

# Patterns and Profiles of Response to Incivility in the Workplace

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The authors draw on stress and coping theory to understand patterns of individual response to workplace incivility. According to data from 3 employee samples, incivility tended to trigger mildly negative appraisals, which could theoretically differentiate incivility from other categories of antisocial work behavior. Employees experiencing frequent and varied incivility from powerful instigators generally appraised their uncivil encounters more negatively. They responded to this stressor using a multifaceted array of coping strategies, which entailed support seeking, detachment, minimization, prosocial conflict avoidance, and assertive conflict avoidance. These coping reactions depended on the target's appraisal of the situation, the situation's duration, and the organizational position and power of both target and instigator. Implications for organizational science and practice are discussed.

*Keywords:* incivility, antisocial work behavior, stress, coping, appraisal

Workplace incivility may be subtle, but its effects are not: Empirical research suggests that employees targeted with uncivil behavior show greater job stress, cognitive distraction, psychological distress, as well as lower job satisfaction and creativity. Personnel targeted with pervasive incivility ultimately leave their organizations at higher rates (Cortina et al., 2002; Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008; Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000; Pearson, Andersson, & Wegner, 2001). To reduce these negative consequences, organizations must be vigilant about incivility: preventing it where possible and, when it occurs, understanding what follows so that effective interventions can be designed. This understanding must include employee responses to uncivil conduct.

The primary goals of the current study were twofold. First, we sought to shed light on the nature of two employee responses to workplace incivility: ap-

praisal and coping. Despite an increasing literature on the antecedents and consequences of incivility, we know little about internal, psychological reactions to this behavior or the general manner by which targets of the behavior manage their experiences. Hence, in the current study, we aimed to provide a descriptive picture of how individuals appraise and cope with incivility across three fairly different contexts of work. A second goal of this study was to understand factors that fuel these employee responses, that is, what makes a person appraise uncivil conduct as more or less stressful, and what determines his or her choice of how to react? Answers to these questions can advance both theory and practice in this domain. To develop hypotheses, we drew from research on not only incivility but also the related constructs of workplace abuse, injustice, harassment, and bullying.

## Theoretical Background on Workplace Incivility

In their seminal scholarship on *workplace incivility*, Andersson and Pearson (1999, p. 457) defined this construct as “low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect. Uncivil behaviors are characteristically rude and discourteous, displaying a lack of regard for others.” Examples include interruption, use of a condescending tone, and unprofessional terms of address. Incivility is both related to and distinct from other antisocial work behaviors. It is a broader construct than *bullying*, which is often defined as involving a power imbalance and occurring at least once per week for at least

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6 months (e.g., Einarsen, 1999; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003). Incivility is also broader than *interactional injustice*, which refers specifically to unfairness or insensitivity displayed by leaders during the implementation of organizational procedures (Bies & Moag, 1986; Colquitt, 2001). Pearson and colleagues (2001) further elaborate on three characteristics of incivility: norm violation, ambiguous intent, and low intensity.

Business ethicists (e.g., Hartman, 1996) contend that every organization has norms of interpersonal respect, reflecting a shared understanding of morality and community. Uncivil behavior violates these norms. This makes incivility a specific variety of *workplace deviance*, defined by Robinson and Bennett (1995, p. 556) as “voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and, in so doing, threatens the well-being of an organization, its members, or both” (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Pearson et al., 2001).

A second key characteristic of workplace incivility is ambiguity of intent to harm: It is not clear to either the instigator, target, or observers that the instigator had harmful or malicious objectives. As Pearson et al. (2001, p. 1400) observed, “one may behave uncivilly as a reflection of desire to harm the organization, to harm the target, or to benefit oneself, or one may behave uncivilly without intent.” In cases where acts of workplace incivility do carry an intent to harm, they fall into the category of *workplace aggression*, defined by Baron (2004, p. 27) as “any form of behavior directed by one or more persons in a workplace toward the goal of harming one or more others in that workplace (or the entire organization) in ways the intended targets are motivated to avoid.”

Andersson & Pearson (1999) and Pearson et al. (2001) note that a third distinguishing characteristic of workplace incivility is its low intensity. Incivility does not entail physical assault, so it is distinct from *workplace violence* (an extreme type of aggression; Baron, 2004). Beyond nonviolence, other indicators of “low intensity” have been less articulated. Pearson et al. (2001, p. 1401) elaborate on the concept of low intensity as being “of lower magnitude of force, lower negative charge,” but this definition is somewhat nebulous and difficult to operationalize.

These conceptualizations of workplace incivility take into account features of the organizational context (i.e., norms), objective characteristics of the uncivil behavior (e.g., nonviolence), and the goals of the instigator (intent to harm). What is largely missing from this conceptual discourse is a detailed focus on the target’s subjective experience. The related

literatures on workplace bullying (e.g., Keashly & Jagatic, 2003; Zapf & Gross, 2001) and generalized workplace abuse (e.g., Richman, Rospenda, Flaherty, & Freels, 2001; Rospenda, Richman, Wislar, & Flaherty, 2000) have demonstrated that we can learn a great deal by foregrounding the target’s perspective. Moreover, by viewing incivility from the standpoint of the target, we can understand it as a source of chronic stress for that person, which then points to a mechanism with which to operationalize low intensity: the target’s appraisal of the situation.

### Appraisal and Its Relevance to Incivility

Theory (e.g., Compas & Orosan, 1993; Lazarus, 1999) holds that when we encounter a potential stressor, this triggers a multistage cognitive–emotional process to evaluate the meaning of the stressor for our own well-being. Before we determine how to respond to the stressor, we appraise the situation to determine the degree of actual or potential harm, threat, or challenge it poses to the self, evaluating it both cognitively and emotionally—for example, as benign, annoying, frightening, or even potentially inspiring. If we determine that we have sustained injury, or are likely to sustain future injury, then we move closer to a psychological state of stress. This appraisal process deserves scholarly attention because “how a person construes an event shapes the emotional and behavioral response” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 24).

This theory suggests that, to understand pathways by which organizational stressors undermine employees’ well-being, we must first understand their appraisals of these stressors. For this reason, appraisal processes are beginning to receive attention in emerging scholarship on aggressive and antisocial work behavior (e.g., Douglas et al., 2008; Sinclair, Martin, & Croll, 2002). Given the central role of emotions in subsequent cognitive processes and behaviors (e.g., Lazarus, 1999) and in organizational attitudes (e.g., Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), we argue that emotional appraisals are key to what makes incivility a “low-intensity” phenomenon, possibly distinguishing it from other forms of workplace hostility. That is, from the target’s perspective, uncivil behaviors should be low intensity in that they give rise to mildly negative appraisals, such as annoyance and frustration. We begin to examine this proposal with an exploratory research question:

*Research Question 1:* How do employees emotionally appraise uncivil behavior at work?

Once we know more about the nature of incivility appraisal, we can then turn to its determinants.

## Determinants of Appraisal

### *Target Characteristics*

Appraisal processes are thought to depend heavily on an individual's location in the social structure (e.g., Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Wheaton, 1997). This invokes theories of social power, which maintain that society confers greater power on certain individuals through social expectations, norms, access to resources, and social and political alliances (e.g., Carli, 1999; French & Raven, 1959). An employee's social power can determine how manageable she or he perceives a stressor to be, with greater power fostering a greater sense of control over the situation. That is, positions of power lead people to expect that they can have an impact on their world—they feel influential, in control, and efficacious. Perceiving that they can effect change in their environment if need be, powerful individuals are not as intimidated by problems in that environment. Conversely, powerlessness detracts from self-efficacy, with low-power people expecting their actions to be inconsequential. They experience *learned helplessness*, or a perceived lack of control over their environment; as a result, these individuals feel more vulnerable to the events unfolding around them (e.g., Cleveland & Kerst, 1993; Mainiero, 1986; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989; Thacker & Ferris, 1991). This reasoning suggests that, as their social power decreases, employees should appraise uncivil events as less controllable and more threatening—and thus, more stressful.

Several potential power bases exist among employees, the most apparent being position within the organizational hierarchy (job level). Indeed, Malamut and Offermann (2001) reported that lower ranked employees appraised their experiences of workplace harassment more negatively than did employees at higher ranks. Job security can also be relevant, because even employees who are highly placed within the organization may feel weak if their job is in jeopardy (Roskies & Louis-Guerin, 1990). We thus begin with these factors to propose the following:

*Hypothesis 1:* Employees who work in lower-level job positions or perceive lower job security will report more negative appraisals of their uncivil experience.

### *Instigator Characteristics*

Incivility always has an instigator, and that person's organizational position and power may also influence the target's response. Mistreatment by a low-level employee may feel much less threatening than abuse from a manager or owner, who can often control valued outcomes, impose sanctions, or dole out injustice with relative impunity (e.g., Tepper, 2000; Thacker & Gohmann, 1996). Equally if not more important than the instigator's absolute social status is that person's status relative to the target. An instigator with formal authority over the target has legitimate power derived from the structural hierarchy of the organization (Pfeffer, 1981). The target may feel helpless to fend off the abuse (Thacker, 1996; Thacker & Ferris, 1991) and therefore appraise it more negatively.

Empirical evidence of such possibilities has emerged in workplace harassment research, which has reported that target appraisals become more negative as harassers become more powerful (e.g., Cortina, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 2002; Langhout et al., 2005). Moreover, the bullying literature emphasizes bully–target power imbalance as a key feature of bullying severity (e.g., Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003; Hoel, Einarsen, & Cooper, 2003). Thus in the present study, we focused on instigator characteristics that indicate absolute social power (job position) as well as social power relative to the target (supervisory power), and hypothesized the following:

*Hypothesis 2:* Employees will report more negative appraisals of their uncivil experience when its instigator occupies a high-level position or has supervisory power over the target.

### *Incivility Characteristics*

Incivility appraisals should depend on not only the individuals involved but also the antisocial acts at the heart of the situation. There are many dimensions along which incivility differs, and we begin with three that are particularly relevant to stress: variety, frequency, and duration. Even though a behavior may be subtle, it can be a potent stressor by taking many forms (large variety), manifesting often (high frequency), and continuing for a period of time (extended duration). These particular incivility dimensions may help explain how such seemingly trivial behavior can be so harmful.

More specifically, situations involving a greater *variety* of behaviors are less predictable. Extensive

human and animal research has demonstrated that unpredictability exacerbates stress. A theoretical explanation for this lies in the Preparatory Response Hypothesis, which argues that advance warning provides information that enables the organism to prepare for the stressor, which reduces its appraised aversiveness. Absent predictability, such anticipatory stress management is not possible (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1999; Wheaton, 1997). Moreover, adaptation to stressors is more difficult when they are multifaceted or evolving.

Temporal factors should also have an impact on appraisals, with “time” being “one of the most important parameters in stressful situations” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 92). We focus specifically on two dimensions: duration (the total time period during which the hostile situation persists), and frequency (how often the uncivil behaviors occur within that window of time). According to theory, aversive experiences that endure for extended durations or repeat with high frequency are more stressful because they “wear down” a person and strip away cognitive and emotional capacities for managing the situation. With resources depleted, the person finds each successive manifestation of the stressor all the more harmful, threatening, or challenging (e.g., Gottlieb, 1997a, 1997b; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1999).

Data supporting such theory have come out of research on the negative outcomes of bullying, harassment, and injustice. For example, Lim and Cortina (2005) found that employee well-being declined as hostile experience became more frequent and varied (i.e., involving a greater range of abuses). Moreover, Rospenda and colleagues (2000) documented more negative drinking outcomes in employees who had endured ongoing harassment and abuse over a 2-year period, compared with employees whose hostile work experiences were of shorter duration. Research has also shown that interactional injustice fosters anger and unhappiness (Barclay, Skarlicki, & Pugh, 2005; Rupp & Spencer, 2006), in addition to various negative organizational outcomes (e.g., Colquitt, Conlon, & Wesson, 2001). Finally, a host of adverse consequences has been associated with experiences of workplace bullying (for reviews, see Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003, and Hoel et al., 2003), which is often defined as a behavior with particularly high frequency, long duration, and variety (Keashly & Jagatic, 2003). Extrapolating from these literatures to develop predictions about appraisal, we hypothesized the following:

*Hypothesis 3:* Employees will report more negative appraisals of their uncivil experience when it involves more varied, frequent, and enduring behaviors.

Trying to manage situations appraised as stressful, individuals engage in coping, our next topic.

### Coping With Incivility

Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 141) define *coping* as “cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands” that tax or exceed the resources of the person. These efforts can focus on regulating the stressful situation, its meaning, or the emotional response. When the situation becomes chronic, unique coping patterns are thought to arise because coping does not entail a reaction to a sudden threat or alarming event. Instead, coping “. . . evanesces into ordinary routines and mental habits” for managing stressors that are “deeply embedded in the fabric of life” (Gottlieb, 1997a, pp. 13–14). Applied to settings of work, this suggests that how employees cope with acute, extraordinary, time-limited disturbances (e.g., violence) should be quite different from how they manage mundane but ongoing hassles (e.g., incivility). Some research has addressed revenge, forgiveness, and reconciliation in response to workplace victimization (Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2001, 2006), but the full breadth of coping responses to incivility has yet to be examined. This led us to pose another research question:

*Research Question 2:* How do employees cope with uncivil behavior at work?

The exploratory nature of this research question is necessary, given the paucity of past empirical work on coping with incivility. We can offer very general predictions, however, expecting to see considerable complexity in incivility coping patterns. These patterns should include responses that are both cognitive and behavioral, emotion focused and problem focused, and approach oriented and avoidance oriented (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Holahan, Moos, & Schaefer, 1996). This would be consistent with the literature on coping with chronically stressful situations. According to theory (e.g., Gottlieb, 1997b), the ongoing and repeated nature of chronic stressors prompts a trial-and-error approach to coping. That is, with recurrent exposure to similar demands, individuals learn which ways of coping to retain for their efficacy and which to discard. If need be, they also

experiment with new strategies. The result, when assessed over time, is not a single coping method but rather a diverse collection of methods. In other words, we anticipate that the same employee will use a heterogeneous array of coping responses, even within the same uncivil situation, yielding a multifaceted coping profile.

Evidence of complexity in coping profiles has emerged in studies of coping with bullying (Niedl, 1996; Zapf & Gross, 2001). For example, Zapf and Gross (2001) found through semistructured interviews with bullying victims that coping strategies often alternated over time between “integrating” and “obliging” techniques, and ultimately ended with the employee-target trying to exit the organization. As noted above, incivility is broader than bullying; it will be interesting to learn whether, despite the differences between the constructs, a similar pattern of coping complexity emerges with workplace incivility.

### *Determinants of Coping*

Just as important as understanding the nature of incivility coping, organizations should know what influences it. We propose that the same variables shaping incivility appraisal will also have an impact on incivility coping profiles for three reasons. First, theory holds that appraisal and coping are inherently interwoven, being components of one common process and taking place very closely in time: “the constructs . . . are conjoined in nature, and should be separated for only the purpose of analysis and discourse” (Lazarus, 1999, p. 101). Features of the person and environment are also implicated in this process, such that “appraisals combine with objective aspects of the stressful situation and personal characteristics of the individual to determine the selection and enactment of specific coping responses” (Compas & Orosan, 1993, pp. 221–222). Thus, factors influencing appraisal—and appraisal itself—should affect coping.

Second, it makes theoretical sense that a target will cope with incivility differently, depending on his or her appraisal of and power in the situation, the behaviors making up that situation, and the person instigating it. For example, if a lower power employee encounters incivility from a superior, the target may simply regulate emotions and cognitions in response, believing that any actions taken would be futile. Alternatively, a high-level target who has access to resources and is accustomed to managing employee misconduct may reprimand uncivil subor-

dinates and then give little further thought to the antisocial behavior. Incivility characteristics also seem highly relevant to coping; for example, it is unlikely that many employees would formally complain about one mild, fleeting uncivil experience.

In terms of empirical evidence, Aquino and colleagues (Aquino et al., 2001, 2006; Bradfield & Aquino, 1999) have demonstrated the relevance of both target and instigator power in influencing certain strategies (revenge, forgiveness, avoidance, and reconciliation) used to cope with workplace victimization. Other research has shown that efforts to cope with workplace harassment depend heavily on appraisals (e.g., Bergman, Langhout, Palmieri, Cortina, & Fitzgerald, 2002; Gruber & Smith, 1995). The harassment literature has further demonstrated that characteristics of the harassing behavior (e.g., its frequency and duration; Cortina & Wasti, 2005; Malamut & Offermann, 2001) also have a strong impact on coping. We expected to find similar patterns in coping with incivility, hypothesizing the following:

*Hypothesis 4:* Employee efforts to cope with incivility will be influenced by their appraisal of the uncivil situation, the objective characteristics of that situation, and the social power of both themselves and their instigators.

### Method

To address Research Questions 1 and 2, we drew on survey data collected from three independent samples. Sample 3 was part of a larger-scale investigation that permitted tests of Hypotheses 1 through 4 regarding determinants of appraisal and coping. To the extent possible, measurement was comparable across the three surveys.

#### *Sample 1: University Employees*

##### *Procedure and Participants*

For the first survey, virtually all employees ( $n = 2,772$ ) at a small public university were invited to participate. Following Dillman’s (1999) method, we mailed employees prenotices, invitations, and reminders to complete surveys on a restricted-access Web site. Nonrespondents eventually received a paper version of the same survey. As a further participation incentive, we offered gift certificates to a random subset of participants.

With a response rate of 66%, we obtained usable surveys from 1,711 employees (51% female), who

had an average age of 44 years and average job tenure of 10 years. This sample was predominantly married or partnered (78%), White/European American (92%), and educated in college if not graduate school (78%). Job positions ranged widely, with the largest categories being faculty (31%), skilled craft/paraprofessional (14%), and secretarial/clerical (12%).

### Measurement

*Incivility.* We used items from the Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS; Cortina et al., 2001) to assess participants' experiences of incivility from other university members within the previous year. To tap the construct domain more fully, we supplemented WIS items (e.g., "put you down or been condescending to you") with new items (e.g., "ignored you or failed to speak to you"; "made jokes at your expense"; "yelled, shouted, or swore at you"). For ease of completion, we chose a relatively brief response format: 0 (*never*), 1 (*once or twice*), and 2 (*more than once or twice*). A principal components analysis revealed a unidimensional structure underlying these 10 items (Cronbach's alpha = .86).

Respondents who had experienced incivility in the workplace at least "once or twice" were branched to questions about the experience they identified as having bothered them most. For the sake of clarity, the survey defined an "experience" as "a behavior or pattern of behaviors that came from the same person(s), even if the behaviors happened over a period of time." After describing the type of conduct that made up this experience, participants answered questions about their appraisal and coping responses. We chose this "specific experience" methodology be-

cause theory and data suggest that appraisal and coping are situation specific (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Analyses for the current study focused on 324 employees whose specific experience involved general incivility in the absence of gendered, sexualized, or racialized mistreatment to avoid confounds with these more specific forms of abuse.

*Appraisal and coping.* To assess targets' appraisals of incivility, six items ( $\alpha = .91$ ) asked respondents to characterize their specific uncivil experience ("How would you describe this experience that bothered you MOST?" "Offensive?" "Embarrassing?" "Annoying?" etc.). Participants responded on a 3-point scale (*no*, *yes*, or *?* if they could not decide). Swan (1997) modeled this scale after the work of Folkman and Lazarus (1985), and found coefficient alphas of .91 and .93 in two independent studies. Table 1 lists all appraisal items.

We assessed strategies for coping with incivility using 12 items from Fitzgerald's (1990) Coping With Harassment Questionnaire (CHQ). The CHQ assesses internally focused coping strategies that regulate cognitions and emotions associated with the experience, paralleling the concept of "emotion-focused coping." It also gauges externally focused strategies, which are analogous to "problem-focused coping." Fitzgerald developed these items to assess ways in which employees respond to workplace harassment, finding average reliability coefficients of .83 and correlations in the appropriate direction with a measure of assertiveness. Although this scale was originally conceived specifically as a harassment-coping measure, item content appeared general enough to capture responses to other types of antisocial work behavior as well.

In the current study, respondents described how they "handled" their specific uncivil experience,

Table 1  
*Individual Appraisal Items, Means, and Standard Deviations*

Item	Sample 1 <sup>a</sup> : university ( <i>n</i> = 324) <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Sample 2 <sup>b</sup> : attorney ( <i>n</i> = 671) <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Sample 3 <sup>b</sup> : court staff ( <i>n</i> = 272) <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )
Offensive	2.22 (0.91)	2.54 (1.28)	2.11 (1.42)
Annoying	2.66 (0.71)	2.81 (1.11)	2.39 (1.18)
Embarrassing	1.70 (0.91)	2.00 (1.20)	1.70 (1.45)
Frustrating	2.42 (0.89)	2.84 (1.29)	2.69 (1.25)
Disturbing	2.06 (0.95)	2.44 (1.34)	2.31 (1.41)
Threatening	1.37 (0.72)	1.48 (1.01)	1.23 (1.42)

<sup>a</sup> Appraisal scale stem: "How would you describe this experience that bothered you MOST? For each word or phrase, circle "yes" if the word describes the experience, "no" if it doesn't, and "?" if you can't decide." Item response scale: 1 = *no*, 2 = *?*, 3 = *yes*. <sup>b</sup> Appraisal scale stem: "To what degree did you find this situation . . ." Item response scale: 0 = *not at all*, 1 = *slightly*, 2 = *moderately*, 3 = *very*, 4 = *extremely*.

indicating whether (*no*, *?*, or *yes*) they had employed specific CHQ strategies listed in Table 2. For purposes of descriptive analysis, we scored these items dichotomously, such that 0 = no use of the strategy and 1 = possible or definite use of the strategy. Each of the three studies in this investigation included items measuring similar coping behaviors, although the number and specific wording of some items varied across studies.

### *Sample 2: Attorneys*

#### *Procedure and Participants*

Sample 2 consisted of 4,605 attorneys in federal practice. The sample was 69% male, 96% White/European American, and 80% married or partnered, with an average age of 43 years. They had practiced law for an average of 15 years. More information about these participants and procedures appears in Cortina et al. (2002) and Lim and Cortina (2005).<sup>1</sup>

#### *Measurement*

*Incivility.* Six general incivility items from the Interpersonal Mistreatment Scale (Cortina et al., 2002) assessed experiences of incivility in federal legal practice (Cronbach's alpha = .88). Items asked how frequently respondents had experienced specific acts (e.g., "made demeaning or derogatory remarks about you" or "paid little attention to your statements or showed little interest in your opinion") during federal litigation. Compared with the incivility scale administered to Sample 1, here we used more elaborate response options (ranging from 1 = *never* to 5 = *many times*) to create a more detailed assessment of uncivil experiences. We also widened the time frame to 5 years (unlike the survey in Sample 1, which assessed uncivil experiences over the prior year<sup>2</sup>). A principal components analysis revealed a single underlying dimension (Cortina et al., 2002). As with Sample 1, participants endorsing any incivility item received questions about the experience that had made the greatest impression on them; included in this section were appraisal and coping scales. Analyses for the current study focused on the 671 attorneys who experienced incivility, without concurrent gendered or sexualized harassment, and then branched to the "specific experience" section of the survey.

*Appraisal and coping.* We administered the same six items used in the Sample 1 survey to assess appraisal of the uncivil situation. The Sample 2 survey, however, used a more elaborate response scale

(from 0 = *not at all* to 4 = *extremely*). Again, Table 1 lists these items.

Ten CHQ items, listed in Table 2, assessed coping responses to the specific uncivil situation. Participants reported how often they had employed each strategy, this time ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*many times*). Again, for descriptive purposes, we scored these items dichotomously: 0 = no use of the strategy, and 1 = use of the strategy at least "once or twice."

### *Sample 3: Court Employees*

#### *Procedure and Participants*

Sample 3 contained 1,167 employees of a large federal judicial circuit. These survey respondents were predominantly female (71%), European American/White (88%), married (69%), and employed full time (96%). Most had at least some college if not an advanced degree (85%). They averaged 40 years of age and 8 years of job tenure. Job classifications varied somewhat, including administrative support staff (31%), specialist (25%), attorney (17%), manager/unit head (16%), and personal secretary (11%). More information about this sample and procedures appears in Cortina and Magley (2003) and Lim and Cortina (2005).<sup>3</sup>

#### *Measurement*

*Incivility.* Cortina et al.'s (2001) seven-item WIS, described above, measured the frequency of experiences of incivility from superiors or coworkers

<sup>1</sup> Although drawing on the same larger data set, these two past studies have different foci from each other and from the current article. Cortina et al. (2002) present some descriptive data on coping, but mostly focus on relationships between gender and incivility in the legal profession. Lim and Cortina (2005) detail how incivility and sexual harassment tend to co-occur and jointly affect personal and professional outcomes.

<sup>2</sup> Our preference is to assess incivility over a 1-year timeframe to avoid problems related to recall bias and memory decay. However, the organization that requested this survey, and the survey administered to Sample 3, insisted on a wider time window, fearing that 1 year would be insufficient to detect uncivil behavior. Although we disagreed, we complied with their request so that these surveys could move forward.

<sup>3</sup> Unlike the current article, these prior papers did not have coping with incivility as their focus. Cortina and Magley (2003) concentrated on retaliation against employees who speak out about mistreatment (coping was analyzed, but only as a predictor of retaliation). Lim and Cortina (2005), as noted previously, addressed the combined incidence and impact of incivility and harassment.

Table 2  
*Coping Behaviors and Percentage of Each Sample Using Each*

Behavior	Sample 1 <sup>a</sup> : university ( <i>n</i> = 324)	Sample 2 <sup>b</sup> : attorney ( <i>n</i> = 671)	Sample 3 <sup>b</sup> : court staff ( <i>n</i> = 272)	Weighted average across samples
Conflict avoidance				
Try to avoid/stay away from the person	58.6	22.5	61.2	40.0
Just put up with it	70.7	—	84.8	77.1
Try not to make the person angry	63.9	46.9	69.8	56.2
Try not to hurt the person's feelings	—	—	57.4	57.4
Minimization				
Tell yourself it wasn't important	63.6	55.3	71.6	60.9
Just try to forget it	54.6	68.0	81.8	67.5
Just ignore it	—	72.5	76.6	73.7
Assume the person meant no harm/ meant well	33.0	57.1	58.4	51.2
Assertion				
Confront the person	—	21.2	40.8	26.9
Ask the person to leave you alone	—	—	13.4	13.4
Let the person know you didn't like what was happening	48.6	—	—	48.6
Informal social support seeking				
Talk with friend/someone for advice/ support	41.1	36.1	72.2	45.1
Talk about it with someone you trusted	61.3	—	81.7	70.6
Talk with family for understanding/ support	48.5	—	—	48.5
Informal organizational support seeking				
Talk with a supervisor/someone in management	35.3	—	35.0	35.2
Report the situation informally	—	7.8	34.6	15.5
Formal organizational support seeking				
Make a formal complaint	6.1	1.4	2.3	2.8

<sup>a</sup> For this descriptive presentation, items were scored dichotomously, such that 0 = no use of the strategy and 1 = possible or definite use of the strategy. <sup>b</sup> For this descriptive presentation, items were scored dichotomously, such that 0 = never used the strategy and 1 = used the strategy at least once or twice.

in the previous five years (from 0 = *never* to 4 = *many times*);  $\alpha = .89$ . Respondents who had encountered incivility at least "once or twice" were again branched to questions about the experience that had made the greatest impression on them. Once again, analyses focused on the subset of employees (*n* = 272) whose specific experience involved general incivility in the absence of gendered or sexualized mistreatment.

*Appraisal and coping.* To assess appraisal of the uncivil situation, we administered identical items as in the Sample 2 survey (see Table 1). A principal components analysis revealed a unidimensional structure underlying these six items. Thus, for analyses beyond simple descriptives, we summed these items into a scale (Cronbach's alpha = .88), such that higher scores indicate appraisals of the situation as being more offensive, annoying, frustrating, and so forth.

We measured strategies for coping with incivility using 15 items from Fitzgerald's (1990) CHQ, with the same 5-point response options as in the Sample 2 survey. We scored these items dichotomously for descriptive purposes (0 = no use of that strategy, 1 = use of the strategy at least "once or twice"), as presented in Table 2. For all other analyses, we scored these items polytomously (using the full 5-point scale) and then summed them into theoretically meaningful scales. Four items assessed attempts at *conflict avoidance*, that is, avoiding upsetting interactions with the instigator or avoiding the instigator altogether (coefficient  $\alpha = .72$ ). Four minimization items gauged efforts to downplay the seriousness of the situation ( $\alpha = .73$ ). Two items measured informal social support seeking or reliance on trusted others for emotional support or advice ( $\alpha = .83$ ). Two items also measured informal organizational support seeking, that is, discussing the situation with

a supervisor or reporting it informally ( $\alpha = .83$ ). In addition, two items assessed verbal assertion to the instigator (i.e., confrontation). Inspection of the responses to these latter two items revealed relatively low variance—when employees did confront their instigators, they did not do so frequently. Therefore, we created a dichotomous indicator from the assertion items (1 = engagement in either behavior at least once or twice, 0 = no use of either behavior). One final item gauged formal organizational support seeking, that is, filing a formal complaint. In sum, five multiitem composites and one single item tapped different coping responses to uncivil workplace behavior. According to a maximum-likelihood confirmatory factor analysis, this six-factor structure fit these data quite well (root-mean-square error of approximation = .06; standardized root-mean-square residual = .06; comparative fit index = .95).

*Characteristics of the incivility, its target, and its perpetrator.* In terms of target characteristics, participants self-reported their job position, allowing us to construct an ordinal variable indicating level in the organizational hierarchy, from lowest to highest: 1 = support staff or secretary, 2 = specialist, and 3 = attorney, unit head, manager, or supervisor. We summed two items assessing participants' perceived job security: "I feel secure in my job" and "I sometimes feel that I am in danger of being fired" (reverse coded); coefficient  $\alpha = .79$ . Responses ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Questions also assessed which WIS behaviors made up the specific uncivil experience. From this information, we calculated the variety (i.e., count of different types of behavior) and average frequency of incivility (response options being *never*, *once or twice*, *sometimes*, *often*, and *many times*). Participants also described the duration of their experience, from *one-time event*, *less than 1 week*, *several weeks*, *1 to 6 months*, and *more than 6 months*.

Finally, respondents described the instigator(s) of their uncivil experience, starting with job position: judge, attorney, court staff/security, and other. Because more than one instigator could be indicated, we scored each option as a separate dichotomous variable. The Perpetrator Power Scale (Swan, 1997) gauged the instigator's supervisory power, assessing this person's ability to affect aspects of the respondent's job (e.g., "pay raises," "chances of being promoted," "performance evaluations"); response options were *no*, *yes*, or *?* if they could not decide. We summed these eight power items into a scale ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

## Results

### *Patterns of Incivility, Appraisal, and Coping: Descriptive Findings*

Among university employees (Sample 1), 75% described at least one experience of uncivil behavior, at least "once or twice," during the prior year at work. Using a wider time window but narrower work context, 54% of attorneys (Sample 2) reported at least one uncivil encounter in federal litigation during the previous 5 years. Finally, 71% of court employees (Sample 3) had faced at least one uncivil act during the past 5 years of work. Further analysis of Sample 3 data revealed that uncivil situations ranged in duration. Many court employees described the uncivil experience making the "greatest impression" on them as a one-time event (51%) or incident lasting less than 1 week (8%). A few had experiences lasting several weeks (9%) or 1 to 6 months (6%). Fully 26% reported that these worst uncivil experiences had persisted for more than 6 months.

To address Research Question 1 (regarding the nature of incivility appraisals), we examined the pattern of mean response to individual appraisal items. As seen in Table 1, across all three samples, appraisals of "annoying" and "frustrating" received the highest ratings, and appraisals of "offensive" were not far behind. In contrast, by far the least endorsed appraisal was "threatening." This suggests that employees on average felt fairly frustrated, annoyed, and offended by their experiences of workplace incivility, but not particularly threatened.

Addressing Research Question 2 (regarding the nature of incivility coping), Table 2 presents the percentage of respondents using the coping behaviors assessed in each sample; it also presents a weighted average for each behavior across the three organizations. Overall, the great majority of employees tried to defuse their uncivil situations behaviorally (via conflict avoidance) or cognitively (using minimization), but they tended not to confront or assert themselves directly to the incivility instigator. In terms of support seeking, many respondents turned to informal social networks, whereas only a minority turned to management. Hardly any employees sought formal support by lodging a complaint with their organization; this finding suggested that this coping strategy is not particularly salient to workplace incivility. For this reason, we excluded the "formal complaint" item from further analysis.

Table 3  
*Construct Measurement in Sample 3 Survey*

Construct	No. items	$\alpha$	Scale range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Target appraisal	6	.88	0–24	12.44	6.49
Target conflict avoidance	4	.72	0–16	7.02	4.23
Target minimization	4	.73	0–16	6.67	3.81
Target assertion <sup>a</sup>	2	—	0–1	0.44	0.50
Target informal social support seeking	2	.83	0–8	3.44	2.47
Target informal organizational support seeking	2	.83	0–8	1.11	1.71
Target formal organizational support seeking	1	—	0–4	0.03	0.18
Target job level	1	—	1–3	1.93	0.83
Target job security	2	.79	2–10	7.44	1.82
Incivility variety <sup>b</sup>	7	—	1–7	4.18	1.90
Incivility frequency <sup>b</sup>	7	.89	0–4	1.63	0.66
Uncivil situation duration	1	—	1–5	2.47	1.72
Instigator power	8	.90	0–16	9.62	5.20
Instigator position: Court staff/security	1	—	0–1	0.54	0.50
Instigator position: Attorney	1	—	0–1	0.10	0.29
Instigator position: Judge	1	—	0–1	0.19	0.39
Instigator position: Other	1	—	0–1	0.22	0.42

<sup>a</sup> We created a dichotomous indicator from the two assertion items (1 = *engagement in either behavior at least once or twice*, 0 = *no use of either behavior*). The mean and standard deviation listed here are for the dichotomous indicator. Being a single-item indicator, Cronbach’s alpha does not apply. <sup>b</sup> Incivility variety scores reflected the number of different Workplace Incivility Scale behaviors that were involved in the specific experience (based on a simple count of endorsed items, so alpha does not apply), whereas frequency scores reflected the average frequency with which those behaviors occurred (based on a mean of Workplace Incivility Scale items).

*Determinants of Appraisal:  
 Regression Analysis*

All remaining analyses involved Sample 3 data; summary statistics for all variables appear in Table 3. We began by testing Hypotheses 1 through 3 about determinants of targets’ incivility appraisals. For this purpose, the six appraisal items were summed into a scale, such that higher scores indicated more negative appraisals; this scale then constituted the dependent variable in a linear regression analysis ( $n = 278$ ). Independent variables included target characteristics (job level and perceived job security), situation characteristics (variety, frequency, and duration of uncivil behaviors), and instigator characteristics (supervisory power and job position).<sup>4</sup> Correlations among all of these variables appear in Table 4, and regression coefficients appear in Table 5.

As can be seen in Table 5, incivility appraisals related significantly to behavior variety, behavior frequency, and instigator power. These variables explained 40% of the variance in appraisal,  $F(9, 268) = 20.16, p < .001$ . Largely supporting Hypotheses 2 and 3, these results suggest that employees tend to appraise uncivil encounters more negatively when the incivility is more varied ( $\beta = .28, p < .001$ ), the incivility is more frequent ( $\beta = .23, p < .001$ ), and

the instigator is more powerful ( $\beta = .26, p < .001$ ). Contrary to predictions, neither duration nor any target characteristics predicted target appraisals (all  $\beta$ s nonsignificant).

*Profiles in Coping: Cluster Analysis*

Next, we identified coping profiles among Sample 3 employees. Specifically, after transforming the five coping composites (conflict avoidance, minimization, informal social support seeking, informal organizational support seeking, and confrontation) into  $z$  scores, we submitted them to  $k$ -means cluster analysis (Hartigan, 1975). We chose a five-cluster solution to capture the widest variety of profiles but also maintain sufficiently large cell sizes for meaningful analysis. Standardized coping means for the five clusters (“profiles”)

<sup>4</sup> Before proceeding with this regression, we tested for potential multicollinearity among the predictors by inspecting variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance (1/VIF) statistics. As a rule of thumb, a variable whose VIF value is greater than 10 or tolerance value is less than 0.1 may be problematic. With the highest VIF being 2.00 and the lowest tolerance being 0.50, we found no problems with multicollinearity.

Table 4  
*Intercorrelations and Discriminant Function Coefficients for Variables in Regression and Discriminant Analyses (Sample 3)*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8a	8b	8c	Standardized discriminant function coefficient
1. Target appraisal	1.00										.51
2. Target job level	-.03	1.00									-.36
3. Target job security	-.24**	.11*	1.00								.00
4. Incivility variety	.50**	-.17**	-.27**	1.00							.10
5. Incivility frequency	.49**	-.12	-.25**	.43**	1.00						.12
6. Uncivil situation duration	.35**	-.15**	-.21**	.30**	.53**	1.00					.53
7. Instigator power	.47**	.02	-.37**	.39**	.36**	.30**	1.00				.17
8a. Court staff/security instigator <sup>a</sup>	.13*	-.13*	-.02	.14**	.09	.10*	.05	1.00			-.28
8b. Attorney instigator <sup>a</sup>	-.10*	.05	.11	-.06	-.05	-.03	-.24**	-.34**	1.00		-.14
8c. Judge instigator <sup>a</sup>	.01	.18**	-.14*	-.02	-.02	-.07	.16**	-.55**	-.15**	1.00	-.09

<sup>a</sup> Dummy-coded “instigator job position” variable.  
 \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

appear in Figure 1; brief descriptions follow. Analyses then tested Hypothesis 4, focusing on factors that differentiate among the profile groups.

this group “support seekers.” Furthermore, these employees engaged in moderate levels of all other coping strategies.

*Cluster 1: Support Seekers*

Cluster 1 represented the smallest of all groups, consisting of 27 employees whose most prominent response to incivility entailed seeking organizational support from supervisors and managers. They also sought informal social support at relatively high levels. Thus, for descriptive convenience, we labeled

*Cluster 2: Detachers*

The largest profile group ( $n = 71$ ), by contrast, did little in the way of coping, with the exception of moderate use of assertion. Compared with other groups, they appeared the most detached from the stressful situation, and even from coping efforts.

Table 5  
*Results of Regression Analysis Predicting Appraisal (Sample 3)*

Variable	Dependent variable: Target appraisal				
	B	SE B	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>
Target job level	0.45	0.39	.06		
Target job security	-0.04	0.18	-.01		
Incivility variety	0.96	0.19	.28***		
Incivility frequency	2.23	0.59	.23***		
Uncivil situation duration	0.27	0.21	.07		
Instigator supervisory power	0.32	0.07	.26***		
Court staff/security instigator	0.83	0.86	.06		
Attorney instigator	-0.06	1.28	-.01		
Judge instigator	0.09	1.04	.01		
Overall model				.40***	.38***

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

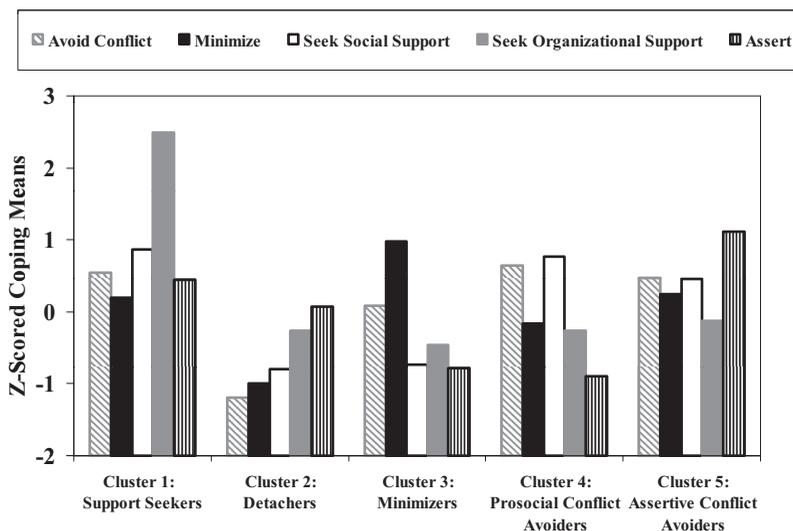


Figure 1. Profiles of coping means for five-group cluster solution.

### Cluster 3: Minimizers

Fifty-eight employees responded to incivility primarily by minimizing the severity of the behavior and attempting to avoid aversive interaction with the instigator. They tended not to enlist support from friends or management and, logically, tended not to confront the instigator about the uncivil behavior.

### Cluster 4: Prosocial Conflict Avoiders

Employees falling into Cluster 4 ( $n = 55$ ) distinguished themselves by engaging in particularly high levels of conflict avoidance and informal social support seeking. Their rates of minimization were also moderate, but they tended not to confront their instigators.

### Cluster 5: Assertive Conflict Avoiders

The 66 employees in the fifth group closely resembled the prosocial conflict avoiders, with one notable exception: They asserted themselves to their instigators at a level higher than any other group. In other words, like Cluster 4, this group avoided interacting with or upsetting their instigators to a great extent. However, at some point they also confronted the instigators about the inappropriate behavior.

### Determinants of Coping: Discriminant Analysis

Target, situation, and instigator characteristics for each of the five profile groups appear in Table 6. To determine the extent that each of these variables distinguished among the five coping groups, we conducted a multiple-group discriminant function analysis ( $n = 248$ ; Klecka, 1980). One significant discriminant function emerged, Wilks's  $\Lambda = .55$ ,  $\chi^2(40, N = 248) = 144.48$ ,  $p < .001$ , accounting for 80% of the between-groups variance.

The standardized discriminant function coefficients appear in the last column of Table 4, showing how much each variable contributes uniquely to the discrimination among coping profile groups (the larger the coefficient, the greater the contribution). These results show that appraisal and duration are the two strongest factors discriminating among coping profiles. According to Table 6, minimizers and detachers had appraised their uncivil situation as less stressful and less enduring than other groups. By contrast, support seekers reported higher stress appraisals and longer incivility durations than any other group. Incivility duration was also exceptionally high for the assertive conflict avoiders.

The target's job level also showed moderate discriminating power, according to the discriminant function coefficients. In particular, Table 6 shows

Table 6  
*Overall and Coping Profile Group Characteristics (Sample 3)*

Characteristic	Full sample ( <i>N</i> = 277)	Support seekers ( <i>n</i> = 27)	Detachers ( <i>n</i> = 71)	Minimizers ( <i>n</i> = 58)	Prosocial conflict avoiders ( <i>n</i> = 55)	Assertive conflict avoiders ( <i>n</i> = 66)
<b>Target</b>						
Mean ( <i>SD</i> ) appraisal	12.55 (6.37)	17.68 (4.07)	9.07 (5.98)	10.50 (5.56)	14.04 (6.64)	14.94 (5.32)
Mean ( <i>SD</i> ) job level	1.93 (0.83)	1.70 (0.78)	2.27 (0.76)	1.86 (0.85)	1.89 (0.84)	1.77 (0.84)
Mean ( <i>SD</i> ) job security	7.46 (1.81)	7.85 (1.51)	7.99 (1.51)	7.67 (1.68)	6.96 (2.06)	6.98 (1.91)
<b>Uncivil behavior</b>						
Mean ( <i>SD</i> ) variety	4.22 (1.91)	5.00 (1.71)	3.40 (1.67)	3.64 (1.77)	4.59 (2.04)	4.95 (1.75)
Mean ( <i>SD</i> ) frequency	1.62 (0.67)	2.02 (0.78)	1.27 (0.44)	1.44 (0.45)	1.74 (0.71)	1.90 (0.72)
Mean ( <i>SD</i> ) duration	2.50 (1.74)	3.52 (1.87)	1.56 (1.15)	1.91 (1.44)	2.84 (1.88)	3.40 (1.62)
<b>Instigator</b>						
Job position: court staff (%)	54.2	10.7	26.0	22.0	16.7	24.7
Attorney (%)	9.7	14.8	33.3	22.2	11.1	18.5
Judge (%)	19.1	5.7	18.9	24.5	32.1	18.9
Other (%)	22.8	6.3	30.2	11.1	20.6	31.7
Mean ( <i>SD</i> ) supervisor power	9.66 (5.14)	10.11 (4.29)	7.65 (5.27)	7.80 (5.43)	12.24 (3.99)	11.04 (4.56)

that detachers worked in significantly higher level job positions than any other group. Another factor that moderately distinguished among the groups was instigator job position—specifically, whether or not the instigator was a fellow court employee. This factor particularly distinguished the detachers and assertive conflict avoiders, who were disproportionately likely to have court-employee instigators, compared with the other three profile groups. It also set apart the support seekers, who were the least likely of all groups to have a court-employee instigator. Finally, instigator supervisory power contributed modestly to the between-groups discrimination; detachers and minimizers differed from other groups by having relatively low-power instigators, whereas instigators for the conflict avoiders (both prosocial and assertive) were the most powerful.

## Discussion

A decade has passed since Andersson and Pearson (1999) first brought workplace incivility to the attention of organizational scientists. The current study makes conceptual contributions to that literature by further refining the definition of incivility—that is, operationalizing the criterion of low-intensity behavior in terms of emotional appraisal. Appraisals might help distinguish incivility from other forms of anti-social work behavior, and such distinctions are badly needed in a literature that is becoming overrun with terms for different behaviors that are difficult to

disentangle. A second key contribution is that we demonstrate how employees appraise and cope with incivility, and we do so across three fairly different work contexts. Third, we also identify variables that predict and distinguish among incivility appraisal and coping responses. This research offers new insights about employee adaptation to a particularly insidious type of job stressor. Below we discuss key findings.

### *Appraisal of Workplace Incivility*

Pearson and colleagues (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Pearson et al., 2001) proposed that a hallmark feature of workplace incivility is its “low-intensity” nature. Seeking to sharpen the clarity of this argument, we have suggested an operationalization of this characteristic from the target’s perspective. That is, the target’s appraisal of the situation could define whether it is a low-intensity experience for that person. On average, employees appraised workplace incivility as moderately to very frustrating, annoying, and offensive, but not particularly threatening. In other words, incivility triggered mildly negative appraisals. Based on these results, we propose that a defining characteristic be that incivility gives rise to mildly negative appraisals in targets (e.g., appraising the behavior as insensitive, annoying, frustrating, bothersome). The three hallmark features of incivility would then be norm violation, ambiguous intent, and mildly negative appraisal. In sum, the concept of appraisal helps refine the conceptualization of incivility

and could potentially help delineate its boundary from other types of antisocial work behavior.

To understand what affects incivility appraisals, we examined a number of theoretically derived correlates. To our surprise, no target characteristics predicted target appraisals, contrary to Hypothesis 1. Appraisals instead depended on the variety and frequency of the uncivil behavior and the power of its instigator, largely supporting Hypotheses 2 and 3. Employees may feel more upset by this conduct when it takes a variety of forms, due to difficulties adapting to an unpredictable, evolving, or multifaceted stressor. Furthermore, frequent acts of incivility can accumulate over time, gradually but continually increasing the total stress. Incivility “from above” could be particularly distressing, as targets may feel unable to resist or protest poor treatment by superiors, and they might worry about the situation escalating into more serious violations of social or professional norms. These findings echo those from the literatures on workplace bullying, harassment, and abuse, which also find that behavior variety, behavior duration, and power imbalances are key determinants of negative outcomes (e.g., Lim & Cortina, 2005; Rospenda et al., 2000; Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003; Hoel et al., 2003). This further supports the statement that opened this article: Although incivility may be subtle, its impact is not—showing similar effects as more blatant and malicious forms of workplace hostility.

### *Coping With Workplace Incivility*

In terms of coping behavior, one particularly notable finding was that few employees responded to incivility by discussing it with organizational authorities; in fact, only 1% to 6% of employees had filed formal complaints about incivility. The uncivil situation may have felt too minor to warrant whistle blowing, which can put an employee at risk for retaliation (e.g., Miceli & Near, 1992). Moreover, as Neuman (2004, p. 74) noted, “how (and to whom) do you report having had your feelings hurt, and what reporting system captures the time you spend ruminating about the perceived mistreatment?” This finding has important practical implications, suggesting that personnel rarely bring workplace incivility to the attention of management. Such behaviors, more often than not, would go unreported and uncorrected. This could help explain why incivility can have such widespread negative effects. To monitor uncivil conduct and curtail its consequences, organizations

should not rely solely on traditional avenues of redress and wait for incivility reports before taking action.

Moving from individual coping behaviors to profiles of behavior, many interesting observations emerge. Characteristics of the target, instigator, and uncivil situation all had some explanatory power in accounting for profile-group differences (as anticipated by Hypothesis 4). The factors that most differentiated support seekers from other groups were appraisal and duration of the uncivil situation: Support seekers found it to be far more frustrating, offensive, disturbing, and so forth, and the situation had persisted for weeks to months. These findings suggest that incivility must be appraised as fairly aversive and continue for some time—and perhaps even escalate to bullying—before employees report it to management.

The detachers and minimizers shared a number of characteristics, having experienced a few mildly appraised, transitory behaviors from less powerful instigators. But unlike minimizers, detachers relied on few conflict avoidance or minimization tactics; if they responded at all, they addressed the situation directly with the instigator. Offering a possible explanation, detachers tended to occupy higher levels in the organizational hierarchy. Owing to greater power, it may be less risky for this group to confront others about inappropriate behavior; in fact, managing misconduct could be within their job duties. Higher status targets might even experience normative pressures to respond to mistreatment in certain ways, as argued by Aquino et al. (2001, 2006), and this could include confronting and correcting the instigator.

Conflict avoiders (both prosocial and assertive) distinguished themselves by experiencing incivility from the most powerful instigators. This could explain their avoidant behaviors: Perhaps they avoided conflict-laden exchanges with the instigator because that person had considerable authority over them. At the same time, assertive conflict avoiders also confronted their instigators at higher rates than any other group. The dialectical nature of this group’s actions—involving both avoidance and approach—might seem irrational, but the variation in behavior makes sense when interpreted as occurring at different points of an ongoing situation. Perhaps these employees steered clear of the instigator for as long as possible, but when this proved ineffective or impractical, they switched to a new strategy of assertion. This would exemplify a trial-and-error approach to coping, typical of responses to chronic stress.

### Practical Implications

Regarding the applied benefits of these findings, knowledge on individual reactions to incivility sheds further light on a process that can trigger job dissatisfaction, performance decline, workgroup disruption, psychological illness, and turnover among employees. With a better grasp of this process, organizations may be in better positions to intervene. Our results suggest, for example, that management should not await formal grievances to take action because most incivility targets employ a variety of coping responses other than organizational support seeking. Findings also suggest that the few employees who do “blow the whistle” typically do so only after they have appraised the incivility as particularly stressful, and it has continued for weeks to months; however, at that point, individual and organizational damage may have already ensued.

We emphasize the organization’s responsibility to develop a system where incivility is prevented to the extent possible, uncivil conduct is taken seriously despite its “minor” appearance, and employee-targets are assisted in their attempts to cope. Pearson et al. (2000) recommend a number of strategies for fostering a civil workplace. When incivilities do arise, more organizations could make counselors available (e.g., via employee assistance programs) to targeted employees, helping them contain the emotional and occupational sequelae of workplace victimization. With such mechanisms in place, employees may be more likely to seek assistance before uncivil situations interfere with their productivity, health, and happiness.

### Limitations and Future Directions

Although securely based on three large samples, this research has its limitations. All of our data were cross-sectional and from a single source, limiting causal inferences and raising the potential for common method bias. There are also shortcomings to using a 5-year time frame to assess employee experiences of incivility (in Samples 2 and 3), as memory decay could lead to underreporting or overreporting of uncivil experiences. In addition, it is difficult to know whether the behavior reported by our participants was ambiguous with respect to intent, given the way we measured incivility.<sup>5</sup> Beyond what we measured, there are certainly other cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses that are salient to incivility.

Nevertheless, we hope that the current study provides a springboard for ongoing investigations into factors

that might explain how and why seemingly minor injustices undermine employee well-being. Future studies could also compare and contrast ways in which employees react to different categories of antisocial work behavior (e.g., incivility, aggression, sexual and racial harassment). In addition, qualitative methods could be used to identify incivility-specific appraisals and coping strategies. Finally, we emphasize the need for longitudinal investigations into responses to workplace incivility, to determine how appraisal and coping unfold within individuals, across situations, and over time.

<sup>5</sup> This is a problem that characterizes much of the research on antisocial work behavior—intentionality or lack thereof is often part of the definition but not the measurement.

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