put up with it. However, there is an inherent dilemma in the findings of this study. Some may question what the problem is given that women do not withdraw from work when treated uncivilly in the workplace. In response to this, we believe that all employees, both men and women, have a right to be treated with respect and fairness at work. In addition, when an

organisation is perceived to be implicitly or explicitly tolerating behaviour reminiscent of mistreatment, it sets the tone for its culture and influences how employees behave towards one another. If workplace incivility is not handled properly, it can spiral and create a hostile work environment which can lead to violence. Therefore, it is important that managers and upper management acknowledge the existence of workplace incivility and stop it in its tracks as early as possible. For example, to encourage a safe and respectful working environment, organisations should encourage a work culture that stigmatises all forms of mistreatment in the workplace. One way to start is to have mission statements and workplace policies that specifically set out appropriate work ethics. Women, in particular should be encouraged to learn how to handle workplace conflict more assertively and appropriately. This can be done as part of women's professional development. Similarly, managers and supervisors should regularly attend communication and leadership training to sharpen their ability to lead people. Finally, organisations should establish some informal and formal processes as part of conflict management and resolution. Only with some of these policies and processes in place can we expect a culture of safety and respect to gradually develop in one's workplace.

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Part 1: Organisational Tolerance for Workplace Incivility

Please indicate what would likely happen in your workplace if you made a formal complaint against a co-worker who engaged in the following behaviours.	Nothing	Very Little- Someone might talk to the person	The person would be told to stop	The person would be given a formal warning	There would be very serious consequences
1. Repeatedly invaded your privacy (e.g. read communications addressed to you, took items from your desk, or opened your desk drawers without permission).	1	2	3	4	5
2. Repeatedly gossiped about you to other coworkers.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Repeatedly treated you in overtly hostile manner (e.g. spoke to you in an aggressive tone of voice, made snide remarks to you, or rolled his or her eyes at you).	1	2	3	4	5
4. Regularly withheld important information relevant to your job and/or excluded you from key decisions.	1	2	3	4	5

Part 2: Work Withdrawal

In the past year, how frequently have you...	Once or twice a year	Every other month	Once/twice a month	Once a week or more
(please circle the relevant letter in the right hand column)				
1. Completed work assignments late?	1	2	3	4
2. Took frequent/long coffee/lunch breaks?	1	2	3	4
3. Made excuses to get out of the office?	1	2	3	4
4. Been late for work?	1	2	3	4
5. Neglected tasks that wouldn't affect your evaluation/pay raise?	1	2	3	4
6. Thought about quitting because of work related issues?	1	2	3	4