

This say "please" or
"thank you", and
having

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This paper examines the differing effects of workplace incivility by gender, focusing on a recent study by Gabriel, Butts, Yuan, Rosen, and Sliter (2017).

Workplace incivility is defined as “ low-intensity deviant behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect” (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p. 457). Examples of uncivil behaviour include answering the phone rudely, failing to say “ please” or “ thank you”, and having loud personal conversations at work. Despite its low intensity, workplace incivility can lead to negative outcomes such as decreased job satisfaction, increased withdrawal behaviours, turnover intentions, (Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Leskinen, Huerta, & Magley, 2013; Gabriel et al., 2017).

It can also spiral into more serious issues, such as workplace violence (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), and as such is an important area of study in today’s workplace. Summary of the Authors’ Findings Gabriel et al. (2017) surveyed 1, 349 participants in a three-part study. Study 1 assessed gender and workplace incivility alone, and found that women are more likely to experience incivility from other women than from men, despite men being the dominant in-group. The authors attribute this to a phenomenon known as “ queen bee syndrome” (Gabriel et al., 2017, p.

3), in which senior women achieve power and success by keeping other women at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy, rather than supporting them in achieving their career goals. Study 2 examined the influence of agency (dominance) and communion (interpersonal warmth) on workplace incivility as experienced by women, as well as the effect of incivility on job

satisfaction. Results indicated that women are more likely to perpetrate incivility against agentic women, likely because they view these women as violating gender stereotypes, or as competition for limited workplace resources. Additionally, these highly agentic targets experienced reduced job satisfaction, likely because their expectations of female solidarity were violated. Communion had no effect.

Study 3 investigated all of the variables in Study 2, as well as psychological vitality and turnover intentions. Psychological vitality is a “state of thriving at work indicative of optimum well-being...it represents a positive balance of resources and motivational energy upon which employees can draw” (Gabriel et al., 2017, p. 10). Workplace incivility was found to decrease psychological vitality, particularly for highly agentic women; the authors believe this occurs because incivility decreases feelings of social relatedness.

Incivility was also associated with increased turnover intentions, especially for highly agentic women. In sum, women experience workplace incivility more frequently from other women than from men. Women with high levels of agency appear to be targets of workplace incivility, perhaps through their increased competitiveness. Finally, incivility from other women appears to be particularly damaging, based on its effects on job satisfaction, psychological vitality, and turnover intentions (Gabriel et al., 2017).

Critique of the Authors' Findings Overall, I believe that this study fills a gap in the workplace incivility literature; there are few studies on how women and men experience incivility differently, and most studies use gender as a control variable rather than a variable of study. Some studies have shown

that women experience incivility more frequently (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Cortina et al., 2013), but this study provides evidence that they frequently instigate it against each other. The results of the current study are consistent with Powell's (2011) assertion that women are more likely than men to engage in indirect (verbal) aggression, while men are more likely to engage in direct (physical) aggression.

Workplace incivility may represent a milder form of verbal aggression, which could explain Gabriel et al.'s (2017) finding that women experienced more uncivil treatment from other women than from men. Additionally, the idea of the queen bee syndrome is consistent with the idea of incivility as "a subtle and insidious form of discrimination" (Cortina et al., 2013, p.

1600), although in this case the discrimination is between women. The relationship between agency, communion, and experiencing incivility could be clarified further. For instance, are highly agentic/less communal people particularly low in agreeableness? Are they highly stubborn or argumentative? Any of these factors may provoke others to behave uncivilly towards them. Interestingly, the current study found that men were treated more civilly by other men when they were high in both agency and communion. This suggests that men "receive social benefits for adhering to certain gender norms and breaking others" (Gabriel et al., 2017, p. 6), especially because highly agentic/less communal women did not receive the same benefit for violating gender norms. When viewed in this light, it is particularly important to avoid blaming the victim, as high agency was only provocative in women, but not in men.

However, Gabriel and colleagues are incorrect in stating that women, being an out-group, report higher levels of incivility than men, as the corresponding in-group; research on gender differences in workplace incivility has actually had mixed results (Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008). For example, Pearson and Porath (2005) found that targets of incivility were equally likely to be male or female, but instigators were more likely to be male. Even in studies finding that women experience more incivility, the effects of incivility on men and women are often the same (Lim et al., 2008). One must consider whether incivility is a function of gender or a function of organizational power. Instigators of workplace incivility are typically in higher-power positions than targets, and that targets often retaliate in subtle ways rather than reporting the incident, so as to avoid negative consequences (Cortina et al.

, 2001; Pearson & Porath, 2005). Women tend to be concentrated at the bottom of organizational hierarchies (a phenomenon referred to as the “glass ceiling”; Powell, 2011), and may be vulnerable to incivility because of their relatively low power, rather than their gender. The issue of perception is also relevant here; are women experiencing more incivility or do they simply perceive it more easily? Without falling into stereotypes about women’s emotionality, women are more skilled at interpreting nonverbal cues from others (Powell, 2011), which may attune them to behavioural nuances in such a way that their threshold for perceiving incivility is lower. Similarly, dysempowerment theory states that women and men have different norms of respectful behaviour, and that women may be more sensitive to violations of these norms (Montgomery, Kane, & Vance, 2004).

However, the authors did control for trait negative affect and paranoia, so the effects of perception on their results should be minimal.

Conclusion & Future Research DirectionsAfter considering these alternative perspectives, it appears that the relationship between gender and workplace incivility is extremely complicated and in need of further research. Future incivility research might consider using multiple sources of information rather than restricting their data to self-reports. A 360° incivility measure that encompasses the employee, their coworkers and supervisor, and even customers or clients could be developed in order to minimize the biases inherent in self-reports. Researchers should also examine the prevalence and effects of incivility in female- vs. male-intensive vs.

gender-neutral fields, as the current study did not differentiate between these types of jobs. We now know that women perpetrate incivility towards other women, but is this effect stronger or weaker in female-intensive fields? Are women more frequent targets of incivility when they work in male-intensive fields because they are a minority group? How do men experience workplace incivility in these fields? Finally, research should examine the interactive effects of gender, race/ethnicity, religion, gender identity, disability, etc. on the experience of workplace incivility, as there is very little research in this area (for an exception, see Cortina et al., 2013). Overall, I believe that the current study fills an important gap in the organizational behaviour literature.

I would have assumed before reading it that women would support each other in the workplace and that incivility towards them would have come

from men, as initially speculated by Gabriel et al. (2017). However, the queen bee syndrome appears to be a factor affecting women's experiences in the workplace, likely in ways outside the scope of this study. For example, perhaps "queen bees" are likely to pass up other women for promotion or transfer opportunities, choosing men instead.

In sum, I believe that this study provides a new perspective on gender differences in the workplace, and I would recommend it as a resource. It should alert us to the dangers of workplace incivility, and to the importance of female solidarity in the workplace.