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What is Workplace Incivility? An Investigation of Employee Relational Schemas

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ABSTRACT
This qualitative study investigated relational schemas of workplace incivility to develop an understanding of incivility from the employee perspective, refine theoretical comprehension of the incivility construct, and begin collecting data to support development of applied interventions. Two hundred and five currently employed respondents answered open-ended survey questions about schematic features of incivility and normative questions about how it should be addressed at work. Responses were analyzed with phenomenological methodology. Workplace incivility was defined in relational schemas similarly to current scholarly conceptualization, but respondents’ examples of incivility included more severe mistreatment as well. Perpetrators, targets, bystanders, and interveners were identified as the primary roles engaged with incivility. Respondents called for active prevention and intervention against incivility, directed by organizational leadership. Rich segments of illustrative qualitative data are presented throughout the article. Researchers should note results indicating construct proliferation in workplace mistreatment literature. Practitioners should consider the roles of leaders and bystanders in addressing workplace incivility.

Fortune 1000 firm executives may spend more than 10% of their time resolving employee conflicts (Johnson & Indvik, 2001). It is therefore no surprise that a great deal of knowledge has accumulated about various forms of workplace mistreatment, including incivility (Schilpzand, De Pater, & Erez, 2016). We now know about many antecedents and outcomes of incivility, as well as its prevalence in the workplace (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Aquino & Thau, 2009; Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Pearson & Porath, 2009). Researchers have also begun considering how to practically address workplace incivility (Kirk, Schutte, & Hine, 2011; Leiter, Laschinger, Day, & Oore, 2011; Pearson & Porath, 2005), though this work remains nascent. While literature has been growing and it has been reported that as many as 96% of employees have experienced workplace incivility and 99% have witnessed it (Porath & Pearson, 2010), we still do not know how members of organizations cognitively represent and make sense of this incivility (for one exploratory exception, see Doshy & Wang, 2014). Given that such cognitive representations of social interactions and relationships can critically influence the future thought and action of employees (Baldwin, 1992, 1997; Hansen, 1989; Sanchez-Burks, Nisbett, & Ybarra, 2000; Wilson & Capitman, 1982), this information is critical to advance our knowledge of incivility beyond behavioral description. We cannot be satisfied that we have a comprehensive theoretical understanding of incivility without this knowledge, nor can we effectively develop applied methods of addressing and preventing incivility in the workplace without it.

Workplace incivility is defined as “low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect,” including rudeness, discourtesy, and a lack of regard for others (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p. 457). It does not include more severe mistreatment such as bullying or physical aggression (Yang, Caughlin, Gazica, Truxillo, & Spector, 2014). This is the well-established scholarly description of incivility, but how do employees make sense of this on the job? One effective manner of uncovering such information is by investigating relational schemas of organization members with regards to incivility. Relational schemas are “cognitive structures representing regularities in patterns of interpersonal relatedness” that assist in navigating social interactions (Baldwin, 1992, p. 461). These schemas include “a script for an expected pattern of interaction,” along with the roles played by self and others in the script.
which is always developing as individuals incorporate information from ongoing social experiences (Baldwin, 1992, p. 462). Investigating these schemas, including organization members’ expected patterns of social interaction during and after instances of incivility, is helpful for understanding perceptions of, and responses to, incivility. This approach to investigating incivility within organizations addresses a major absence in our theoretical knowledge of this form of workplace mistreatment.

Research that explores relational schemas of incivility can also aid the development of practical strategies to address and prevent incivility, since the content of relational schemas is known to influence future thought and action (Baldwin, 1992; Sanchez-Burks et al., 2000). Thus, information about such schemas can serve as a strong foundation upon which the definition of specific prevention and intervention strategies can be built in the future. Uncovering effective methods of addressing incivility has the potential to enhance the well-being of employees and efficiency of organizations by influencing the development of new patterns for responding to incivility and reducing incivility among peers at work (Pearson & Porath, 2005); however, such investigation should include an awareness of what organization members believe about incivility, as well as preferences for who should address incivility, and how they should do so. While research to date may have established a bird’s-eye view of workplace incivility, it is now time to test our scholarly conceptualization by exploring this construct from the ground in the rich qualitative perspectives of those who engage with incivility in the regular course of their employment (Miner et al., 2018).

Theoretical background

Workplace incivility

Workplace incivility is a construct that falls within the broader field of workplace mistreatment (e.g., Hershcovis, 2011), also known as workplace aggression (e.g., Barling, Dupré, & Kelloway, 2009) or workplace victimization (e.g., Aquino & Thau, 2009). Barling et al. (2009) defined the field from the perpetrator (actor) perspective as investigating “any behavior initiated by employees that is intended to harm another individual in their organization or the organization itself and that the target is motivated to avoid” (p. 672). Aquino and Thau (2009) defined the field from the perspective of the target (victim) as being about “when an employee’s well-being is harmed by an act of aggression perpetrated by one or more members of the organization” (p. 718). Workplace mistreatment research includes constructs beyond incivility such as bullying, harassment, and undermining (Hershcovis, 2011). It has been argued elsewhere that due to construct proliferation in mistreatment research—with many constructs overlapping in definition, concept, and measurement—efforts should be made to reconcile among constructs in the field (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Barling et al., 2009; Hershcovis, 2011; Raver & Barling, 2008). Thus, although the current study focuses on incivility, it is situated more broadly within the field of workplace mistreatment, and this literature is drawn upon throughout.

Workplace mistreatment research has identified that instances of incivility are frequent, with predictors including negative affect, trait anger, and perceived interpersonal provocation (Barling et al., 2009). Many negative outcomes of mistreatment have been found: increased depression, anxiety, and job stress; decreased mental health, well-being, and job satisfaction (Aquino & Thau, 2009). Organizations suffer as incivility “diminishes productivity, performance, motivation, creativity, and helping behaviors” (Pearson & Porath, 2005, p. 8). Andersson and Pearson (1999) posited a theory of how incivility unfolds over time, suggesting that instances of incivility are interactive processes between two or more parties, where the perpetrators, targets, observers, and social context shape (and are shaped by) the incivility. In this way, a perpetrator behaves uncivilly toward a target, the target may interpret this behavior negatively, which may lead the target to reciprocate the incivility, initiating a feedback spiral of incivility. The wish to reciprocate incivility could be misdirected and impact another party, thereby dragging others into the spiral—or bystanders could learn and engage in incivility by witnessing others act it out (Andersson & Pearson, 1999).

Incivility can also be subtle and enacted by the perpetrator with or without intention, as well as with or without intent to harm the target. Perpetrators can deny alleged intent by claiming that they did not know about its effects, the target misinterpreted the behavior, or the target was too sensitive (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). However, much of this model remains theoretical, such that we still know little about the perceptions and cognitive representations of employees involved with incivility at work.

Relational schemas

Schemas were introduced into cognitive psychology defined as “an active organisation of past reactions, or of past experiences, which must always be supposed to be operating in any well-adapted organic response” (Bartlett, 1932, p. 201). Schemas have been more recently defined as “cognitive structures that represent knowledge
about a concept or type of stimulus” (Fiske & Taylor, 1991, p. 98). The current study is concerned with relational schemas, which have entered the realm of organizational research in the past (e.g., Huang, Wright, Chiu, & Wang, 2008), but not relative to mistreatment. Relational schemas are cognitive structures representing scripts for expected social interactions and the roles played by self and other in these scripts, which assists us to navigate interpersonal relationships (Baldwin, 1992, 1997). Conflict frames are a similar construct in conflict literature (Pinkley, 1990); however, when focusing on only three discrete frames used to cognitively interpret conflict, these are too narrow to describe the broader cognitive representations sought in relational schemas. Mental models are also similar (Rook, 2013), but mental models expand far beyond relational elements, thus being too broad to describe the interpersonal roles and scripts considered in the current study.

An alternative approach could be to consider employee perspectives without using any of these cognitive structures as a guide. Doshy and Wang (2014) conducted an exploratory study of 11 participants in this manner. They asked employees for perspectives about how any specific uncivil event that each had experienced as a target unfolded and how it affected them. Their findings included incivility being enacted primarily within power structures where supervisors are uncivil toward subordinates, organizations typically failing to address such incivility, and employees fearing addressing incivility themselves due to the risk of job loss or other retaliation. The authors ultimately called for more specific phenomenological research (like the current study) to begin detailing the complexities of this area of investigation. The current study employs a larger sample and aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how employees cognitively represent workplace incivility in the context of relational schemas and in comparison to contemporary scholarly conceptualization of the construct, along with normative data concerning how to address incivility in applied settings.

**The current study**

**The content of relational schemas of workplace incivility**

**Definitional and behavioral components of incivility**

At present, we know little about lay definitions of incivility and presume that our research participants agree with scholarly conceptualization—but is this the case? In accordance with scholarly definition, uncivil actions are passive verbal and nonverbal behaviors (Pearson & Porath, 2005), and exclude more severe acts of workplace mistreatment such as making threats, yelling, or physical violence (Yang et al., 2014). Incivility is of low intensity because it represents rudeness, unprofessional behavior, and a lack of courtesy. It involves ambiguous intent because observers cannot be certain whether the uncivil behavior was done specifically to harm the victim or for some other reason, such as the perpetrator not realizing what he or she has done. Regardless, the behavior involves violating workplace norms of respect. Finally, incivility involves rudeness or discourtesy because it can include behaviors that are deficient, unfair, and lack transparency (Pearson, Andersson, & Wegner, 2001). Still, we do not know if employee understandings of workplace incivility map onto this scholarly conceptualization. Further, some particular examples of workplace incivility include bosses rebuking subordinates for minor issues in front of many colleagues and employees making sarcastic remarks about other employees in front of clients (Pearson & Porath, 2005). Thus, beyond detailed investigation of the definitional features of workplace incivility, more in-depth analysis of its prototypical examples would also be valuable.

RQ1: What are the definitional features of workplace incivility represented in relational schemas of workplace incivility?

RQ2: What are examples of prototypically uncivil behaviors represented in relational schemas of workplace incivility?

**Individual roles in incivility**

The roles played by self and other in social interactions and relationships are a key element of relational schemas (Baldwin, 1992, 1997). In accordance with how mistreatment literature has organized the study of its constructs (Raver & Barling, 2008), relational schemas of incivility are likely to include the roles of perpetrator and victim. A substantial amount of workplace mistreatment research has been conducted from each of these perspectives (Hershcovis, 2011), with examples of incivility including both as central to the acting and experiencing of incivility (Pearson & Porath, 2005). Andersson and Pearson (1999) also posited the importance of the observer role, given that incivility may be seen by others in the workplace; their theory has been supported by subsequent research (Pearson & Porath, 2005; Reich & Hershcovis, 2015). Beyond these abstract roles, incivility has generally been studied with perpetrators and targets that come from within the organization (e.g., supervisors, coworkers), though some mistreatment research has considered extra-organizational sources as well (e.g., customers; van
Jaarsveld, Walker, & Skarlicki, 2010). Thus, workplace incivility may come from members of an organization and individuals outside of it. Still, we must ask from the perspective of employees: Who is involved in workplace incivility and how?

RQ3: What are the primary individual roles represented in relational schemas of workplace incivility?

Events following incivility

Relational schemas also include scripts describing how interactions manifest over time (Baldwin, 1992, 1997). The following represent possible script components that may reside within employees’ relational schemas of workplace incivility, in particular concerning events that might follow incivility.

Workplace mistreatment has been associated with many negative psychological outcomes (Aquino & Thau, 2009). Given the regularity with which such consequences occur, they would be expected to reside in the relational schemas of workplace incivility.

Following incivility, targets may understandably engage in coping strategies to deal with victimization. Cortina and Magley (2009) identified five main profiles of coping with incivility, including behavioral and cognitive strategies, along with noncoping. Which of these would emerge in the relational schemas under investigation was uncertain, but a range of such scripts could be present, representing employees’ understanding of the breadth of responses available following incivility.

Describing what occurs following incivility can also take a conflict management perspective. Blake and Mouton (1964) developed the original dual-concern model of conflict management. Since that time, variations of the model have developed, though most call for two dimensions leading to four or five conflict management strategies (Sorensen, Morse, & Savage, 1999). Rahim’s (1983) conceptualization considered dimensions of concern for self (CS; attempt to satisfy own concerns) and concern for other (CO; attempt to satisfy other’s concerns), both ranging from low to high. When combined, five styles of handling interpersonal conflict arise: integrating, avoiding, dominating, obliging, and compromising (confirmary factor analysis upheld the validity of these styles, as well as its invariance across different roles and levels within organizations; Rahim & Magner, 1995). Rahim and Magner (1995) also clarified the meaning of these styles: Integrating is “concerned with collaboration between parties … to reach a solution acceptable to both parties” (p. 123); avoiding refers to withdrawal, willful blindness, and handing off issues to someone else; dominating refers to zero-sum mentality that can lead to forceful behavior to achieve goals; an obliging individual “attempts to play down the differences and emphasizes commonalities to satisfy the concerns of the other party” (p. 123); and compromising is a quid pro quo style in which parties mutually exchange or give up something. These styles of handling conflict could reside in relational schemas, given that workplace incivility appears related to interpersonal conflict (Raver, 2013; Raver & Barling, 2008) and has been investigated with conflict management styles in the past (Trudel & Reio, 2011).

Instances of incivility may also be reciprocated, creating a feedback loop of increasing mistreatment (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Pearson and Porath (2005) have noted that “in the most extreme cases, this tit-for-tat behavior can intensify in successive rounds to the point of shouting matches, veiled threats, or even physical aggression” (p. 12). Thus, relational schemas of incivility may include scripts of reciprocated mistreatment increasing in intensity over time.

Constructively preventing and addressing workplace mistreatment with leadership intervention is uncommon. Organization leaders may not believe that any mistreatment is occurring and victims of mistreatment may feel that help is out of reach, thus perpetuating ongoing mistreatment (Davenport, Schwartz, & Elliott, 2002). It has also been noted that when faced with mistreatment, an “organization’s resources are predictably marshaled in support” of perpetrators, leaving victims feeling as though the organization is working against them (Namie & Namie, 2000, p. 4). Namie and Lutgen-Sandvik (2010) found that “in over 70% of the cases, respondents thought that authorities either made the situations worse or did nothing” (p. 360). Further, Doshy and Wang (2014) speak of the “willful blindness” of organizations regarding workplace incivility (p. 38). There is no reason to believe that leadership involvement with incivility would be represented any differently in relational schemas, but this possibility was investigated in the current study, along with the others detailed above.

RQ4: What occurs following episodes of incivility as represented in relational schemas of workplace incivility?

What organization members want

Relational schemas are descriptive, reflecting how employees cognitively represent incivility, but they could also be paired with thoughts about how incivility ought to be handled. Cialdini, Reno, and Kallgren (1990) clarified the differences between these kinds of information: Descriptive norms refer to what usually
happens while injunctive norms refer to what ought to happen. Injunctive norms can be prescriptive (should be done) and proscriptive (should not be done; Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, & Hepp, 2009). While such injunctive information would not form part of a descriptive relational schema, it complements this knowledge by informing our understanding of what normative stance individuals take with regard to their schemas (e.g., is what happens in the context of incivility at work appropriate; are changes in order; who should be involved with potential changes?). For instance, given the overall impact that leadership quality may have on the incidence and intensity of workplace mistreatment as noted above (also see Kelloway, Sivanathan, Francis, & Barling, 2005), it is possible that beyond relational schemas, individuals could also hold complementary prescriptive beliefs about the role of leadership in dealing with incivility. Thus, injunctive normative data can be of utility in developing effective strategies to prevent and address incivility, so the current study also considered this issue as a complement to the schemas being studied.

RQ5: How do organization members want workplace incivility to be prevented and addressed?

**Methods**

**Research design**

Qualitative phenomenological methodology guided the current study. Creswell (2007) provided the methodological framework based in Moustakas’s (1994) foundational approach. This method concerns itself with description of human experience, asking research questions to investigate the meaning that can be derived from experiencing a phenomenon.

**Participants and procedures**

Ethics approval was received from the ethics board of the author’s university. Two hundred and six American Mechanical Turk (MTurk) participants completed Internet surveys to elicit information about their relational schemas of workplace incivility and related injunctive beliefs. Reviewing MTurk reliability assessments “on dimensions universally relevant to researchers” suggests that MTurk samples are reliable, respondents are diligent due to intrinsic motivations and incentive structures, and that “researchers can use MTurk for virtually any study that is feasible to conduct online” (Paolacci & Chandler, 2014, p. 186). MTurk is notable for “its reliability, low cost, speed of data collection, and heterogeneity of participants” (Goodman, Cryder, & Cheema, 2013, p. 222). Indeed, only one of the 206 participants’ data was excluded from the sample for failure to attend to instructions and correctly respond to attention questions. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that the typical psychology research respondent on MTurk is more attentive than subject pool participant counterparts (Hauser & Schwarz, 2016).

Four selection criteria were implemented to prevent “aschematic” individuals from completing the survey and impairing results (Baldwin, 1992, p. 471). Participants were screened to be (a) engaged in paid work in an organization (b) with a supervisor and (c) at least two other coworkers. Further, (d) participants must have experienced workplace incivility. The 205 participants (54% female) whose data were included in the current study had an average age of 34 years and average job tenure of 5 years. The sample was predominantly Caucasian or White (79%), followed by African American or Black (7%) and Hispanic (7%). Many respondents had completed some amount of higher education (36% four-year college or university degree; 24% some college or university; 15% master’s degree). Participants worked in many different industries, including sales and related (16%), food preparation and service related (11%), and education, training, and library (11%). The current job titles of respondents were also quite variable, including accountant (0.5%), waiter (0.5%), secretary (1.5%), and assistant manager (1.5%).

**Measures**

The survey elicited information about relational schemas of workplace incivility and related injunctive beliefs using open-ended survey items developed for the current study (see Table A1). Baldwin (1992) reported that relational schemas may be investigated by asking participants to describe common social situations in terms of the affect, behavior, and cognition of the participants and others involved. The current study took a broader approach, asking about incivility more generally, to avoid leading participants to any possible researcher-imposed preconceptions. In accordance with phenomenological methodology, participants independently raised themes that were most salient to their experience while attempting to avoid leading them to any researcher-expected outcomes (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Survey respondents provided detailed responses to items, submitting an average of 464 words per person.

**Data analysis**

Data analysis was conducted in accordance with Creswell (2007) and Moustakas (1994). Following
collection of raw survey data, horizontalization of the
data (highlighting significant portions of survey
responses) and development of themes (arranging
data into clusters of meaning) were completed with
the aid of QSR NVivo software. Themes were then
integrated into textural and structural descriptions,
respectively representing descriptions of participants’
relational schemas of workplace incivility and the con-
textual influences on them. Phenomenological analysis
then uncovered the essence of relational schemas of
workplace incivility (a unified description of the com-
mon components of participants’ relational schemas,
related context, and related injunctive beliefs). Analysis was continually revisited and revised through-
out this process, with frequent discussion between the
author and a colleague to enhance the reliability of
results. This typically took the form of revising the
descriptive titles given to various themes and how to
separate or combine them to maintain fidelity to the
qualitative data.

Results

The content of relational schemas

Definitional features
Survey responses revealed nine prominent definitional
features of workplace incivility (see Table A2). Participants considered workplace incivility to be
rude, harmful, disrespectful, unsocial, mean/hostile,
impolite, purposeful, unprofessional, and inappropriate
behavior. Rudeness was the most frequently identified
theme, arising almost twice as often as the next most
frequent feature, which was harmfulness. A clear exam-
ples of rudeness in the data included “workplace incivi-
lity is rudeness in the workplace”; many participant
responses repeated this concept. Participants also fre-
quently described the harmful nature of incivility,
including that “it is any behavior that is meant to
hurt someone else and not having any regard for some-
one else’s feelings.” Disrespect was also a common fea-
ture (“workplace incivility is when your coworkers and
managers treat you with disrespect”). Finally, the con-
cept of being mean or hostile was also seen regularly in
the data (“workplace incivility is actions or words that
are unkind [sic] or even cruel to others”).

Respondent data about workplace incivility’s defi-
nitional features often included co-occurring themes
(52% of respondents raised two to four definitional
features of workplace incivility, 34% provided one
definitional feature, and 14% defined incivility only
with examples of incivility as opposed to actual defi-
nitional features). An example of four co-occurring
definitional features (rudeness, disrespect, harmful,
purposeful) provided by a participant was:
“Workplace incivility is when co-workers are rude
and disrespected [sic] to their own peers. They have
an intended target they want to harm.” However,
these co-occurring features were not identified in
any patterned manner. Themes for rude and impolite
features were correlated, \( r(203) = .28, p < .01 \). Themes
for inappropriate and harmful features were also cor-
related, \( r(203) = .17, p < .05 \). Beyond these two
correlations, participants only seemed to raise more
than one feature on a regular basis, as opposed to
raising any two or more specific features together in
any statistically significant manner. As such, the pro-
ceeding results and discussion should be understood
within the context of phenomenological themes reg-
ularly co-occurring but with minimally predictable
patternning between the themes.

Prototypical examples of workplace incivility

The top 16 most frequent examples of incivility raised in
the current study were considered in order of theme fre-
quency as follows (see Table A3): dismissive, criticize/insult, talk (unspecified), rumor/gossip, inappropriate lan-
guage, sabotage/backstab, talk (indirect), talk (direct), dis-
 crimination/stereotype, name-calling, sexual harassment,
threat/intimidate, body language, bullying, inappropriate
jokes, shout. Different types of verbal communication were
described vaguely in the data, as opposed to more clear-cut
examples such as name-calling or rumor/gossip. Thus,
talking (direct) refers to vague descriptions of uncivil
words being spoken face-to-face from perpetrator to target;
talking (indirect) refers to vague descriptions of uncivil
words being spoken by perpetrators behind targets’ backs;
and talking (unspecified) refers to vague descriptions of
uncivil words being spoken by perpetrators when it was
unclear whether this was being conducted directly or indi-
rectly with regard to the target.

Some examples of the most frequently raised proto-
typical forms of incivility are illustrative. The dismissive
theme included behavior such as excluding, ignoring,
or interrupting others (e.g., “excluding only the target
individual from workplace events” or “asking for input
and then ignoring it”). Criticizing/insulting was often
described similar to “criticizing others for various
things when it’s unwarranted.” Talking (unspecified)
was referred to as “language or words that are said by
someone who wants to harm another person.” Rumor/
gossip was also regularly identified by participants and
included “spreading nasty rumors or gossiping nega-
tively about a person.”

Beyond these examples, participants sometimes
raised contextual information concerning whether
these types of prototypical incivility are exhibited overtly or covertly. Overt incivility would be “berating or criticizing people in public,” while covert incivility looked like “being low key about trying to be rude or harm someone in any type of way and being on the downlow about it.” Explicitly considered covert incivility was raised by 5.85% of participants, whereas explicitly considered overt incivility was raised by 7.80%. The remainder of responses could be categorized as overt or covert, but they were not explicitly described as such by participants.

In accordance with phenomenological analysis, participants were also asked to provide information about an example of a time that they experienced incivility (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). While such information does not necessarily reside within participant schemas, it is likely to inform schema development (Fiske & Taylor, 1991), and it provided opportunities for in-depth data collection (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The top 14 most frequently raised examples were considered in this study: criticize/insult (23%), dismissive (14%), shout (14%), inappropriate language (13%), talk (indirect) (12%), unfair treatment (12%), name-calling (10%), inappropriate jokes (7%), fight/argue (7%), lying (5%), invasion of privacy (4%), sabotage/backstab (2%), threat/intimidate (2%), and withhold information (2%).

Criticize/insult was the most commonly raised example of personally experienced incivility. This included experiences such as:

My immediate supervisor, who is a line lead for the line that I work on, seems to have a personal problem with me. She is constantly criticizing everything I do, even though I had been doing my job very well in the eyes of others, including other supervisors.

Dismissiveness was also raised, such as “I felt like I was ignored. When I needed help I could not get it.” Finally, shouting was considered, including “a teacher once, yelled at me, in front of a classroom of children.”

These examples extended beyond the expectation of participants’ definitional features. Far from being only rude or impolite, many examples included illegal and violent manifestations of mistreatment. Thus, employees considered workplace incivility to be a broad range of low- to high-intensity deviance (i.e., any kind of workplace mistreatment), from simply “a coworker was incessantly using their cell phone and failed to look up or acknowledge anyone in the meeting” all the way to “I have been sexually harassed at my job in the past.”

Individual roles in incivility
Four main roles were found in participant relational schemas of workplace incivility: perpetrators (71%), targets (48%), bystanders (10%), and interveners (11%). Within each role, participants described which characters in the workplace were implicated in filling that role, such as coworkers, supervisors, clients, subordinates, or “everyone.” There were also references to characters being involved in incivility without specifying precisely which role they occupied (20%).

Participants most often raised the role of perpetrators—the individuals being uncivil. This role was filled by coworkers (48%), supervisors (27%), clients (11%), everyone (3%), and subordinates (3%). Participants described how “coworkers are most often the offenders” and “most of the time it is the supervisors creating a hostile work environment.”

Participants also spoke about targets—the individuals whom incivility is directed toward. Coworkers (33%), subordinates (14%), clients (4%), supervisors (4%), and everyone (2%) were considered as potential targets of incivility. For instance, “I mainly see coworkers being uncivil to each other,” or incivility “tends to be when a supervisor or administrator tries to throw their weight around and take advantage of someone who is lower on the totem pole.”

Ten percent of participants also mentioned passive bystanders, including coworkers (6%), everyone (2%), supervisors (2%), and clients (1%). Participants noted that “co-workers, supervisors, other employees, and clients can be innocent bystanders” to incivility. The definition of “bystander” can be nuanced in workplace mistreatment literature. Paull, Omari, and Standen (2012) proposed 13 different roles that bystanders might fill based on continuums of how the bystander behavior is constructive–destructive and passive–active. Participants of the current study tended to use the term to describe observer behavior that was more passive.

Interveners were also discussed by participants (11%), representing individuals who attempt to address and prevent incivility in a more active manner. Participants identified supervisors (9%), coworkers (2%), and clients (<1%) as interveners. For the most part, if anyone was expected to intervene, “supervisors when they see it or hear about it, deal with it immediately and take it very seriously.” Perhaps supervisors were identified as the most common interner because they have more power to do so than lower level targets, who generally tend to have less power than perpetrators (Pearson & Porath, 2005), and because supervisors occupy a role expected to solve problems and encourage teamwork in accordance with implicit leadership theories (Eden & Leviatan, 1975). In particular, research has identified that power and perceived challenges to the status of observers can increase support toward targets of incivility (Hershcovis et al., 2017).
Participants were also asked about others who are aware of incivility at work. Responses included only those directly involved with the incivility (35%), everyone or many people (31%), supervisors and human resources (31%), unspecified others (23%), coworkers (22%), and clients (7%). These results show notable variability among participants, since many suggested that only parties directly involved with incivility are aware of it, whereas another substantial portion felt that everyone is or many other people are aware of it. How exactly are other individuals involved with incivility if not directly engaged as perpetrators or targets? Respondents indicated five primary ways: avoiding (21%), witnessing/overhearing (20%), hearing about it after the fact (16%), intervening (14%), and reporting (8%). It is perhaps telling that of the five ways to be involved, the most frequent three did not involve active attempts to prevent or address incivility. Rather, respondents reported that these other people avoid the situation, witness or overhear it, or learn about it after the fact through office gossip. The other two less frequent ways of engaging with incivility were more active, either intervening directly or reporting the incident.

**Events following incivility**

Ten primary themes arose regarding what is expected to happen after an episode of incivility: avoid situation/move on (35%), negative feelings/stress (31%), discipline/reprimand (17%), discuss/mediate (16%), report (13%), rumor/gossip (11%), avoid perpetrator (11%), terminate employment (11%), apology/reconciliation (5%), and confront perpetrator (5%).

The two most frequent themes (raised approximately twice as often as the next theme) reflected passive responses to workplace incivility. The first was avoiding incivility or trying to move on (“after an episode like this, everyone usually just goes back to the work that they were doing and they try to focus on what they are supposed to be doing”). The second referred to negative feelings and stress (“other co-workers see this and can cut the tension with a knife”). Themes coming in at a more distant third, fourth, and fifth represented more active responses, such as disciplining or reprimanding perpetrators, engaging in a discussion or mediation of the problem, and reporting incivility. The remainder of these themes considered in the current study were a mixture of active and passive responses following incivility.

**What organization members want**

While participants raised prescriptive and proscriptive norms, the current study focused on the prescriptive to understand what employees preferred be done to combat incivility in the future (see Table A4). Participants raised 10 main preferred responses to incivility and its perpetrators: discipline/reprimand (29%), discuss/mediate (29%), terminate employment (15%), plan for prevention (12%), apologize (11%), address/intervene (unspecified) (10%), avoid (10%), report (7%), counseling/training (6%), and confront perpetrator (5%).

Participants thus preferred a range of primarily active responses to workplace incivility. Three times as many participants called for disciplining/reprimanding perpetrators (“I prefer that management remind employees that the behavior of incivility will not be tolerated and enforce disciplinary action immediately to set the tone”) and discussing/mediating to arrive at a resolution (“I think there definitely needs to be a mediation so that the offending party can hear how they have made others feel”) than called for passively avoiding it (“for the most part it should just be ignored and people should get over it”). Beyond these general themes of resolution and redress, more specific themes for the punishment of perpetrators by terminating their employment and obtaining an apology from them also arose. Further, some participants called for planning to prevent future incivility (“I think that senior management should get involved and work to prevent such events from ever happening again”).

Table A4 also summarizes who participants believed should be involved in responding to incivility, primarily supervisors/management (66%) and perpetrators/targets (18%). Responses to this item revealed the strongest result in the data. Two-thirds of participants believed that some combination of supervisors, management, owners, and human resources—essentially organizational leadership—should be involved in combatting incivility in the workplace.

**Discussion**

Relational schemas of workplace incivility defined a loose combination of rude, harmful, disrespectful, unsocial, mean/hostile, impolite, purposeful, unprofessional, and inappropriate behavior: largely low-intensity, undesirable, and purposeful behaviors that could be overt or covert in nature. At the same time, relational schemas housed prototypical examples of incivility that strayed from this definition, including a full range of workplace mistreatment (from using cellphones during a meeting all the way to sexual assault). These behaviors tended to involve perpetrators (usually coworkers or supervisors), targets (usually coworkers or subordinates), bystanders (mainly coworkers), and interveners (mainly supervisors). Beyond
these primary roles, some respondents suggested that no other parties are involved with incivility, while others suggested that most everybody else in the workplace becomes at least peripherally involved by hearing about and then avoiding it. Relational schemas included scripts of primarily passive responses to workplace incivility, though some active responses were also present. Finally, respondents desired active intervention and prevention against workplace incivility, led foremost by their organizational leadership.

**Construct proliferation in workplace mistreatment literature**

While lay and scholarly definitions of incivility were similar, of note is the disparity between lay and scholarly conceptualization of prototypical examples of workplace incivility. Given construct proliferation concerns in workplace mistreatment research (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Barling et al., 2009; Hirschcovis, 2011; Raver & Barling, 2008), the broad array of prototypical incivility examples seen in the relational schemas of the current study provides further evidence of the wide-ranging overlap of mistreatment constructs, not just by definition, concept, and measurement, but also by participants’ perceptions of them. Given that participant perceptions in this regard are essential to work in the field of mistreatment research, results of the current study should give pause to reflect: Is workplace incivility actually workplace incivility, or is it synonymous with workplace mistreatment more broadly?

**What is workplace incivility?**

The relational schemas of workplace incivility investigated in the current study appeared to define incivility quite similarly to its scholarly definition. Where the schematic definition of workplace incivility possibly differed from the theoretical definition was on the issue of ambiguous intent to harm targets of incivility. While the theoretical definition stresses ambiguity as a key component (Pearson et al., 2001), Miner et al. (2018) suggest further investigation into this element of incivility. Indeed, lay employees did not necessarily agree with the scholarly conceptualization including ambiguity, given their descriptions of purposefulness and overtness. It is possible that this disparity is due to participants considering more overt and aggressive forms of workplace mistreatment to be prototypical examples of incivility (see below; e.g., physical violence is more easily interpreted as being intentionally harmful than is gossip). This emphasis on purposefulness may also reflect a manifestation of the fundamental attribution error by participants (Ross, 1977), leading them to overemphasize perpetrators’ intentions in the context of incivility. Given that the ambiguous intent to harm is a key definitional feature that is supposed to distinguish incivility from other forms of workplace mistreatment (Schilpzand et al., 2016; Sliter, Withrow, & Jex, 2015), this finding furthers concern about construct definition and proliferation in the field of workplace mistreatment. While researchers continue to theorize about and conduct studies of incivility, it should be noted that participants do not necessarily agree with precisely what we think we are studying.

Even more surprising is the stark divergence of lay and scholarly examples of incivility noted above. Scholarly work suggests that uncivil actions are passive verbal and nonverbal behaviors (Pearson & Porath, 2005), excluding severe mistreatment such as yelling and physical abuse (Yang et al., 2014). However, relational schemas included an enormous range of behaviors, from passive and minor (e.g., ignoring others and gossiping about them) to severe and illegal (e.g., discrimination and sexual harassment). While researchers and employees may understand a similar definition of incivility, their conceptions of the construct differ when considering examples of it in action.

**Individual roles in incivility**

Results of this study expanded upon the traditional understanding of roles held in incivility (i.e., perpetrators, victims, and observers from within the organization; Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Aquino & Thau, 2009; Barling et al., 2009). Participants identified perpetrators, targets, passive bystanders, active interveners, and others that are peripherally aware of incivility. Relational schemas painted a complex social picture of incivility; bystanders and interveners also play a role here, as can characters from outside the organization (typically clients or customers). It is interesting to note the involvement of these other individuals, as the direction and impact of mistreatment may have a more complex and wide-ranging impact than just between the supervisor-perpetrators and subordinate-targets in the power structure described by Doshy and Wang (2014).

Porath and Erez (2009) have also reported observers’ performance suffering as a result of witnessing rudeness at work. Relational schemas tended to identify these observers as being aware but inactive about incivility, perhaps motivated by self-preservation concerns. This would be consistent with bystander intervention research, suggesting “an individual’s likelihood of helping decreases when passive bystanders are present in
a critical situation,” especially when faced with non-dangerous scenarios (Fischer et al., 2011, p. 517). Other research has shown that when passive bystanders to workplace mistreatment become active interveners, they may do so in a delayed and ineffective manner (McDonald, Charlesworth, & Graham, 2016). If practitioners wish to develop more immediate and effective strategies to address and prevent incivility, including bystander interventions, an explicit system of encouragement that recognizes the varied roles that bystanders can occupy and provides them the necessary tools to intervene constructively will be required (as noted for various forms of workplace mistreatment; Branch, Ramsay, & Barker, 2013; Paull et al., 2012).

**Events following incivility**

While some schematic responses to incivility were active (e.g., reprimanding perpetrators), a passive approach was more representative of the data (e.g., feeling negatively about the incivility and avoiding it). From the list of possible responses to incivility described above, the reciprocation and escalation of incivility was notably absent in the current study. While Andersson and Pearson (1999), Gallus, Bunk, Matthews, Barnes-Farrell, and Magley (2014), and Pearson and Porath (2005) theorized and found that instances of incivility can lead to reciprocal spirals of mistreatment, this was not a significant component of relational schemas (reciprocating incivility was only raised by 3% of respondents). If such reciprocation and escalation of mistreatment is occurring, respondents did not describe it. This is similar to Doshy and Wang’s (2014) findings that individuals avoided reciprocation and escalation due to fears like losing their jobs. It also aligns with the Miner et al. (2018) suggestion that incivility may not always follow a tit-for-tat pattern. Further, given that passive responses to incivility were predominant in relational schemas, it was no surprise that leadership intervention was also an infrequent theme. It was not apparent in the data that leaders were actively or willingly intervening against incivility on a regular basis; rather, respondents claimed that leaders would not get involved at all (e.g., “managers do not want to become involved”), only got involved because they had to (e.g., “management is required to report all incidents to Human Resources”), or only got involved after intervention was requested (e.g., “I pushed the issue and the one guy got suspended for a week”).

What appeared more present were negative psychological outcomes (e.g., “those that experienced the event are noticeably frustrated or upset, and word begins to go around the floor about what happened, further inspiring negativity and increasing tension even further”). Different coping and conflict management strategies could flow from this, such as Cortina and Magley’s (2009) five profiles of coping with incivility. In the current study, support seekers may be seen as those who sought organizational and social support (“I pushed the issue and the one guy got suspended for a week”), detachers may be seen as lacking in coping mechanisms (“people try to forget about it”), minimizers may be seen as those who avoided perpetrators and minimized the severity of incivility (“I had some hostility towards her, but I don’t hold a grudge long. I pretty much just be professional, but don’t go out of my way for this person”), prosocial conflict avoiders may be seen as avoiding conflict and seeking social support (“so, usually, people talk to the co-workers they’re closest to and then try and move on”), and assertive conflict avoiders may be seen as generally avoiding conflict but at some point confronting the perpetrator (“I just kept my mouth shut the first time, but I bit back the second”).

Rahim (1983) and Rahim and Magner’s (1995) styles for handling interpersonal conflict may also be present in the schemas in terms of integrators discussing and mediating incivility conflict (“the parties that were involved have to hash it out with some of the higher [sic] ups and see what steps need to be taken to avoid such behavior”), avoiders distancing themselves from the situation (“people try to forget about it”), dominators confronting perpetrators (“usually if the person in question is confronted his behavior changes for a [sic] some time and he is more careful about what he says”), obligers apologizing for incivility (“usually there’s some kind of apology involved”), and compromisers attempting resolution with mutual exchanges (“we forgive our coworkers for things they say and do—our job is stressful, and at the end of it all we have to be a cohesive team to provide the services we do”).

**What organization members want**

Respondents overwhelmingly requested action against workplace incivility, in contrast to their schematic expectation of passivity. Their ideal responses to incivility were not just that perpetrators suffer serious consequences (terminating perpetrators’ employment), but were often more constructive and collaborative (apologizing, mediating, and counseling). While expected responses to incivility covered a range of conflict management styles, the two main requests for how incivility ought to be handled fell within the styles of integrating (“I think there definitely needs to be a mediation so that the offending party can hear how they have made others feel”) and dominating (“I prefer
that management remind employees that the behavior of incivility will not be tolerated and enforce disciplinary action immediately to set the tone”). This may reflect respondents’ ideal in which incivility is stifled through strict discipline—indicating a general disdain for the harmful behaviors—while also recognizing the utility of a collaborative approach to mediate issues and foster constructive growth. However, while an integrating style may relate to decreased incivility, dominating has been related to increased incivility (Trudel & Reio, 2011). Some respondents also requested active prevention of incivility. In considering future development of strategies to intervene against incivility, such considerations from the perspective of employees may be fruitful, particularly when paired with empirical data to support their preferences, such as using an integrative conflict management approach.

Respondents also called for their leaders to take a primary role in addressing and preventing workplace incivility. Since employees believe that leadership “should reprimand the uncivil behavior as soon as possible before it turns into a bigger problem,” it may be of utility to begin leadership action against incivility sooner rather than later, to begin curtailing the negative consequences of this workplace mistreatment while more specific strategies are still being developed and tested. Research has begun to investigate how different forms of leadership might impact incivility at work (Lee & Jensen, 2014; Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland, & Hetland, 2007), and perceived supervisor support may help reduce the negative effects of incivility if it does occur (Beattie & Griffin, 2014). Practically speaking, specific intervention strategies may not need to be articulated before organizational leadership takes charge of this role overwhelmingly desired by employees.

**Strengths, limitations, and future directions**

The current study benefited from a rich qualitative design that revealed novel and detailed understandings of workplace incivility that were otherwise unknown in workplace mistreatment literature. The inductive phenomenological analysis elicited new perspectives on employees’ relational schemas of incivility and how they would prefer such incivility to be addressed and prevented in the future. The sample size was robust for a qualitative design, providing further confidence in the meaningfulness of results. At the same time, the current study was based on open-ended survey responses that, unlike interviews, lacked the ability to probe for extra detail from respondents in real time. Although most items were not presented from any one perspective, respondents were only included in the research if they had experienced incivility, and they tended to reply in relation to targets of incivility. This may have biased the data against considerations of the perpetrator, observer, and intervener. Further, results were derived from the description of historic events by respondents at one point in time and may have suffered from frail memory recall. The survey item that asked how people make sense of incivility was also often misunderstood or left unanswered by respondents, who instead focused their responses on what happens after incivility in their workplaces. Finally, results of the current study were derived from an American sample, which may not be generalizable to other contexts with different union environments or cultural tolerances for incivility.

Advancing this line of research could therefore benefit from more focus on perspectives other than targets, longitudinal designs such as diary studies, and research comparing results to other contexts and cultures (including more unionized environments and collectivist cultures). This study also focused primarily on prescriptive rather than proscriptive norms regarding incivility. Proscriptive norms of respondents that could have been discussed included respondents desiring that incivility not go unaddressed and that observers not spread rumors about incivility after it happens; future research could explore such proscriptive norms in greater depth. Given the dominant focus of the prescriptive norms on desired leadership intervention, further research could also investigate how leaders cognitively represent incivility in the context of their leadership roles and what they believe about intervention opportunities. Developing strategies to prevent and address incivility in the workplace could proceed in the future with a focus on leadership and knowledge of the relevant literature considering bystander psychology, as well as pairing leader and employee preferences with empirically supported conflict management styles.

**Conclusions**

The relational schemas and related normative data considered in the current study provide new insights into mistreatment at work. They derive from rich qualitative data providing a new window into the lived experiences of employees engaging with and making sense of incivility. Researchers should note the implications for construct proliferation and overlap. Practitioners should note the implications for addressing incivility, with employees desiring proactive prevention and reactive intervention spearheaded by organizational leadership. Further, if practitioners wish to develop strategies to address and prevent incivility, this will likely require
a system of explicit encouragement with the provision of necessary tools for organization members to do so constructively. Future research in this regard can continue to develop our understanding of mistreatment and how to reduce its pernicious presence in the workplace.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

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References


Table A1. Survey items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ</th>
<th>Incivility component</th>
<th>Survey item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ1</td>
<td>Definitional features</td>
<td>- In your own words, please indicate: What is workplace incivility?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ2</td>
<td>Behavioral examples</td>
<td>- What types of events does it include?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ3</td>
<td>Individual roles</td>
<td>- Please describe a time when you experienced incivility at work. Be specific and detailed. What happened?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ4</td>
<td>Subsequent events</td>
<td>- To what extent are coworkers, supervisors, other employees, and/or clients involved in the instances of workplace incivility that you have seen? Who is most involved? In what way? Why? Who is typically aware of these uncivil situations—only the parties involved, or others too? If there are others, who are they and how are they involved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ5</td>
<td>Injunctive beliefs</td>
<td>- After an incivility episode, what do you think should and should not happen? Why? How would you prefer that episodes of incivility be handled at work? Who should and should not get involved?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. RQ = research question.

Table A2. Definitional features of workplace incivility.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definitional feature</th>
<th>Percent of respondents</th>
<th>Respondent quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rude</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>&quot;workplace incivility is rudeness in the workplace&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;workplace incivility is someone being rude intentionally to you&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;workplace incivility is working with someone who has rude behavior&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmful</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>&quot;it is any behavior that is meant to hurt someone else and not having any regard for someone else's feelings&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;workplace incivility involves having a person, or persons, act in a way that would be harmful or rude towards others&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disrespectful</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>&quot;workplace incivility is when your coworkers and managers treat you with disrespect&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;workplace incivility is when an individual is purposefully disrespectful towards their co-workers&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;workplace incivility is treating your co-workers with disrespect, having your supervisor or co-workers treat you with disrespect or your customers treating you with disrespect&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsocial</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>&quot;workplace incivility is when people decide to forgo social norms and act in ways that are disruptive to the workplace environment&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;workplace incivility is rude or unsociable speech or behavior within the workplace&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;antisocial behavior&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean/hostile</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>&quot;workplace incivility is actions or words that are unkind [sic] or even cruel to others&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;anything rude or mean happening in the workplace&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;whenever someone is really mean or rude to someone else in the workplace&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impolite</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>&quot;it includes any kind of behavior that is not civil, meaning not polite&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;I think workplace incivility is generally any action that is rude, impolite or can be taken offensively&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposeful</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>&quot;workplace incivility is when an individual is purposefully disrespectful towards their co-workers&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;workplace incivility is when people in a person's workplace treats [sic] someone inconsiderately and means [sic] to do it&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;workplace incivility is unwanted actions and behavior from another individual with the intent to directly or indirectly harm another&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unprofessional</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>&quot;I believe this includes any behavior that is considered unprofessional and offensive in the workplace&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;workplace incivility is any sort of event which involves coworkers acting in an unprofessional or generally rude manner toward each other or toward clients&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>&quot;workplace incivility could be defined as lacking in professional courtesy, rudeness and selfishness&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;incivility is when rude or inappropriate behavior is occurring, which is in this case, the workplace&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;I think workplace incivility is any act of being uncivil or inappropriate in a workplace setting&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table A3. Prototypical examples of workplace incivility.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prototypical example</th>
<th>Percent of respondents</th>
<th>Respondent quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>“excluding only the target individual from workplace events”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“asking for input and then ignoring it”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“interrupting you when speaking”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticize/insult</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>“criticizing others for various things when it’s unwarranted”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“berating or criticizing people in public”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk (unspecified)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>“language or words that are said by someone who wants to harm another person”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“snide comments or remarks”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumor/gossip</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>“spreading nasty rumors or gossiping negatively about a person”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“indulging in gossip and spreading rumors”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>“cussing and using inappropriate language with your coworkers”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language</td>
<td></td>
<td>“using very foul language at work”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabotage/backstab</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>“trying to sabotage a fellow worker while they are doing their job”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“it could include backstabbing”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk (indirect)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>“talking about coworkers behind their back”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“saying hurtful things behind another’s back”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk (direct)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>“talk badly about each other to each others’ face”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“talking to me in a condescending [sic] tone”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination/</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>“mostly regarding gender, race, religion, and other critical forms of stereotype”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stereotype</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name-calling</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>“calling you names”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual harassment</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>“call each other names in order to put someone down”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“any type of sexual harassment would be considered uncivil”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“sexual touching”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat/intimidate</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“when a co-worker threatens to punch you in the face”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“events it includes is [sic] death threats”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“being physically intimidating or hostile”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body language</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“a person’s body language or gestures (that are inappropriate)”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“all manner of bullying in the workplace”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“basic bullying in an attempt to adversely change the work atmosphere”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate jokes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“It includes jokes about gender, race, attitudes of life, or any other topic that is of a personal nature as well as crude jokes”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“inappropriate jokes at the expense of another employee”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shout</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“the perpetrator shouts at the victim”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“the customers who scream at us”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Table A4. What should happen following incivility and who should be involved.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What should happen</th>
<th>Percent of respondents</th>
<th>Respondent quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discipline/reprimand</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>&quot;I think that the person committing the incivility should be reprimanded&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;I prefer that management remind employees that the behavior of incivility will not be tolerated and enforce disciplinary action immediately to set the tone&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss/mediate</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>&quot;everyone should have a sit down to work out their differences and a liaison from human resources should be present&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;I think there definitely needs to be a mediation so that the offending party can hear how they have made others feel&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terminate employment</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>&quot;I think the person who does it should be fired&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;I think people should actually be fired every single time, that would put a stop to it&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan for prevention</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>&quot;I think the incivility should be addressed and behavioral expectations be set to prevent this from occurring in the future&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;after an incivility episode, I think that senior management should get involved and work to prevent such events from ever happening again&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apologize</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>&quot;I think that apologies are in order&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;after an episode, the initiating party should apologize and seek to repair the relationship&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address/intervene</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>&quot;after an incivility episode, there should be measures to resolve the issues that arose during the episode&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(unspecified)</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;a series of similar uncivil episodes needs to be addressed in some way&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>&quot;it’s best to forget about it&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;for the most part it should just be ignored and people should get over it&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>&quot;I think these episodes should be reported to HR, to higher ups, to anyone that will listen&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;after an incivility episode, others should report the behavior to their supervisors, because it may start to get worst [sic]&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling/training</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>&quot;I personally think that management should set up classes on how to get worker [sic] to get along&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;they should get therapy to work on themselves&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confront perpetrator</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>&quot;I think one should confront the person responsible, otherwise such attitudes and episode [sic] will continue to happen and poison the work atmosphere&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;I think that the wronged party should approach the incivil [sic] party and express his or her feelings about what happened&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisors/management</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>&quot;ideally it would be handled by a supervisor or HR&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;I think the supervisor or manager should reprimand the uncivil behavior as soon as possible before it turns into a bigger problem&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrators/targets</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>&quot;ideally the people directly involved in the incident would talk it out, the perpetrator would be notified of what exactly they had done wrong, and things could be handled quietly&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;after an incivility episode, the affected party should first try to talk to the other party&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>