The Influence of Workload and Incivility Level
on the Perception and Perpetration of E-mail Incivility

by

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

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Abstract

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By Laura Black

Workplace incivility consists of rude and discourteous behaviours that demonstrate a lack of regard for others (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). The detection of negative consequences associated with experiencing incivility has led to the development of a theoretical model of the process of workplace incivility perception and perpetration (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), in addition to the identification of potential individual and situational influences on this process, including level of workload (Buhler, 2003).

I used an experimental design to investigate the influence of workload and experiencing varying levels of incivility on the perception and perpetration of incivility in a simulated office setting. In the study 172 undergraduates were randomly assigned to either high or low workload conditions and completed a series of in-basket tasks. Workload was manipulated by assigning more in-basket tasks to those in the high workload condition. One task in all the in-baskets involved responding to two email messages, one civil and one uncivil, resulting in a 2 (workload) x 2 (civility of the stimulus email) mixed repeated measures design. The dependent measures of interest were the perception (self-rated) and perpetration (self and other rated) of incivility in the e-mail response task, and the instigation of incivility (self and other rated) in an additional e-mail that the participant was asked to draft.

I expected that participants would respond with more incivility to uncivil than to civil e-mails, and that individuals under high workload would perceive and perpetrate more incivility than participants under low workload. I also expected that workload would interact with e-mail incivility condition to influence the level of incivility in participants' responses, such that the effect of the initial level of incivility on the perpetration of incivility would be stronger at the higher workload level (i.e., the interaction would be driven primarily by the larger disparity in responses to the civil and uncivil e-mails in the high workload condition). Finally, I also predicted that perceptions of intent accompanying incivility would predict both increased perception and perpetration of incivility, and that participants would rate the e-mails they wrote as being less uncivil than would independent raters. Mixed repeated measures ANOVA and regression analyses supported all of these hypotheses, with two exceptions: level of workload did not affect the level of incivility perceived by participants, and perceptions of intent did not predict either the perception or perpetration of incivility. These results are discussed in the context of the relative strengths and limitations of the study, and implications and potential directions for future research are outlined.

December 20, 2006

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The examination of modern manners has recently come to the forefront of popular

literature with the publication of Lynne Truss' book *Talk to the Hand: The Utter Bloody*

Rudeness of the World Today, or Six Good Reasons to Stay Home and Bolt the Door and

various media stories outlining the seemingly increasing disregard in today's society for

civility, especially in the workplace (Brown, 2006; Cohen & Langer, 2006; Witham,

2002). This increasing attention to workplace rudeness in popular culture corresponds to

a small but growing scientific and practitioner literature investigating the construct and

consequences of rudeness in the workplace, or workplace incivility, which has been

defined as: "low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in

violation of workplace norms for mutual respect" (Andersson and Pearson, 1999, p.457).

Incivility consists of rude and discourteous behaviours that demonstrate a lack of regard

for others (Andersson & Pearson, 1999).

Uncivil acts in the workplace are conspicuous because they are atypical and

violate workplace norms for appropriate social behaviour (Pearson, Andersson, &

Wegner, 2001). Workplace norms consist of shared behavioural standards that develop

from the traditions, policies, and culture of a particular workplace to enable cooperation

among organizational members (Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000). Although these

norms may fluctuate across organizations and industries, a number of social behaviours

tend to be commonly interpreted as violations of social behavioural norms in the

workplace, such as leaving a jammed photocopier for another individual to discover and

fix, ignoring or neglecting to greet another individual, borrowing supplies or materials

and failing to return them, or neglecting to respond to voicemail or electronic mail (e-mail) (Johnson & Indvik, 2001). Furthermore, the prevalence of incivility in North American workplaces is high: 36% of workers report having been targets of incivility over a one year time period (Forni, Buccino, Greene, Freedman, Stevens, & Stack, 2003), a victimization rate that increases to 71% when the reporting period is increased to five years in length (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001). In addition, 65% of workers report witnessing incivility at work over a one year time span (Forni et al., 2003).

Individuals who frequently encounter workplace incivility may also experience a number of negative psychological and somatic outcomes, including but not limited to impaired concentration and productivity decline, increased absenteeism, and reduced organizational citizenship behaviour (Johnson & Indvik, 2001; Pearson et al., 2001), in addition to lower levels of psychological well-being and health satisfaction (Martin & Hine, 2005). Furthermore, non-responsiveness of managers and supervisors to employee reports of incivility is associated with employee distrust of leaders, perceptions of leader incompetence (Pearson et al., 2000; Pearson et al., 2001), and decreased intrinsic work motivation (Kane & Montgomery, 1998).

Even witnessing or hearing about the occurrence of uncivil behaviour can detrimentally affect individuals (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), a problem likely exacerbated by the finding that 85% of employees who experience incivility discuss the incident with coworkers (Forni et al., 2003). Witnesses of incivility often experience decreased trust in and commitment to an organization (Spreitzer, 1995), and may even

interpret uncivil behaviour to be a workplace "norm", leading to the creation of a climate of incivility in the workplace (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Pearson et al., 2001).

The body of workplace incivility literature is steadily growing, particularly with respect to the definitional construct of workplace incivility and the process by which individuals perceive and respond to incivility in the workplace. Indeed, Andersson and Pearson (1999) have developed a theoretical model outlining the potential progression of incivility perpetration and reciprocation in organizations. However, various aspects of this model remain theoretical in nature and require empirical substantiation. In addition, the actual impact of a number of individual and situational factors that have been suggested as influences on the perception and perpetration of incivility in the workplace remains to be empirically determined, such as the level of workload an individual experiences (Buhler, 2003, Johnson & Indvik, 2001).

Accordingly, in the current study I begin to substantiate empirically the process of incivility in the workplace. Using an experimental design in a laboratory setting I investigate the influence of being the target of varying levels of incivility on the perception and perpetration of incivility. Additionally, I examine if workload affects the perception and perpetration of incivility. The use of experimental methodology progresses the predominantly theoretical and correlational workplace incivility literature by enabling the identification of causal precipitating factors in incivility perception and perpetration.

Development of the Workplace Incivility Literature

As previously noted, in addition to the prevalence and consequences of workplace incivility, existing research has indicated numerous forms in which incivility may

manifest in the workplace (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Buhler, 2003; Johnson & Indvik, 2001; Pearson et al., 2000). However, largely because of the recent appearance of incivility in the psychological literature, the construct itself and the process by which it progresses in organizations have received relatively little empirical attention. This has resulted in a number of concerns surrounding the appropriate operational definition and measurement boundaries of this construct, in addition to questions concerning the process of incivility instigation and reciprocation within organizations.

Andersson and Pearson (1999) theoretically outline the process of incivility perception and perpetration in their seminal article on the incivility construct. They suggest that when an individual's behaviour violates a social norm, feelings of injustice may be elicited in the target(s), potentially triggering hostile thoughts and negative causal attributions (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Sievers & Mersky, 2006). Such norm violations are likely to be attributed to individual factors of the perpetrator, such as purposeful intent, rather than to characteristics of the situation, due in large part to a variety of attributional biases such as fundamental attribution error, correspondence bias, and actor/observer bias (Alcock, Carment, & Sadava, 2001). Attributions of this sort may make retaliation from targets of uncivil behaviour more likely (Sievers & Mersky, 2006).

This initial appraisal of causative factors for norm violation purportedly leads to a stage of secondary appraisal, in which the target decides whether or not to reciprocate the behaviour (Sievers & Mersky, 2006). Ergo, incivility may continue within an organization as a series of reciprocal "tit-for-tat" social exchanges without escalation in intensity, with the potential to desist or expand at any time (Andersson & Pearson, 1999).

Although such a pattern of social exchange may appear relatively innocuous, qualitative evidence indicates that even non-escalating patterns of incivility exchange can be harmful to organizations and employees (Pearson et al., 2000). For instance, participants in and witnesses of uncivil exchanges appear to suffer negative physical and psychological outcomes. Moreover, workplace norms for mutual respect may become eroded over time by the persistent modeling of uncivil behaviours (Pearson et al., 2000), ultimately resulting in the development and expansion of a climate of incivility in the workplace (Gallus, Matthews, Bunk, Barnes-Farrell, & Magley, 2006).

Contrary to this "tit-for-tat" pattern of incivility exchange, in which reciprocated incivility is performed at the same level of intensity as the original uncivil behaviour, Andersson and Pearson (1999) theorized that instigation of an uncivil action by an individual may precipitate an incivility spiral, in which the recipient of the uncivil behaviour retaliates against the perpetrator with intensified reciprocal incivility. Indeed, several researchers have suggested that the intensified reciprocation of incivility that characterizes an incivility spiral is likely a common reaction to perceptions of incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Andersson et al., 2001; Gallus et al., 2006). This is because individuals are motivated to retaliate against negative behaviours targeted at them (Bies & Tripp, 2001; Greenburg & Barling, 1999; Jawahar, 2002; Kim, Smith, & Brigham, 1998; Skarlicki & Folger, 2004) and tend to (consciously or unconsciously) "overmatch", or perform retaliatory behaviours at a higher level of intensity than the initial negative act. Such overmatching may stem from potentially exaggerated negative feelings felt by the target following the subjective experience of incivility, and serves as an effort to ensure that the retaliation is effective (Helm, Bonoma, & Tedeschi, 1972; Youngs, 1986).

This is particularly true when reciprocating against acts of low intensity (Youngs, 1986). Such retaliatory responses may then lead to further reciprocation by the other party, resulting in a counter-cycle of reciprocal incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). It is in this manner that an incivility spiral may develop, in which increasingly aggressive retaliatory behaviours are performed back and forth between actors in a process of reciprocation that may ultimately escalate to workplace aggression (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Indeed, Andersson and Pearson (1999) have posited that the accumulation of numerous uncivil experiences over time in an incivility spiral may culminate in a "tipping point", when one more instance of incivility triggers intense, potentially physical, retaliatory aggression. Support for the idea of an incivility "tipping point" as the culmination of an incivility spiral is derived from the stress and coping literature, which indicates that when daily hassles are interpreted as cognitively threatening (or, as in the case of incivility, offensive or inappropriate) and are repeated frequently over time, impaired psychosomatic functioning can ultimately result (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The idea of an incivility "tipping point" also appears to be largely based on the "popcorn" model of aggression, in which "interpersonal heat" from repeated minor injustices results in an eventual explosion of aggression (Schat & Kelloway, 2005). Schat and Kelloway (2005) defined workplace aggression as: "behaviour by an individual or individuals within or outside an organization that is intended to physically or psychologically harm a worker or workers and occurs in a work-related context" (p.191). Indeed, as an incivility spiral progresses, the "stakes" (e.g., saving face, redressing perceptions of negative treatment) increase, and actors' inhibitions about causing harm

may be severely reduced, increasing the likelihood that neither party will cease the process of retaliation before it escalates to psychological or physical aggression (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). Certainly, the theorized progression of incivility to aggression is supported by research on the escalation of conflict, which illustrates that aggression usually results from escalating reciprocal patterns of negative interactions between individuals, rather than being spontaneous in nature (Brett, Shapiro, & Lytle, 1998; Felson, 1982).

Workplace aggression is associated with a number of negative outcomes for organizations and employees, including lost productivity, decreased employee psychological and somatic health, decreased commitment to the organization, and a decline in the performance of organizational citizenship behaviours (Schat & Kelloway, 2005). Along with its severity, the prevalence of workplace aggression illustrates further the pressing need for research in this area. Recent estimates suggest that American workers experience workplace aggression on a weekly to monthly basis from supervisors (13.5%); coworkers (15%); or members of the public (23%) (customers, clients, or patients) (Schat, Frone, & Kelloway, 2006), necessitating the identification of reliable predictors of this behaviour, such as incivility, to facilitate the development of effective interventions to control and prevent it from occurring (Greenburg & Barling, 1999; LeBlanc & Kelloway, 2002).

At this point it is constructive to differentiate incivility from the construct of aggression. In particular, a model of workplace deviance developed by Robinson and Bennet (1995) provides a useful framework for differentiating workplace incivility from workplace aggression. In this model, the authors classify various forms of deviant workplace behaviour using two orthogonal dimensions: the extent to which the behaviour

is targeted at individuals (interpersonal) or organizations (non-interpersonal); and the level of harmfuless, or intensity, of the behaviour. Workplace incivility refers to relatively mild or low intensity violations of social norms characterizing social interactions between individuals who work together (Giacalone & Greenburg, 1997; Robinson & Bennet, 1995), or between employees and outside individuals who interact with the organization (Jex, Burnfield, & Yugo, 2006). In contrast, the level of intensity or harmfulness with which workplace aggression is accompanied can vary greatly, from manifestations relatively low in intensity, such as verbal insults, to manifestations high in intensity, such as physical assault or murder.

In addition, largely because of the low intensity level associated with incivility, this construct can be further distinguished from workplace aggression by the ambiguity of intent to harm with which uncivil behaviour is accompanied (Anderson & Pearson, 1999). Incivility consists of actions that could easily happen either accidentally or intentionally. Accordingly, the attribution of incivility depends entirely upon the perception and subjective interpretation of the individual(s) witnessing or experiencing the behaviour. It is difficult for a target or witness of incivility to determine with absolute certainty that the perpetrator intended to cause offense (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Indeed, intentions accompanying a given act of incivility may be differentially perceived by targets and witnesses, regardless of whether the perpetrator actually intended to cause harm (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2001). Conversely, unambiguous intent and expectation to cause harm are critical components of current definitions of psychological and physical aggression, which emphasize the cognitive experience and

actual intentions of the perpetrator, rather than the perceptions of the target or witnesses (Neuman & Baron, 1997; Schat & Kelloway, 2005; Schat et al., 2006).

The Current Study

Incivility is purported to be a precipitating factor in the occurrence of workplace aggression (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), which has been estimated to cost North American organizations billions of dollars annually as a result of lost productivity, the need to strengthen existing security measures, increasingly frequent health and workers' compensation claims and legal liability disputes, and diminished corporate reputation (Schat & Kelloway, 2005). Accordingly, several researchers have examined the prevalence and nature of incivility in the workplace (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Pearson et al., 2001; Cortina et al., 2001) and the potential process by which incivility is perpetrated and reciprocated within organizations (Andersson & Pearson, 1999).

Indeed, the high prevalence and negative consequences of incivility in the workplace necessitate further investigation of the incivility process in organizations and the identification of potential organizational factors that may influence this process. Accordingly, in the present experimental study I investigate reactions to incivility in a simulated office setting. Participants individually complete a series of managerial in-basket exercises under the pretence that the study is intended to evaluate the capability of in-basket tasks to assess managerial ability. In-basket tasks are a common component of assessment centers, which are standardized evaluations on multiple selection tools to assess candidates' proficiency in job-relevant behaviours (Catano, Wiesner, Hackett, & Methot, 2005). In a traditional in-basket exercise, candidates are given a package of tasks that would typically appear in a manager's in-basket, and are then given time to review

the material and indicate in writing whatever actions they believe to be most appropriate in relation to each item. When time is called for the exercise, the in-basket materials and notes written by the candidate are collected for review (Catano et al., 2005).

One of the assigned tasks embedded in the in-basket exercise in the current study involves responding to e-mail messages, which enables the manipulation of two main variables. First, the initial stimulus e-mails that the participants find in their inboxes vary in level of incivility, with each participant receiving one civil and one uncivil message. The incivility level of participant responses to these e-mails are subsequently independently rated to determine if experienced incivility is a causal factor leading to the perpetration of incivility in the workplace, as suggested by Andersson and Pearson (1999).

The second variable I manipulate is the participants' workload. The number of tasks participants are required to complete varies. Some participants are assigned a smaller number of filler tasks in addition to the e-mail task described above, and others are assigned more filler tasks to complete within the same prescribed time frame. Thus, I am able to examine the influence of workload on the perception and perpetration of incivility in the e-mail response task, and on the instigation of incivility in an additional e-mail that the participant is asked to draft.

E-mail Communication as a Medium for Incivility

E-mail communication is used as the context for the incivility manipulation in the current study as it is a workplace arena rife with the potential for uncivil behaviour (Buhler, 2003). Because e-mail is still a relatively recent form of communication with evolving norms (Weinstock, 2004), the potential for norm violation is high, leading a

number of organizations to develop and implement "netiquette" codes or digital writing guidelines (Weinstock, 2004). Both theoretical and practitioner research suggests that electronic communication may facilitate incivility not only because it is a communication medium with developing norms, but also because electronic communication within organizations often entails responding as quickly as possible to large numbers of e-mail on a daily basis, encouraging the use of terse, abbreviated messages as a time-saving mechanism (Buhler, 2003). Further, because individuals may be more likely to make negative attributions in a time-pressured situation than in a less time-constrained situation (Alcock et al., 2001), the perceived need to read and reply quickly to e-mail often results in quick interpretation of the sender's meaning and intent, further increasing the potential for negative interactions and misinterpretations. Indeed, when compared to traditional memos, e-mail typically "evidences a disregard for both English grammar and polite discourse and is often characterized by bluntness, spelling and punctuation errors, poor grammar, inappropriate self-revelation, and the forgetting or neglecting of social boundaries and rules for behaviour" (Weinstock, 2004, p. 367).

The impersonal, socially isolated nature and virtual lack of situational and non-verbal cues that are associated with electronic mail messaging also likely contribute to the increased likelihood of incivility perpetration and perception in e-mail communication (Dubrovsky et al., 1991). E-mail recipients are not provided with the social-contextual cues commonly used to interpret an individual's meaning and intent, such as facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice, thereby increasing the possibility for misinterpretation and the commission of attributional errors (Ramirez, Walther, Burgoon, & Sunnafrank, 2002). Individuals may also behave more uncivilly during e-

mail communication because any perceived incivility or norm violation can be easily blamed on the inherently terse nature of electronic communication (Weinstock, 2004). Indeed, individuals who communicated via computer mediated communication in laboratory experiments behaved in a more unreserved manner and made more extreme, unconventional, and riskier decisions during a decision-making task than individuals discussing and communicating decisions face-to-face (McGuire, Kiesler, & Seigel, 1987). Furthermore, recent research into the related construct of cyber-aggression supports the idea that aggression can occur in computer-mediated contexts (Weatherbee & Kelloway, 2006). Finally, e-mail communication provides a medium for incivility that is relatively easy to manipulate in a laboratory setting, thereby allowing for a high degree of control during preliminary experimental research on perceived and perpetrated incivility.

The Potential Influence of Workload

In addition to theories relating to the behavioural progression of incivility, individual and situational factors that influence the occurrence of workplace incivility are beginning to receive scholarly attention. In particular, situational constraints such as reengineering, downsizing, budget cuts, increased productivity pressure, high workload, informal work environments, and the use of part-time employees are noted as potential contributors to the proliferation of incivility in the workplace (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Buhler, 2003).

Qualitative evidence suggests that work overload intensifies feelings of time pressure, frustration, and stress, which may then lead to increased perceptions of workplace incivility as well as the perpetration of incivility. This is because individuals

under stress may forego social skills and experience diminished ability to judge others' actions accurately due to reduced perceptual focus (Johnson & Indvik, 2001; Pearson et al., 2000), and are more likely to react to perceptions of mistreatment due to lowered tolerance for norm violation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Certainly, the effects of increasing workload on feelings of frustration, stress, and counterproductive work behaviour are well documented, including the progression from stress and frustration to acts of aggression, which theoretically may result from experiencing incivility (Keenan & Newton, 1984; Matthews et al., 2002; Penney & Spector, 2005). Individuals experiencing high workload and time pressure may also come to believe that uncivil behaviour is required or justified to complete tasks efficiently (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Buhler, 2003). Indeed, 96% of survey respondents indicated that keeping workload at a manageable level would reduce workplace incivility (Forni et al., 2003). However, an extensive search of the psychological and practitioner literature shows that at present there appears to be no experimental research demonstrating the effect that high workload may have on incivility perception and perpetration in the workplace. Accordingly, in the current study I use an experimental approach to supplement the qualitative research that indicates high workload influences the incivility process in the workplace.

Unfortunately, the average employee workload is increasing in North America, particularly for white-collar staff (Johnson & Indvik, 2001). It is possible that high workload may increase the prevalence of incivility in the workplace. As individuals under high workload are purported to feel increased amounts of stress and frustration due to reduced patience for norm violation, I expect that these individuals will be more likely to perceive and perpetrate incivility than individuals with lower workloads.

H_{1a}: Individuals in the high workload condition will perceive more incivility than individuals in the low workload condition.

H_{1b}: Individuals in the high workload condition will perpetrate more incivility (both in replies to received e-mails and in e-mails they originate) than individuals in the low workload condition.

Substantiating the Process of Incivility Perpetration

Andersson and Pearson (1999) suggested that experiencing incivility potentially leads to the reciprocation of incivility at either an equal or increased level (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Sievers & Mersky, 2006). In accordance with this theory, I expect that individuals will respond with more incivility to uncivil e-mails than to civil e-mails (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Furthermore, I expect that workload will interact with e-mail incivility condition to influence the level of incivility in response e-mails, such that the effect of the initial level of incivility on incivility perpetration will be stronger at the higher workload level (i.e., the interaction will be driven primarily by the larger disparity in the responses to the civil and uncivil e-mails in the high workload condition).

H_2: Individuals will perpetrate more incivility in response to uncivil e-mails than to civil e-mails.

H_3: The incivility of responses to the civil and uncivil stimulus e-mails will be more discrepant in the high workload than in the low workload condition.

Previous research also indicates that during retaliation individuals tend to unconsciously "overmatch" the original offensive behaviour they initially received, believing that they in fact responded with an equal level of intensity (Youngs, 1986). Further evidence that individuals may underestimate the intensity and frequency of their

negative actions is indicated by survey research in which a large number of survey respondents indicated that they frequently experience incivility from others, while only 11% indicated that they themselves had instigated uncivil acts in the workplace over the past 12 months (Forni et al., 2003). In addition, Johnson and Indvik (2001) cite the results of a national survey which indicated that although 89% of respondents reported incivility to be a serious problem, an overwhelming 99% of respondents claimed their own behaviour is always civil.

It is therefore possible that a discrepancy may exist between the level of incivility individuals attribute to their own actions and the level of incivility that would be assigned to those same actions by other individuals. Such a discrepancy may result from a variety of processes. For instance, when individuals respond to perceived uncivil behaviour, they may have a tendency to underestimate the level of incivility present in their own actions. This potential underestimation of one's own uncivil behaviour may occur because individuals may perceive the reciprocation of incivility as justified and somehow not truly uncivil because it adheres to a basic social norm of reciprocation (Gilovich & Savitsky, 1999). Indeed, individuals tend to perceive their behaviour as reactions to the actions of others, and therefore justified or appropriate (known as the self-as-target bias) (Alcock et al., 2001). Alternately, in accordance with the illusion of transparency, it is possible that individuals may believe that their behaviour will not be interpreted as uncivil by others because the individuals themselves do not consider their behaviour to be uncivil (Gilovich & Savitsky, 1999). Finally, individuals may simply underreport the intensity and frequency of uncivil actions that they perpetrate for social desirability purposes (i.e., to make themselves look better). Accordingly, I hypothesize that the

incivility rating assigned by participants to the e-mails they write will be lower than the incivility rating assigned by objective raters.

H$_4$: The incivility rating assigned by participants to the e-mails they write will be lower than the incivility rating assigned by objective raters.

Also, as implicitly suggested by Andersson and Pearson (1999), the perception of incivility does not depend on perceptions of intent. This means that even if individuals believe that an uncivil action was performed unintentionally, they may nonetheless suffer the negative consequences associated with experiencing this form of workplace deviance. However, it is also possible that the perception of incivility could be strengthened if the incivility is perceived as having been performed intentionally. Indeed, harm that is inflicted intentionally has received more intense retribution in previous research than harm inflicted unintentionally (Darley & Pittman, 2003). Furthermore, individuals are motivated to retaliate when they perceive that they have been intentionally harmed (Darley, Carlsmith, & Robinson, 2000; Schultz & Wright, 1985). Accordingly, perceptions of intent accompanying incivility should result in the perpetration of incivility by the recipient as a form of justified retaliation. To substantiate these hypotheses empirically, I investigate whether perceptions of intent (i.e., the perception that incivility was performed intentionally) predict either the perception of an e-mail as uncivil or the perpetration of incivility by participants. I hypothesize that the perception of intent will predict both the perception and perpetration of incivility by participants in response to the uncivil e-mail. This focus on the uncivil e-mail stimulus results from the fact that, as perceptions of intent are dependent upon the perception of incivility, it is

more likely that participants would perceive intent under the uncivil stimulus condition than under the civil stimulus condition.

H$_5$: Perceived intent will significantly positively predict the perception and perpetration of incivility in response to the uncivil e-mail.

Method

Participants

One hundred seventy two undergraduate students enrolled in psychology courses at a small university in Eastern Canada participated in the current study. All participants were enrolled in their third year of study or higher at the time of their participation and spoke English as their first language. Each participant received two psychology course credit marks in exchange for participation in the study.

Of the 172 participants, data from 17 individuals was compromised and discarded from analysis for the following reasons: excessive exterior noise or the occurrence of unintended distractions during the administration process (6); the e-mail task was not completed (7); or the participant indicated during the debriefing session in response to a retrospective question that s/he knew the true purpose of the study[1] (4).

The majority of participants were female[2] (69.7%), and were aged 21 and under (57.4%), followed by 22-25 years (39.4%). The remaining participants were aged 26 years and over (3.2%). In addition, the majority of participants had 1-5 years of previous work experience (58.7%), followed by 6-10 years of work experience (32.9%). The remainder of participants either had no work experience (4.5%) or indicated that they possessed 11 or more years of work experience (3.9%). Finally, the majority of participants reported that they did not have managerial experience (78.7%).

Materials/Measures

In-Basket Task Components

    Organization Description.

    To facilitate participants' understanding of the study tasks and to enhance the realism of the in-basket task, participants read a one page description of the organization they were meant to be working for and the responsibilities of their position.

    Filler Tasks.

    Filler tasks were used to simulate an in-basket task and to create the between subjects conditions of high and low workload. The filler task in the low workload condition consisted of an exercise in choosing a company slogan. The filler tasks in the high workload condition consisted of the aforementioned slogan task, a work shift scheduling task, a document editing task, and a task involving organizing the refreshment menu for an organizational event.

    "Note to Self" Draft E-mail Task.

    To determine if workload influences an individual's propensity to perpetrate incivility, one of the tasks in the participant's in-basket in both workload conditions consisted of a "Note to Self" reminding the participant to log into his/her e-mail account to send an e-mail to another member of the organization concerning a task that needed to be accomplished or to solicit required information. To avoid the potential confounding effects of hierarchical rank or gender, the rank and gender of the recipient for this e-mail was kept ambiguous. In addition, to avoid any potential confounding effect that the content of the message itself may have had on incivility perpetration, two different "Note

to Self" messages were developed and their use was counterbalanced throughout the study. Copies of both versions of the "Note to Self" task can be found in Appendix A.

Civil and Uncivil E-mails Received by Participants.

All participants responded to two e-mail messages received from subordinates. The civility level of the two e-mail messages was manipulated. Each participant received one civil and one uncivil message. The imbedding of this "e-mail responding" exercise amongst the other tasks included in the in-basket allowed the true purpose of the study to be camouflaged, thereby limiting the influence of socially desirable responding. The ordering of the civil and uncivil e-mails in the participant's online mailbox was counterbalanced to avoid order effects.

To avoid any potentially confounding effect of gender, the gender of the sender of the stimulus emails remained ambiguous through the use of gender-neutral names selected in accordance with the work of Van Fleet and Atwater (1997). Further, to avoid the potentially confounding effect of e-mail content (i.e., that the content of the e-mail may account in some way for the level of incivility perceived and performed by participants), four different e-mail messages were developed to enable the manipulation of civility in the e-mails received by participants. A civil and uncivil version of each of these four e-mails was created. The content of the uncivil and civil e-mails assigned to each participant was then randomly manipulated, and no individual received civil and uncivil e-mails containing the same content. The uncivil version of each e-mail contained the following seven characteristics of e-mail incivility identified by a review of organizational e-mail etiquette guides and practitioner literature: no entry in subject field; lack of a proper introduction and salutation; e-mail composed entirely in lower case

letters; inappropriate use of punctuation and spacing; poor spelling and grammar; inappropriate closing; and improper use of acronyms and shortened words (California Polytechnic State University, 2006; Chome, 2006; Christensen, 2003; Intel Corporation, 1995; Russell, 2004; Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2006; Shea, 1997; The National Society for Black Engineers, n.d.; Tuffley, 2004; Watch Your Netiquette, 1998; Weinstock, 2004).

The civil version of each e-mail contained none of these characteristics. The civil and uncivil versions of each of the four e-mail messages (as received by male participants) are provided in Appendix B. The e-mail messages received by female participants were exactly the same as those received by the males, with the exception that the form of address used at the beginning of the message consisted of "Ms. Doe" rather than "Mr. Doe". A pilot group of 10 undergraduate honours psychology students and graduate Industrial/Organizational psychology students were given a definition of incivility and rated the civility level of each e-mail to test the strength of the manipulation. Each student rater rated four of the eight e-mails using the E-mail Incivility Scale described below (in the Participant Questionnaire section). E-mails that received highly disparate ratings from different raters (i.e., scores differing by more than 1 anchor on the incivility scale) were edited and re-rated by all 10 raters to ensure that all e-mails to be utilized in the study demonstrated the same level of civility or incivility. The students were also asked to reproduce and correct the uncivil e-mail messages they were assigned to ensure that the acronyms and shortened words used were not incomprehensible. A representative copy of the pilot rating form can be found in Appendix C.

E-mail Accounts and Log-in Instructions.

Electronic mailboxes were created to enable the sending and receiving of e-mail messages for the in-basket task. In total, seven electronic accounts were created: Four accounts for the four employees from whom the uncivil and civil e-mail messages were sent to the participants and to which participants sent responses to the manipulated e-mails; one account to which the participants sent the "Note to Self" draft e-mail, and two accounts for participants themselves to log into to access and send e-mail messages (one for females, one for males, to accommodate the differential suffixes for either gender – Mr. or Ms.). These electronic mailboxes were created using Inbox.com, a free web-based e-mail service.

Participant Questionnaire

After completing the in-basket task battery, participants completed a questionnaire with items assessing their perceptions of each in-basket task, including a self assessment of their performance on each of the tasks. The questionnaire also included an assessment of the level of incivility level participants perceived in each e-mail they received and wrote, and a measure of their perceptions of the intent of the sender. The questionnaire also included questions concerning demographic information. The scale used by participants to assess e-mail incivility is outlined below.

E-mail Incivility Scale – Participants.

Participants rated the civility level of each e-mail they received using an 8 item measure of e-mail incivility developed for the current study. Specifically, the scale instructed the respondent to "Please rate the quality of the e-mail given the workplace setting in which it was written". Items were developed using characteristics of e-mail

incivility identified by a review of organizational e-mail etiquette guides and practitioner literature (California Polytechnic State University, 2006; Chome, 2006; Christensen, 2003; Intel Corporation, 1995; Russell, 2004; Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2006; Shea, 1997; The National Society for Black Engineers, n.d.; Tuffley, 2004; Watch Your Netiquette, 1998; Weinstock, 2004). Example items include "punctuation", "clarity", and "introduction/beginning of message (including manner used to address you – first or last name, none, etc.)". The respondent rated each item for the respective e-mail using a five point Likert scale (1 = very inappropriate; 5 = very appropriate). Responses were then reverse coded, such that higher scores indicate a higher level of incivility.

Coefficient alpha for this scale was .85 (participant perceptions of uncivil e-mail) and .89 (participant perceptions of civil e-mail), with inter-item correlations ranging from .26 ("entry in subject line" and "overall tone/impression of civil e-mail") to .75 ("spelling/grammar" and "punctuation"). Examination of the alpha if item deleted data indicates that the removal of any scale items would not improve the reliability of the scale. Coefficients were also calculated for each of the four content e-mails separately.

Similarly, participants rated each e-mail that they wrote using this scale. However, the item "Use of acronyms/shortened words" was not included in computation. Most participants did not use shortened words or acronyms in their e-mails, leading to extensive missing data. Also, the item "Entry in subject line" was removed from this scale. The decision to remove this second item was based on the fact that in reality the wording in the Subject line of a response e-mail is automatically filled out by electronic mail programs identically to the original e-mail received, preceded by a "Re:". It is relatively uncommon for individuals to change the information in the Subject line when

replying to e-mail messages. Accordingly, this criteria item was not applicable when evaluating response e-mails. Thus, participants completed a six item incivility measure for each email they wrote. The coefficient alpha for this scale was .84 for the self-rated response to the civil e-mail, and .79 for the self-rated response to the uncivil e-mail. Item intercorrelations ranged from .17 to .69. The scale in its entirety can be found in Appendix D.

Perceived Intent.

Participants were also asked to rate whether they believed the individuals who wrote the civil and uncivil e-mails intended for the e-mail to be uncivil. This was assessed using a single item question with the wording: "Do you believe the author of the e-mail intended for it to be inappropriate?". This item was categorically rated using the response options "no", "unsure", and "yes".

E-mail Rating Packages

Rating Packages.

Rating packages were created using the emails written by each participant. Each contained a definition and description of the incivility construct and indicators of incivility in e-mail communication, guidelines to follow in rating the incivility level of the e-mails, and a copy of each of the three e-mails written by the participant. A series of items assessing incivility followed each email. The text of the original e-mail message to which the participant had responded was removed to maintain rater blindness to condition and enhance rater objectivity. Raters were also blind to the workload of each participant.

The civility level of each e-mail written by participants was assessed using the same Email Incivility Scale as that utilized by participants, with three exceptions. First,

the wording of the scale anchors was changed from "inappropriate" and "appropriate" to "uncivil" and "civil". Second, due to extensive missing data and to maximize comparability with the scale used to assess participant self-perceptions of e-mail incivility, the item "Use of acronyms/shortened words" was not included in the computation for this scale. The item "Entry in subject line" was also removed from the scale following each of the two response e-mails, for the same reasons used to remove the item from computation of the participant self-perceptions of incivility scale. Thus, the raters completed a six item incivility measure for each email the participant wrote. The coefficient alpha for this scale was .90 for both the rated response to the uncivil and civil e-mails, and .85 for the draft e-mail. Item intercorrelations ranged from .37 to .74. A copy of the rating package in its entirety is provided in Appendix E.

Interrater Reliability.

Two independent female raters rated all the emails. One rater was a second-year graduate student in Industrial/Organizational psychology. The second rater possessed a Masters of Science degree in Industrial/Organizational psychology. Pilot rating packages for 10 participants were developed and completed by the two raters to address rating discrepancies, align rater interpretation of the rating items, and clarify procedures for rating problematic items. The resultant rating guide with definitions and instructions for scoring each item used by the raters is provided in Appendix F.

Procedure

Pilot Study

The procedure for the study and the filler tasks for the high and low workload conditions were piloted using a sample of 11 undergraduate students who participated in

the study for two bonus points towards their final grade in a psychology course. The data from these individuals were used to determine the filler tasks that would be included in each workload condition and the feasibility of the research design, and were not included in subsequent hypothesis testing.

The study was a 2 x 2 mixed repeated measures design in which participants were randomly assigned to one of the two levels of the between subjects variable workload (high or low), and all participants experienced both levels of the within subjects variable, incivility level of the stimulus e-mails (high and low). Data collection was completed individually. Upon arrival, the researcher explained the cover story to each participant, that is, that the study involved completing a set of in-basket tasks while acting as the manager of a fictional organization to determine the ability of such exercises to predict managerial potential. Participants read an organization and position description and were told that they had 30 minutes to complete the tasks in their in-basket, in whatever order they thought best. The researcher remained in the room while participants completed the exercises, enabling the easy detection of potential problems with the procedure or the in-basket tasks themselves. The researcher did not interact with the participant during the in-basket exercise. After 30 minutes, the researcher administered the participant questionnaire, after which the participant was debriefed. At this time the participant was probed to determine if he or she had guessed the true purpose of the study during the experiment.

A number of pilot participants from the high workload condition chose to complete other tasks first and did not complete the e-mail task. Therefore, to ensure that all participants completed the task of interest, I opted to instruct remaining participants to

complete the in-basket tasks in the order in which they appeared, and held this order constant throughout the remainder of the study. This was the only substantial change made to the procedure based on the pilot study, other than that post-pilot participants were left alone in the study room to complete the in-basket exercise.

Main Study

As with the pilot study, data collection was completed on an individual basis. The procedure used remained the same as in the pilot study, with the exception that the participant was left alone in the study room during the completion of the in-basket exercise. Secondly, the ordering of the tasks in each participant's in-basket remained constant across participants and participants were instructed to complete the in-basket tasks in the order in which they appeared, to ensure that the e-mail task would be completed. In the low workload condition, the slogan task preceded the e-mail and "note to self" task. In the high workload condition, the slogan task and the script editing task preceded the e-mail and "note to self" tasks. The e-mail and "note to self" tasks were then followed by the shift scheduling task and the refreshment menu task.

The study room, the researcher administering the study, the computer on which participants completed the e-mail tasks and the room's condition (i.e., lighting and temperature) were kept constant across all participants. In addition, workload condition (high or low), the e-mails received by each participant, and the order in which the civil and uncivil e-mails appeared in each participant's electronic mailbox were randomly determined.

Results

Interrater Reliability

Interrater reliability estimates to assess the consistency of the rating system were obtained by calculating Kappa at the item level. Kappa is a chance-corrected statistic that reflects the index of agreement between two raters by calculating the proportion of rater concordance beyond what would normally be expected to occur by chance (Fleiss, 1971). Guidelines for relative Kappa interpretation recommended by Landis and Koch (1977) specify that Kappa values ranging from .41 to .60 and from .61 to .80 denote "moderate" and "substantial" strength of agreement, respectively. Kappa coefficients for scale items are presented in Table 1. Kappa values ranged from .71 (for the item "entry in Subject line" for the draft e-mail) to .83 (for the item "punctuation" for the response to civil e-mail), indicating that there was substantial agreement between raters in the current study, and therefore adequate interrater reliability.

To ensure that rater gender was not unduly influencing the rating process, a third (male) rater evaluated 15% of participant data (n = 23). Interrater reliability for the three raters was calculated by item using a two way mixed model intraclass coefficient (ICC) with proportion of rater agreement defined in terms of absolute agreement. In accordance with McGraw and Wong's (1996) guidelines for intraclass coefficient interpretation, the average measures intraclass coefficient was interpreted in the current analysis. ICCs ranged from .84 (for the items "overall impression/tone of e-mail" for the response to uncivil e-mail and "punctuation" for the response to civil e-mail) to .89 (for the item "spelling/grammar" for the response to uncivil e-mail), indicating substantial interrater reliability and the absence of any gender effect.

Table 1.

Kappa and Intraclass Correlation Values by Item

Item	Rated Response to Uncivil E-mail κ (ICC)	Rated Response to Civil E-mail κ (ICC)	Rated Draft E-mail κ (ICC)
Overall impression/tone of e-mail	.76 (.84)	.72 (.86)	.74 (.88)
Entry in Subject line			.71 (.87)
Introduction to/beginning of message	.79 (.88)	.82 (.86)	.82 (.86)
Punctuation	.76 (.88)	.83 (.84)	.80 (.87)
Spelling/grammar	.76 (.89)	.75 (.86)	.75 (.84)
Clarity	.74 (.87)	.75 (.87)	.75 (.87)
The way in which the message ended	.77 (.88)	.79 (.85)	.75 (.87)

Hypothesis Testing

Descriptive statistics for the measures used in the study are presented in Table 2.

Missing data were handled using listwise deletion, resulting in a dataset of 155

individuals for the following analysis.

Table 2.

Descriptive Statistics for E-mail Incivility Scale

Scale	Low Workload Mean (SD) Range	High Workload Mean (SD) Range
E-mail Incivility Scale (Participant Rated)		
Perceptions of Stimulus E-mail (Uncivil)	4.04 (.60) 1.13 – 5.00	4.11 (.80) 1.75 – 5.00
Perceptions of Stimulus E-mail (Civil)	1.14 (.30) 1.00 – 2.57	1.24 (.46) 1.00 – 3.13
Perceptions of Response E-mail (Uncivil)	1.44 (.44) 1.00 – 2.71	1.31 (.40) 1.00 – 2.43
Perceptions of Response E-mail (Civil)	1.35 (.39) 1.00 – 2.57	1.24 (.43) 1.00 – 2.83
Perceptions of Draft E-mail	1.32 (.43) 1.00 – 2.63	1.18 (.35) 1.00 – 2.50
E-mail Incivility Scale (Rater Rated)		
Response to Uncivil E-mail	2.32 (.96) 1.42 – 4.67	3.39 (.82) 1.67 – 4.67
Response to Civil E-mail	1.89 (.63) 1.33 – 4.67	2.50 (.79) 1.33 – 4.50
Draft E-mail	1.97 (.62) 1.29 – 4.57	2.69 (.73) 1.29 – 3.93

Note: Total N = 155 (low workload N = 76; high workload N = 79)

The data were screened overall as well as by condition and cell for each of the between and within subjects variables (workload level and civility of e-mail message received) to identify outliers or violations of the assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variance (for both the between and within subjects variables), and homogeneity of the variance-covariance matrices (for the within subjects variable). Sixteen outliers (defined as a score greater than 4 standard deviations from the mean) in the data were identified. Accordingly, two iterations of the following analyses were completed; one with all outliers removed and one with none removed. The pattern of results did not change across iterations, and thus the outliers were retained for the analysis. The number of

participants in each cell were essentially identical across cells, and the majority of score distributions for each measure were normal, with five exceptions for which the distribution of scores was significantly negatively skewed and one for which the distribution was positively skewed. However, because the analytic procedures used (repeated measures ANOVA, t-tests, and regression) are robust to violations of this assumption, transformations were not utilized (Howell, 2002).

Levene's test for homogeneity of variance was significant for the between subjects variable for "rated response to the civil e-mail", indicating potential heterogeneity of variance for the between subjects variable (level of workload). However, Levene's test is quite sensitive to violations of this assumption (Howell, 2002). Thus, a check for violations of the assumption of homogeneity of variance was completed by comparing the variances of all conditions in the data to one another. This screen indicated that homogeneity of variance can be assumed as no cell in any of the analyses demonstrated a variance greater than four times the size of the smallest variance and the sample size was virtually identical across cells (Howell, 2002). In addition, with only two levels of the within-subjects factor in the current analysis, only one covariance exists, and the assumption of sphericity is effectively met for analyses involving the repeated measures variable civility level of the stimulus e-mail (Keselman, Algina, & Kowalchuk, 2001).

The Influence of Workload and Incivility of E-mail Stimuli on Incivility Perception and Perpetration

To confirm that the manipulation of the independent variable "stimulus e-mail incivility level" was successful and to test Hypothesis 1_a (that level of workload would
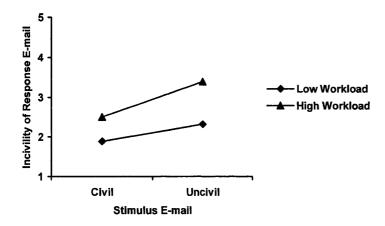
influence the perception of incivility such that participants in the high workload condition would perceive more incivility in stimulus e-mails than participants in the low workload condition), I conducted a 2 x 2 mixed design analysis of variance with one between (level of workload) and one within (incivility level of the stimulus e-mails) variable. The manipulation was successful: level of incivility of the original e-mail significantly influenced perceptions of incivility $F(1, 153) = 1712.22$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .92$, such that participants perceived more incivility in the uncivil ($M = 4.08$, $SD = .71$) than in the civil ($M = 1.19$, $SD = .39$) e-mail, regardless of workload condition.

Contrary to Hypothesis 1_a, level of workload did not significantly affect the level of incivility perceived by participants, $F(1, 153) = 2.03$, $p > .05$. Participants in the high workload condition ($M = 4.11$, $SD = .80$) did not differ from those in the low workload condition ($M = 4.04$, $SD = .60$) with respect to their perceptions of incivility in the stimulus e-mails, and no interaction existed between workload and e-mail civility level, $F(1, 153) = .04$, $p > .05$.

In Hypothesis 2, I proposed that individuals would be more uncivil in response to the uncivil e-mail than in response to the civil e-mail. Further, in Hypothesis 1_b and 3, I anticipated that participants in the high workload condition would perpetrate more incivility than individuals in the low workload condition, particularly when responding to the uncivil e-mail. The results of a 2 x 2 mixed design analysis of variance with one between (level of workload) and one within (civility level of original e-mail) variable and rated incivility of the response to the uncivil e-mail (perpetrated incivility) as the outcome measure supported these hypotheses. Level of incivility of the stimulus e-mail affected the level of incivility performed by participants, $F(1, 153) = 163.45$, $p < .001$, η^2

= .52, such that individuals performed more incivility in response to the uncivil e-mail (M = 2.87, SD = .92) than in response to the civil e-mail (M = 2.20, SD = .78). Workload also affected the level of incivility performed by participants in response to the civil and uncivil stimulus e-mails, $F(1, 153) = 62.22, p < .001, \eta^2 = .29$, such that participants in the high workload condition performed more incivility in general (M = 2.95, SD = .08) than participants in the low workload condition (M = 2.11, SD = .08).

Workload also significantly interacted with level of incivility of the stimulus email, $F(1, 153) = 20.33, p < .001, \eta^2 = .12$. The simple main effects of civility of the stimulus email were significant across both levels of the workload variable. In each case, more incivility was evident in responses to uncivil than to civil emails. Paired samples t-tests illustrated that participants in the low workload condition performed significantly more incivility in response to the uncivil e-mail (M = 2.32, SD = .67) than to the civil e-mail (M = 1.89, SD = .63), $t(75) = 7.46, p < .001$, and those in the high workload condition perpetrated significantly more incivility in response to the uncivil e-mail (M = 3.39, SD = .82) than to the civil e-mail (M = 2.50, SD = .79), $t(78) = 10.51, p < .001$. The interaction is driven primarily by the larger disparity in the responses to the civil and uncivil e-mails in the high workload condition. Indeed, an independent samples t-test using difference scores shows a greater disparity in the level of incivility in response to the civil and uncivil e-mails in the high workload condition ($M_{difference}$ = .89, SD = .75) than in the low workload condition ($M_{difference}$ = .43, SD = .50), $t(153) = -4.54, p < .001$. The interaction between incivility level of the stimulus e-mail and workload level is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Interaction between Incivility of Stimulus E-mail and Workload

In Hypothesis 1_b I hypothesized that participants in the high workload condition would demonstrate more incivility in the draft e-mail than participants in the low workload condition. To test this hypothesis, I examined the independently rated incivility in the messages drafted based on the "note to self" task across the two levels of workload using an independent samples t-test. Level of workload significantly influenced the rated incivility level of the draft e-mails: The mean incivility level of draft e-mails written by participants in the high workload condition was significantly higher ($M = 2.69$, $SD = .73$) than in the low workload condition ($M = 1.97$, $SD = .62$), $t(153) = 6.59$, $p < .001$.

The Discrepancy Between Self and Other Ratings of Incivility

Finally, supporting Hypothesis 4, participants' self ratings of the incivility of the e-mail written in response to the uncivil e-mail ($M = 1.36$, $SD = .42$) were significantly lower than the incivility rating assigned by raters ($M = 2.88$, $SD = .92$), $t(153) = 18.58$, $p < .001$. Participants' self ratings of the incivility of the e-mail written in response to the

civil e-mail ($M = 1.29$, $SD = .41$) were also significantly lower than the incivility rating

assigned by raters ($M = 2.20$, $SD = .78$), $t(153) = 13.81$, $p < .001$. These findings indicate

that participants rated the level of incivility they exhibited in the e-mails that they wrote

significantly lower than did the raters. Further, a paired samples t-test using difference

scores shows that the mean discrepancy between self and rater incivility scores was

greater for the response to the uncivil e-mail ($M_{difference} = 1.52$, $SD = 1.01$) than for the

response to the civil e-mail ($M_{difference} = .92$, $SD = .82$), $t(153) = 9.99$, $p < .001$.

The Influence of Perceptions of Intent on the Perception and Perpetration of Incivility

Two regression analyses were conducted to test Hypothesis 5, that perceptions of

intent would predict perceptions of incivility and the perpetration of incivility in response

to the uncivil e-mail. The correlations between the variables included in these analyses

are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3.

Intercorrelations between Perceptions of Intent, Perceptions of Incivility, and Incivility
Perpetration in E-mail Responses

Scale	1	2	3
1. Participant Perceptions of Intent – Uncivil E-mail	-		
2. Participant Perceptions of Incivility – Uncivil E-mail	-.02	-	
3. Rater-Rated Incivility of Response to Uncivil E-mail	.04	.33*	-

Note: * = Correlation is significant at the $p < .01$ level (two-tailed)
          **=Perceptions of Intent were coded as 0 = No, 1 = Unsure, and 2 = Yes
          Listwise N = 154

Contrary to the hypothesis, perceptions of intent did not significantly predict

perceptions of incivility, $R^2 = .00$, $F(1, 153) = .05$, $p > .05$. Participants who believed the

uncivil e-mail was intended by the author to be uncivil were no more or less likely to

perceive the e-mail as being uncivil than those who believed the e-mail was not intended to be uncivil, $\beta = -.02$, $t(153) = -.22$, $p > .05$. Furthermore, perceptions of intent did not significantly predict incivility perpetration in response to the uncivil e-mail, $R^2 = .00$, $F(1, 153) = .21$, $p > .05$. Participants who believed the uncivil e-mail was intended by the author to be uncivil were no more or less likely to perpetrate incivility than participants who did not perceive intent, $\beta = .04$, $t(153) = .45$, $p > .05$.

Discussion

The high prevalence and negative consequences of workplace incivility necessitate the investigation and substantiation of the incivility process in organizations as well as the identification of organizational factors that may influence this process. Previously, theoretical research has outlined the potential process of workplace incivility and identified numerous situational factors that may influence its occurrence (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Buhler, 2003; Johnson & Indvik, 2001; Pearson et al., 2001). In the current study I conducted what appears to be the first experimental research to substantiate a component of Andersson and Pearson's (1999) model of incivility perception and perpetration. This also appears to be the first experimental study to examine the influence of one suggested situational variable, workload, on the perception and perpetration of incivility.

Current Findings

All of my hypotheses were supported, with two exceptions. Most importantly, I hypothesized that participants would perform more incivility in response to an uncivil than to a civil stimulus e-mail. Indeed, regardless of workload level, uncivil e-mail

stimuli prompted more uncivil responses from participants than did civil e-mail stimuli. Accordingly, these results support the first step of Andersson and Pearson's (1999) theorized model of incivility exchange. In addition, my hypothesis that individuals in the high workload condition would instigate more incivility than participants in the low workload condition was also supported, showing that a high level of workload is a situational variable that encourages the occurrence of workplace incivility, as has been theoretically suggested (Buhler, 2003; Johnson & Indvik, 2001).

Similarly, as hypothesized there was a larger disparity in the incivility of responses to the civil and uncivil e-mail stimuli in the high workload condition than in the low workload condition. The e-mail responses highest in incivility were written by participants in the high workload, high incivility condition. These findings support qualitative research that suggests high workload encourages workplace incivility (Buhler, 2003; Johnson & Indvik, 2001) and augment Andersson and Pearson's (1999) model of incivility perpetration by indicating that situational factors such as workload influence the level of incivility an individual will likely perpetrate. Workplaces in which employees have a high level of workload may therefore be more susceptible to uncivil exchanges and subsequent incivility "spirals", at least in e-mail communication.

Finally, I expected to find that the incivility rating assigned by participants to their e-mails would be lower than the incivility rating assigned by objective raters. This hypothesis was supported. There are a number of potential interpretations for this result. First, this finding may highlight a social judgment bias that may exist in the perception of incivility. For instance, it is possible that individuals may underestimate their own uncivil behaviour, an interpretation that is in accordance with research indicating that individuals

who retaliate in response to offensive behaviour tend to unconsciously "overmatch" the original offensive behaviour they initially received, believing that they in fact responded with an equal level of intensity (Youngs, 1986). Alternately, in accordance with the illusion of transparency, it is possible that individuals may believe that their behaviour will not be interpreted as uncivil by others because the individuals themselves do not consider their behaviour to be uncivil (Gilovich & Savitsky, 1999). If true, this explanation could explain incivility self-report surveys that indicate a large number of individuals are the recipients of incivility, while far fewer individuals report performing acts of incivility (Forni et al., 2003). Indeed, although an individual may behave uncivilly, such actions may in fact be performed unintentionally or without self-awareness.

However, it is also possible that participants intentionally lowered their incivility ratings for favourable self-presentation reasons, due to the belief that managerial potential was being assessed in the current study. Alternately, it is also possible that participants' self reports of incivility were lower than the raters' due to a belief that responding to perceived incivility with incivility is not inappropriate social behaviour because it adheres to norms of social exchange and is therefore perceived by individuals to be justified and not uncivil. This interpretation may be supported by the fact that although self reports of performed incivility were significantly lower than the incivility ratings assigned by raters, this discrepancy was significantly greater for the e-mail written in response to the uncivil e-mail. Thus, it is highly possible that participants' self reports of incivility were lower due to a self-justification process.

I also hypothesized that participants in the high workload condition would be more likely to perceive incivility than participants in the low workload condition. However, this hypothesis was not supported. The apparent lack of relationship between workload and perceived incivility may have resulted from ceiling and floor effects in the current study due to the strength of the incivility manipulation. Indeed, participants tended to rate the uncivil and civil e-mails using the extreme points of the rating scale (i.e., 1 or 5), regardless of workload condition. This would indicate that the incivility manipulation in the current study was sufficiently strong that its presence or absence was easy to ascertain, regardless of workload condition. Alternately, it is possible that workload may not influence an individual's propensity to perceive incivility, but may influence how they respond to it. Indeed, my results suggest that a high workload may lead to more intense incivility perpetration. It is possible that such intensified responses may be as a result of the increased feelings of stress and time pressure that typically accompany high workloads, which lower tolerance for norm violation (Buhler, 2003).

To determine if the apparent lack of relationship between workload and perceived incivility was an artifact of ceiling and floor effects in the current study due to the strength of the incivility manipulation, future research should investigate the influence of workload on the perception of intermediate levels of incivility, rather than solely high and low levels. Level of workload may be more likely to influence individuals' tendencies to perceive intermediate levels of incivility rather than in such cases where it is more clearly present or absent (regardless of the ambiguity of intent). In such cases, the increased number of activities competing for space in the individual's perceptual focus may prompt busy or time pressured individuals to perceive increased incivility in vague situations.

Additionally, my hypothesis that the perception of intent would positively predict both the perception and perpetration of incivility in response to the uncivil e-mail stimulus was not supported. When explaining this non-significant result, it is important to note that perceived intent was difficult to measure realistically in the current study. I asked the participants to infer whether a fictional individual had intended to write an inappropriate e-mail based on a single communication with no prior history of dealings or interactions. However, it is likely that a history of past interactions would be used in real life by individuals to interpret the behaviour of others, particularly when the behaviour is accompanied by ambiguous harmful intent. The artificiality and difficulty of determining intent in the current study was likely exacerbated by the use of e-mail as the incivility medium, as e-mail lacks social cues used to interpret behaviour and intentions in face-to-face communication (Weinstock, 2004). Accordingly, it is possible that the non-significant relationship between intent and incivility perception and perpetration in the current study may be due to artifacts of the study design. Future research could investigate the role of intent in the perception and perpetration of uncivil behaviour using an organizational study and the use of diaries. Employee participants could record the incivility they experience and witness, in addition to their perceptions of the instigator's intent (without identifying individual perpetrators of perceived incivility, should identification constitute an ethical concern). Such a method would provide the organizational context lacking in the current study concerning interpersonal conduct norms and previous interaction history.

Implications

Regardless of workload level, individuals perceived and perpetrated email incivility, suggesting both that e-mail communication is a medium in which workplace incivility can occur, and that incivility perception begets incivility perpetration in the workplace. This is important not only because e-mail use within organizations is increasing (Weinstock, 2004), but also because the perception and perpetration of incivility by organizational members is associated with numerous negative effects and may lead to the development of incivility spirals (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Pearson et al., 2001).

Accordingly, organizations can investigate methods to mitigate the potential for uncivil acts, such as the development and enforcement of organizational codes of professional interpersonal conduct, or "netiquette" codes for interpersonal interaction in electronic communication. Indeed, although 84% of employees believe official efforts to foster workplace civility would increase their personal productivity by keeping stress and fatigue at manageable levels, more than one third of organizations have no policy concerning appropriate and professional interpersonal contact. Even within those organizations with such a policy, a large number of employees feel that it is not communicated clearly enough to employees or adequately enforced (Cortina et al., 2001).

Training programs could be developed to increase employees' self-monitoring and awareness of the tendency to misinterpret the behaviour of others in a negative manner. Such programs could take the form of self awareness or coping programs. These efforts might help individuals become aware of and closely monitor their own actions and potential motivations for the actions of others. They may also help people to cope better

with incivility that they do experience, thereby reducing the likelihood of perpetration as a response. The development of such measures and training programs to counteract the growth of incivility within organizations provides a fruitful avenue for future research, particularly in terms of their effectiveness and efficiency.

Furthermore, my study showed that individuals under high workloads perpetrated more incivility than individuals with low workloads. This indicates that workload may be a causal factor in the perpetration of workplace incivility. This finding is important because the average workload of the North American worker is increasing (Buhler, 2003). Organizations should consider the potentially detrimental effect of workload on incivility perception and perpetration in the workplace and its subsequent effect on employees' performance and psychosomatic functioning. Ideally, workloads should be kept manageable to help mitigate the incidence of workplace incivility. However, should this prove impractical, organizations can investigate the above-mentioned methods as a means to reduce the incidence and negative outcomes of incivility in the workplace.

Similarly, the demonstrated discrepancy between self and other ratings of incivility may have important organizational implications. For instance, although this discrepancy could be due to socially desirable responding by participants, it is also possible that this discrepancy may reflect a tendency of individuals to unknowingly commit uncivil acts, or justify the perpetration of incivility as appropriate social behaviour. Whatever the cognitive process, the fact that individuals rate their own behaviour as more civil than do others may contribute to increased incivility in the workplace, with the attendant negative consequences. If individuals do tend to underestimate the incivility of their own actions, while being predisposed to notice the

uncivil actions of others, this may increase the likelihood for incivility spirals to occur. Alternately, if the perpetration of incivility is perceived as justified behaviour by individuals, incivility is likely to propagate in organizations. The curricula for the types of training and awareness programs suggested above must take these possibilities into account. The programs must educate employees about the potential consequences of such behaviour, even when it is perceived as justified, and make individuals more aware of their own actions and how they may be perceived by others. Ideally the programs should equip people with other methods of dealing with uncivil behaviour, such as improved communication skills to both reduce the potential for acting in an uncivil manner or facilitating interpersonal discussion about actions that were performed by one individual and interpreted negatively by others.

Similarly, given its increasing use in organizations, it is important to note that the present results suggest that incivility occurs in work related e-mail communication. Indeed, as noted earlier, the inherent characteristics of e-mail communication may promote such incivility. For instance, a history of past interactions can provide a basis or shared mutual context for the interpretation of a terse e-mail. However, if the sender makes incorrect assumptions about the recipient's depth of knowledge about a particular subject, the same terse e-mail may be perceived as unclear and frustrating, and therefore uncivil, to the recipient (Ducheneaut & Bellotti, 2003). Furthermore, e-mail has enabled the production and distribution of instantaneous communication, which can lead to feelings of time pressure and increased workload (Weinstock, 2004). E-mail proliferation in organizations may also result in feelings of increased emancipatory potential: Many workers may be more comfortable sending e-mail to their superiors concerning

organizational complaints than addressing them directly face to face, which may increase the potential for instances of incivility in e-mail communication. Accordingly, the development of "netiquette" codes for interpersonal conduct in e-mail communication may be a useful tool for organizations to implement to help mitigate or prevent incivility, and subsequent incivility spirals, from occurring.

Limitations

The interpretation of the study results must be tempered by a discussion of the study's limitations. For instance, although a strength of the current study is the use of an experimental method, this design introduces concerns regarding external validity. First, given that the study participants were undergraduate students, it is possible that the current results may not generalize to the general working population or to individuals of diverse age groups and cultures. However, attempts were made to sample individuals with previous work experience to better represent the working population.

In addition, because the workplace setting used in the current study was artificial and the participants knew that the individuals with whom they were interacting were fictional, it is possible that the participants' e-mails may have been more uninhibited and uncivil than they would have been if the participant was interacting with actual organizational employees. However, although possible, this is unlikely. The participants believed that their performance during the tasks was being assessed to determine their managerial potential, and knew that other individuals would be reading the e-mails that they wrote. This belief should have motivated the participants to be on their "best behaviour", which in fact may have contributed to the inhibition of uncivil behaviour, even in response to incivility. Indeed, the ratings assigned to the draft e-mails and e-mails

written in response to the uncivil stimulus e-mail were only rated as mid-range on the e-mail incivility scale, although the perceived incivility of the stimulus uncivil e-mail was typically rated at the extreme, high end of the scale.

In fact, the rating disparity between the stimulus e-mails and the e-mails written by participants suggests a number of additional potential limitations in the study design that may have attenuated the relationships between perceived and perpetrated incivility and workload. For instance, the incivility manipulation may not have been sufficiently strong to elicit a more uncivil response from the participants. However, as previously noted the perceived incivility of the stimulus uncivil e-mail was rated extremely high by the majority of participants, making this possibility unlikely. Alternatively, it could be that the measurement scale used to assess incivility was too clement and did not capture all the potential characteristics of e-mail incivility. Accordingly, the incivility performed by participants in the current study may have been at a lower level than in a real life setting. Indeed, one participant commented during the debriefing session that, although she had indicated in her response e-mail that she would comply with the request of the originator of the uncivil e-mail, she actually would have had no intention of doing so. Accordingly, the artificiality of the design and the participants' belief that they were being assessed in a selection context likely attenuated the true relationships between incivility perception and perpetration and workload.

In many ways the results in the current study are striking partly *because* of the artificiality of the design. As indicated by Pearson and colleagues (2001), the perception and perpetration of incivility is influenced by organizational context and norms, such as previous history of interaction with coworkers, superiors, and subordinates, all of which

were absent in the current study. Therefore, it is also possible that participants would have given "the benefit of the doubt" when responding to uncivil e-mails, because they had no previous interaction with these individuals and no real sense of the norms for e-mail communication within the organization. Accordingly, participants may have lowered the amount of incivility they perpetrated, making the overall amount of incivility observed in the current study less than what it may actually be in a real life setting.

It is also difficult to argue that a one-time interaction with a researcher in which there are no repercussions for poor performance will produce the same level and amount of stress that would be elicited by a high workload level experienced by employees in real organizational settings. However, the clearly important influence of workload demonstrated in this study, despite such a limitation, indicates that the effect of this situational factor on the incivility process may be even stronger in an actual work setting.

Perhaps one of the most important limitations of the current study is the lack of organizational context that results from the use of an experimental method. Ordinarily, the interpretation of the behaviour and intentions of another individual, including uncivil behaviour, is likely based on the target's past interactive history with that person and norms of the organization involved. For instance, e-mails containing characteristics of incivility as assessed in the current study may not be perceived as uncivil nor lead to negative consequences when they are sent back and forth regularly between work colleagues who know one another well and are comfortable with communicating in a manner that may be perceived as uncivil by others. The design of the current study did not account for the influence of organizational norms and past interactive history on the perception and perpetration of incivility, making this a potential area for future research.

In addition, if these same work colleagues were required to score one another's e-mails using the scale developed for the current study, the e-mails would likely receive high ratings of incivility, despite the fact that the individuals themselves may not be bothered by the uncivil nature of the e-mails. This could become problematic in future studies that attempt to link experienced incivility to negative outcomes. Indeed, current stress literature has identified that it is the level to which life events bother an individual that influences negative outcomes, more so than whether or not the life event occurred (Ferguson, Lawrence, & Matthews, 2000). Accordingly, the incivility scale used in the current study could be revised to include assessments of how much each indicator of incivility bothered or upset the recipient in future research.

Similarly, a potential limitation of the incivility measure in the current study relates to the necessary deletion of two items from the scales rating the incivility of the response e-mails (both self and rater rated). A potential criticism is that this change may have altered the measurement of incivility so as to bias the results. Indeed, the deletion of the "Use of acronyms/shortened words" item from the incivility scale may reflect a problem with the measurement of deviant behaviours in general. Namely, although certain behaviours might be prototypical of the construct being measured, they may occur at such a low frequency that they become an impediment to measurement of the construct.

However, it is important to stress that the item deleted from the current scale is not central to the construct of incivility in e-mail communication: The construct of e-mail incivility and the determination of an e-mail as uncivil does not hinge solely upon the presence or absence or shortened words or acronyms. Indeed, it is unlikely that even the

full 8 item version of the scale contained every possible indicator of e-mail incivility. However, the fact that significant results were obtained despite the use of a scale which is arguably clement in its measurement of incivility speaks to the strength of the results of the current study. Similarly, deletion of the "Entry in Subject line" item was based on the fact that in reality it is relatively uncommon for individuals to change the information that is automatically entered by the e-mail program in the Subject line when replying to e-mail messages. Accordingly, this item was not applicable when evaluating response e-mails because it did not represent an action that was actually performed by the participants, and its deletion likely provided a more accurate measurement of participants' perpetrated incivility.

Directions for Future Research

Future research could address some of the aforementioned limitations of the current study through the use of alternative study designs. For instance, longitudinal organizational studies could counter the artificiality of the current design by providing not only organizational context concerning interpersonal conduct norms but also including participants of varying demographics in a real life setting. For example, such studies could utilize behavioural diaries or interviews in which employees from an organization recount their personal experiences of incivility. Participants could document or report orally both incivility experienced and perpetrated by themselves and other organizational members, while refraining from identifying the organizational members to whom they are referring. Such a longitudinal study could also be used to track the development of incivility spirals and the negative effects of experiencing incivility over time. In addition, such studies could be used to determine whether individuals who

perceive that they have experienced incivility experience negative effects regardless of whether they believe the incivility to have been intentionally committed.

Furthermore, future lab studies could involve a confederate behaving uncivilly to a participant during the completion of a task (such as not holding a door open when walking from one room to another, or interrupting when the participant is having a conversation with the researcher). Towards the end of the study session, the participant would be provided with the opportunity to perpetrate the same uncivil action. The criterion would then be more objective in terms of whether the participant performed the uncivil act or not, rather than relying on the potentially idiosyncratic judgment of raters. Such confederate studies could be used to investigate the manifestation of a number of forms of workplace incivility, such as incivility in telephone conversations or face to face interpersonal conversations.

However, although the use of confederate studies in future incivility research will be constructive, the usefulness of e-mail communication as a medium for studying incivility was also confirmed in the current study, indicating that this form of organizational communication will prove useful in future investigations of workplace incivility. For instance, the procedure used in the current study could be used to determine whether the manifestation of incivility or attribution of intent is dependent on the hierarchical position of the participants. For instance, the hierarchical position of individuals may influence both the perception and perpetration of incivility, as individuals may be more or less predisposed to interpret actions from superiors as intentionally uncivil, or be less likely to perpetrate incivility in response to incivility performed by superiors, increasing the risk of development of secondary spirals against

coworkers, subordinates, or customers. In addition, this design could be used to determine whether individuals in a supervisory position tend to make more negative decisions in response to uncivil requests from subordinates than if the request had been phrased in a more polite manner.

Additional ways in which e-mail communication may be used in an uncivil manner also warrant further investigation, particularly given the ubiquitous use of e-mail communication in organizations. For example, Martin and Hine (2005) recently developed a model of workplace incivility consisting of four factors: hostility, privacy invasion, exclusionary behaviour, and gossiping. Characteristics of e-mail communication make it a useful medium for the investigation of these factors. For instance, it is possible that incivility originating in e-mail communication may transfer to the physical workplace setting, or enable the development of secondary spirals and modeling via the carbon-copy, or "cc" feature, which places these secondary recipients of the message in a "witness" role.

Indeed, future research should seek to examine further the remaining components of Andersson and Pearson's (1999) model of incivility perception and perpetration, such as whether reciprocal incivility escalates in intensity. Additionally, it is important to determine whether and what organizational and dispositional factors influence whether an incivility exchange manifests into an incivility spiral, continues as a series of "tit-for-tat" exchanges, or desists. Future research could also consider the possible contributions of individual factors as well as additional situational characteristics on the perception and perpetration of workplace incivility. For instance, previous research suggests that hostile attribution bias, reciprocation wariness, Type A behaviour pattern, and an individual's

level of Agreeableness may influence perceptions of incivility (Jawahar, 2002).

Differences in the perception of incivility due to individual differences are important to

study because behaviour interpreted as uncivil by one individual may be interpreted as

merely efficient workplace behaviour by another. In addition, coworkers from different

cultures may react very differently to the same workplace behaviour, increasing the

potential for misunderstandings or unintended incivility and incivility spirals. Such

information would be beneficial in the development of incivility training programs.

Some existing research has investigated whether there are "typical" targets and

perpetrators of incivility (Cortina et al., 2002; Cortina et al., 2001; Montgomery, Kane, &

Vance, 2004). For instance, survey research indicates that female employees self-report

more experienced incivility in the workplace than do males (Cortina et al., 2002; Cortina

et al., 2001; Gallus et al., 2006; Cortina & Lim, 2005). However, it is uncertain whether

female employees are in fact more likely to be targets of incivility, or if they instead are

more likely than males to *perceive* incivility (i.e., interpret actions to be uncivil). Indeed,

previous workplace harassment research has indicated that women interpret more

workplace behaviours to be intimidating, offensive, and hostile than do men, and that

women and men do not find the same behaviours to be sexually harassing (Berdahl,

Magley, & Waldo, 1996; Crow, Hartman, Hammond, & Folk, 1995).

Given that incivility shares the same social-interactionist nature as harassment,

females may be more likely than males to perceive instances of incivility occurring to

themselves and to others. This would have important implications for the design of

awareness, prevention and training programs in the workplace. Such a research question

could be investigated using the current study design, particularly since the gender of the

fictional individuals with whom the participants interact would not be influenced by peripheral influences such as attractiveness.

There is also a pressing need for empirical research demonstrating the dimensions and boundaries of the incivility construct. Such research would broaden our understanding of how this form of behaviour manifests in the workplace and enable us to differentiate it from other forms of workplace mistreatment (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Griffin & Lopez, 2005; Pearson et al., 2000). In particular, the role of interactional justice perceptions in the incivility process and the differential construct boundaries of interactional justice and incivility need to be empirically defined, as previous researchers have noted an apparent conceptual overlap between the constructs of workplace incivility and interactional injustice (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2001).

Interactional justice was originally conceptualized in the work of Bies and Moag (1986) as the quality of interpersonal treatment received from organizational decision makers during the execution of organizational procedures. Recent empirical research has further separated interactional justice into two separate dimensions: interpersonal and informational (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, & Porter, 2001). Interpersonal justice refers to the extent to which politeness, dignity, and respect characterize authorities' actions during the enactment of procedures and outcome distribution, whereas informational justice refers to the quality of explanations provided by superiors to clarify how and why procedures are employed and outcomes are distributed (Colquitt et al., 2001). Two indicators of interpersonal justice in particular appear to overlap with the construct of workplace civility: respect (e.g., courtesy; avoidance of rude or attacking behaviours) and propriety (e.g., avoiding improper questions).

Some research (Cortina et al., 2001; Jex et al., 2006; Penney & Spector, 2005) has therefore focused on the source of the mistreatment (e.g., superior, coworker, or subordinate) as a potential differentiating factor between the interpersonal component of interactional injustice and incivility. Conversely, rather than as an attribution or interpretation of behaviour, Andersson and her colleagues frame incivility as a characteristic of behaviour which may or may not be perceived by targets or witnesses, and suggest that the experience of incivility may lead an individual to make a justice attribution about the behaviour (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). The outcome of this justice evaluation may then influence the individual's response (i.e., whether or not the incivility is perpetrated in response).

According to Andersson and Pearson's (1999) conceptualization, feelings of interpersonal injustice can occur as a consequence of the perception of uncivil behaviour, as an attribution or evaluation made about uncivil behaviour. Indeed, interpersonal justice perceptions should be investigated as a potential interpretive lens through which an uncivil action is evaluated, mediating the relationship between the experience of incivility and its perpetration as a response.

Future research should also investigate the other forms of proposed incivility "spirals". For instance, Pearson and her colleagues (2000) suggest that exchanges of incivility may precipitate secondary spirals, in which incivility is indirectly displaced as a result of modeling. In this form of incivility spiral, witnesses who interpret a social exchange in the workplace to be uncivil may interpret such behaviour to be "the norm" for that organization, and may thereafter perform similar uncivil behaviours themselves. Intuitively, such a pattern of secondary spiraling may continue in social interactions

throughout the organization, far removed from the original participants of the original uncivil exchange. In some cases, reciprocal incivility may even extend outside the workplace, such as when it is directed at one's family or friends. These potential patterns of incivility perception and perpetration should be investigated, in addition to further substantiating the "tit-for-tat" incivility perpetration model.

Conclusion

The current study has begun the process of experimentally substantiating Andersson and Pearson's (1999) proposed model of incivility perception and perpetration by showing that, in general, individuals who perceive that an action is uncivil will respond with incivility. In addition, the current findings also demonstrate that one's workload influences the level of incivility initiated and perpetrated. The current study can therefore serve as a stepping stone for future research substantiating the incivility perception and perpetration process, in addition to investigating methods to prevent and minimize the impact of incivility in the workplace.

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Appendix A

The Two Versions of the "Note to Self" Draft E-mail Task

Version One:

Note to Self:

Send an e-mail to Brekke Price, who is responsible for ordering new equipment - need to know new quote price for 65 new headsets for call agents by next Monday. The equipment needs to be delivered by end of June at the latest.

Brekke Price's e-mail address: b_price_xpediant@inbox.com

Version Two:

Note to Self:

Contact Brekke Price in customer complaints department - set up a meeting time and place to discuss departmental issues. Include reminder that Brekke's coffee fund contribution for the last two weeks is overdue.

Brekke Price's e-mail: b_price_xpediant@inbox.com

Appendix B

The Civil and Uncivil E-mail Stimuli Received by Participants

E-mail A: Civil Version

To: r_doe_xpediant@inbox.com
From: a_dunn_xpediant@inbox.com
Subject: Concerns about Impending Change in Business Hours

Dear Mr. Doe,

A number of Customer Service Representatives are worried about the proposed plan to begin operating the call centre twenty four hours a day, seven days a week.

The majority of Customer Service Representatives working at this call centre do not want this change in business hours to take place. We are especially concerned about the negative effects of having to work at night and how this will affect our personal lives. This e-mail is being sent by me on behalf of the Customer Service Representatives to ask if you will meet with a group of us as soon as possible to discuss our concerns.

Thank you for your time,

Auren Dunn

E-mail A: Uncivil Version

To: r_doe_xpediant@inbox.com
From: a_dunn_xpediant@inbox.com
Subject: none

fyi,

a number of csrs are worried about the proposed plan to begin operating the call centre 24/7.

the majority of csrs working at this cc do not want this change in business hrs to take place. we are esp. concerned about the neg. effects of having to work at night & how this will affect our pers. lives. this e-mail is being sent by me on behalf of the csrs to ask if you will meet w/ a group of us asap to discuss our concerns.

auren

E-mail B: Civil Version

To: r_doe_xpediant@inbox.com
From: l_marshall_xpediant@inbox.com
Subject: Schedule Change Request

Dear Mr. Doe,

This e-mail is to address a problem with my work schedule for next week. I had previously booked the Friday of that week off to attend my cousin's wedding. However, I have just found out that the wedding is on Saturday, not Friday as I had previously thought. I am scheduled to work on Saturday, but due to the wedding I would like to request that this shift be changed to Friday.

I have talked to Sarah Drake, a call agent who is scheduled to work on Friday. Sarah would be willing to switch shifts with me so I can attend my cousin's wedding. May I have your approval to switch shifts with Sarah?

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Leigh Marshall

E-mail B: Uncivil Version

To: r_doe_xpediant@inbox.com
From: l_marshall_xpediant@inbox.com
Subject: none

hey r.,

this e-mail is wrt a problem with my work schedule for next week. i had previously booked the fri. of that week off to attend my cousin's wedding. however, i have just found out that the w. is on sat., not fri. as i had prev. thought. i am scheduled to work on sat., but due to the w. i wld like to req. that this shift be chgd to fri.

ihtt sarah drake, a call agent who is sched. to work on fri. s. would be willing to switch shifts w/ me so I can attend my cousin's w. may i have your ok to switch shifts w/ s.?

ttyl,

leigh

E-mail C: Civil Version

To: r_doe_xpediant@inbox.com
From: p_vickers_xpediant@inbox.com
Subject: Uncomfortable Chairs

Dear Mr. Doe,

This e-mail is in regard to a concern I have regarding the quality of the working environment for Customer Service Representatives here at Xpediant.

The chairs we Customer Service Representatives sit in while we conduct telephone calls are very uncomfortable. They are very old, and are not ergonomic. Many of the chairs have either plastic or wooden seats, with no armrests. People who sit in these chairs for long shifts experience back pain, fatigue, and headaches as a result, which negatively impacts our performance when interacting with customers. A number of people have even formed the habit of taking pain relief medications before starting their shifts, in an effort to prevent feeling the pain while working. Others undergo physiotherapy to relieve the soreness.

In my opinion, this is an important problem that needs to be addressed. On behalf of the Customer Service Representatives, would it be possible for you to make a formal suggestion to upper management that new ergonomic chairs be purchased to replace the chairs we are currently using? I understand that this is an expensive undertaking, and that you will need time to consider if the investment is worthwhile. Until that time, any suggestions you may have regarding how Customer Service Representatives could deal with this uncomfortable situation will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Pat Vickers

E-mail C: Uncivil Version

To: r_doe_xpediant@inbox.com
From: p_vickers_xpediant@inbox.com
Subject: mail message

r.,

this e-mail is wrt a concern i have re: the quality of the working environ.for csrs here at xpediant.

the chairs we csrs sit in while we conduct phone calls are very uncomfortable. they are very old, & are not ergonomic. many of the chairs have either plastic/wooden seats, w/ no armrests. ppl. who sit in these chairs fr long shifts exp. back pain, fatigue, & headaches as a result, which neg. impacts our performance when interacting with customers. a number of ppl have even formed the habit of taking pain relief meds before starting their shifts, in an effort to prevent feeling the pain while working. others undergo physio. to relieve the soreness.

imo, this is an imp. prob. that needs to be addressed. on behalf of the csrs, wld it be possible 4 u to make a formal sugg. to upper mgmt that new ergonomic chairs be purchased to replace the chairs we r currently using? i understand that this is an $$$ undertaking, & that u will need time to consider if the investment is worthwhile. until that time, any sugg. u may have re: how csrs could deal w/ this uncomft. sit. wld be greatly appreciated.

pat

E-mail D: Civil Version

To: r_doe_xpediant@inbox.com
Fr: c_votour_xpediant@inbox.com
Subject: Non-adherence to Smoking Policy

Dear Mr. Doe,

As the weather has gotten colder over the past few weeks, some Customer Service Representatives have started smoking their cigarettes directly in front of the entry doors to the building, instead of in the designated smoking area further away.

This has created an uncomfortable situation for we Customer Service Representatives who do not smoke but who must walk through this area in order to enter the building. I understand that it is cold outside, but I do not feel that people who do not smoke should have to endure inhaling second hand smoke as part of the daily routine when arriving at work and leaving the building at the end of the day and for various breaks.

As a number of other people have raised this same concern, we took it upon ourselves to remind a group of people smoking by the entry doors last week that it was against company policy to smoke there, and that they should move to the designated area if they wished to smoke. We received rude comments and nasty looks in return, and the smokers did not move away from the entrance. Since that time, it seems that even more csrs are refusing to use the designated smoking area, and it is now impossible to enter or leave the building without having to wade through a sea of smoke.

The seriousness of this situation has led me to contact you. Any recommendations you could provide to me and other non-smoking Customer Service Representatives to help us handle this situation would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your time,

Chris Votour

E-mail D: Uncivil Version

To: r_doe_xpediant@inbox.com
Fr: c_votour_xpediant@inbox.com
Subject: none

fyi,

as the weather has gotten colder over the past few wks, some csrs have started smoking their cigs directly in front of the entry doors to the building, instead of in the desig. smoking area further away.

this has created an uncomfortable sit. fr we csrs who don't smoke but who must walk through this area iot enter the building. i understand that it is cold outside, but idf that ppl who do not smoke should have to endure inhaling 2nd hand smoke as part of the daily routine when arriving at work & leaving the building at the end of the day & for various brks.

as a # of other ppl have raised ths same concern, we took it upon ourselves to remind a grp of ppl smoking by the entry doors last wk that it was against comp. policy to smoke there, & that they should move to the desig. area if they wished to smoke. we recved rude comments & nasty looks in return & the smokers did not move away from the entrance. since that time, it seems that even more csrs are refus. to use the desig. smoking area, & it is now impossible to enter/leave the building w/out having to wade through a c of smoke.

the seriousness of the sit. has led me to contact u. any recommendations u cld provide to me & other non-smoking csrs to help us handle this sit. wld be greatly appreciated.

chris

Appendix C

Representative Pilot Rating Package

Incivility has been defined 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" (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p.457). With this definition in mind, please read and rate the civility level of each of the following 4 e-mail messages. The e-mails are written from subordinates to a superior in the context of a call centre.

E-mail A

Please rate the civility level of e-mail A, given the workplace setting in which the e-mail was written:

	1 Very Inappropriate	2 Somewhat Inappropriate	3 Neither Appropriate or Inappropriate	4 Somewhat Appropriate	5 Very Appropriate	N/A
Overall impression/ tone of e-mail	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Priority level assigned to e-mail by sender/ entry in "Subject" line	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Introduction to/ beginning of message (including form of address used to address you – first or last name, none, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Punctuation	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Spelling/Grammar	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
The way in which the message ended (exp: "Thank You" type-tag; manner used to identify themselves – first/last name)	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Use of Acronyms/ shortened words (LOL, JK, FYI., "rep." for "representative", etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Are there any aspects of this e-mail which you found to be uncivil but which were not included in the above list? If so, what were these aspects?

Finally, to ensure that e-mails used in the study are understandable, please write/type out the following 2 e-mails correctly. For example, a sentence reading "The csrs are unhappy" would be rewritten as "The customer service representatives are unhappy".

E-mail 1

this e-mail is wrt a problem with my work schedule for next week. i had previously booked the fri. of that week off to attend my cousin's wedding. however, i have just found out that the w. is on sat., not fri. as i had prev. thought. i am scheduled to work on sat., but due to the w. i wld like to req. that this shift be chgd to fri.

ihtt sarah drake, a call agent who is sched. to work on fri. s. would be willing to switch shifts w/ me so I can attend my cousin's w. may i have your ok to switch shifts w/ s.?

ttyl

E-mail 2

fyi,

as the weather has gotten colder over the past few wks, some employees have started smoking their cigs directly in front of the entry doors to the building, instead of in the desig. smoking area further away.

this has created an uncomfortable sit. fr employees who don't smoke but who must walk through this area iot enter the building. i understand that it is cold outside, but idf that employees who do not smoke should have to endure inhaling sec.hand smoke as part of the daily routine when arriving at work & leaving the building at the end of the day & for various brks.

as a # of other ppl have raised ths same concern, we took it upon ourselves to remind a grp of ppl smoking by the entry doors last wk that it was against comp. policy to smoke there, & that they should move to the desig. area if they wished to smoke. we recved rude comments & nasty looks in return & the smokers did not move away from the entrance. since that time, it seems that even more smokers are refus. to use the desig. smoking area, & it is now impossible to enter/leave the building without having to wade through a c of smoke.

the seriousness of the sit. has led me to contact u. any recommendations u cld provide to me & other non-smokers to help us handle this sit. wld be greatly appreciated.

Appendix D

E-mail Incivility Scale – Participants

Please rate the quality of the e-mail, given the workplace setting in which the e-mail was written:

	1 Very Inappropriate	2 Somewhat Inappropriate	3 Neither Appropriate or Inappropriate	4 Somewhat Appropriate	5 Very Appropriate	N/A
Overall impression/ tone of e-mail	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Entry in "Subject" line - does it briefly summarize what the e-mail is about	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Introduction to/ beginning of message (including manner used to address you – first or last name, none, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Punctuation	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Spelling/Grammar	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Clarity	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
The way in which the message ended (exp: "Thank You" type-tag; manner used to identify themselves – first/last name)	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Use of Acronyms/ shortened words (LOL, JK, FYI, "rep." for "representative", etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Appendix E

Example Rating Package Completed by Raters

E-mail Civility Rating Form for Study Black

Rater #:

E-mail set being rated:

After rating the 3 e-mails, please compare them by ranking the e-mails in order of civility
(1 = most **civil**, 2 = second most civil/second most uncivil; 3 = most **uncivil**):

     1 (most civil)   = E-mail # ___
     2   = E-mail # ___
     3 (most uncivil)   = E-mail # ___

Was it difficult to rank these e-mails in order of civility?

     ___ Yes   ___ No

Incivility has been defined 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" (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p.457). A wide variety of behaviours can be interpreted as uncivil, such as staring, not holding a building entrance door open for another, and talking on cellular telephones while engaged in social interactions with others (Pearson, Anderson, & Porath, 2000). In the workplace, common examples of uncivil behaviours include leaving a jammed photocopier for another individual to discover and fix, ignoring or neglecting to greet another individual, borrowing supplies/materials and failing to return them, and neglecting to respond to a phone message/e-mail (Johnson & Indvik, 2001). Uncivil or inappropriate e-mail communication is often characterized as using the following indicators:

- Empty or vague Subject line
- Indication of importance or high priority when the e-mail is not really urgent
- Lack of a proper introduction (the message begins without addressing recipient, first name used when addressing the recipient in a more formal manner would be more appropriate)
- The e-mail is composed entirely in upper or lower case letters
- Extreme absence or excess (!!!!) of punctuation
- Improper spelling or grammar
- Poor formatting (no paragraphs/spaces between paragraphs, etc.)
- Lack of a "Thank you", etc., type tag at close of message
- Too many emoticons or acronyms
- Use of sarcasm or slang
- Inclusion of irrelevant information
- Lack of context: the recipient is forced to send a reply requesting clarification

Please keep this description of incivility in mind when reading and rating the civility level of the e-mail messages in this package. The e-mail messages and rating forms are provided on the following pages.

Each participant wrote three e-mail messages while acting as Rikaine Doe, a manager of a fictional call centre called Xpediant. Two e-mails were written in response to e-mails received from subordinates. Each participant received two e-mails to which they were required to write response/reply e-mails. These responses are the first two e-mails you will be rating. To aid in your rating, a brief synopsis of the original e-mail to which the participant is replying is provided below:

If the message is written in response to **a_dunn_xpediant@inbox.com**: The original e-mail from Auren Dunn expresses concerns about a proposed plan to begin operating the call centre twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. The majority of Customer Service Representatives do not want this change to take place and are concerned about various negative effects having to work at night. The e-mail closes with a request asking the participant to meet with the customer service representative as soon as possible to discuss these concerns.

If the message is written in response to **l_marshall_xpediant@inbox.com**: The original e-mail from Leigh Marshall requests a schedule change. Leigh booked the wrong day off to attend a wedding, and is now scheduled to work the day the wedding is taking place. Leigh has arranged with a coworker (Sarah) to take over this shift, and is e-mailing to obtain Rikaine's approval for the shift switch.

If the message is written in response to **p_vickers_xpediant@inbox.com**: The original e-mail from Pat Vickers outlines a number of concerns about the poor quality of the chairs used by customer service representatives at Xpediant, including various health problems resulting from their use. The e-mail closes by requesting Rikaine to make a formal suggestion to upper management that new ergonomic chairs be purchased to replace the chairs, and requests suggestions regarding how Customer Service Representatives could deal with this uncomfortable situation.

If the e-mail is written in response to **c_votour_xpediant@inbox.com**: The original e-mail from Chris Votour explains that some Customer Service Representatives have started smoking their cigarettes directly in front of the entry doors to the building, instead of in the designated smoking area further away. This has created an uncomfortable situation for Customer Service Representatives who do not smoke but who must walk through this area in order to enter the building. An unsuccessful confrontation between the non-smokers and smokers has resulted in even more people are refusing to use the designated smoking area. The e-mail ends with a request for Rikaine to provide recommendations to help non-smoking employees handle this situation.

Please rate the quality of the previous e-mail, given the workplace setting in which the e-mail was written.

	1 Very Uncivil	2 Somewhat Uncivil	3 Neither Civil or Uncivil	4 Somewhat Civil	5 Very Civil	Not Applicable (N/A)
Overall impression/ tone of e-mail	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Introduction to/ beginning of message	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Punctuation	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Spelling/Grammar	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Clarity	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
The way in which the message ended	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Use of acronyms/ shortened words	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Do you believe the author of the e-mail intended for it to be inappropriate?

YES   NO   UNSURE

Did the author of the e-mail mention that the original e-mail s/he received was rude or inappropriate?

YES   NO

Each participant was also required to compose one e-mail to b_price_xpediant@inbox.com that was not a response to a previously received e-mail (an "initiated" e-mail). This is the third e-mail you will be rating.

<u>In Condition 1, participants were given the following information to compose the e-mail:</u>

Send an e-mail to Brekke Price, who is responsible for ordering new equipment - need to know new quote price for 65 new headsets for call agents by next Monday. The equipment needs to be delivered by end of June at the latest.

<u>In Condition 2, participants were given the following information to compose the e-mail:</u>

Contact Brekke Price in customer complaints department - set up a meeting time and place to discuss departmental issues. Include a reminder that Brekke's coffee fund contribution for the last two weeks is overdue.

In this set, the participant was in Condition ___.

Appendix F

General Directions and Definitions Guide Used By Raters

General Directions and Definitions for Rating E-mails

- **Remember that you are rating an e-mail from a manager to a subordinate in a formal work setting, in which the manager and subordinate do not know one another.**
- **Rate only the format and structure of the e-mail and *how* things are said, rather than the actual content of the message or the adequacy of the decisions/suggestions made (with the exception of rude comments/"please" and "thank you" type comments), unless otherwise specified.**

Overall impression/tone of e-mail: Your initial reaction to the e-mail. If you received this e-mail after having sent out a polite e-mail, what would your reaction be?

Entry in "Subject" line: Does it briefly summarize what the e-mail is about/indicate what the e-mail is being written in regards to.

Introduction to/beginning of message: Consider the manner used to address the recipient (first or last name) and the formality of the situation – from a manager to a subordinate and individuals who do not know one another. Also consider how the e-mail begins – a nice beginning to the message (i.e., thanks for bringing this to my attention, etc.) or just starting in immediately (i.e., I'll look into this.).

Punctuation: Are there excessive punctuation errors/lack of punctuation and spacing?

Spelling/Grammar: Are there excessive punctuation/grammatical errors? Also, some spelling errors would be considered more serious than others, such as spelling a name wrong.

Clarity: How clear is the message? Consider spacing, whether you had to reread parts of the message to understand what was being said, unnecessary complexity...essentially whether anything impeded your ability to read and understand the message quickly and accurately. Also consider whether a response e-mail would have to be sent to gather required information (i.e., if a meeting is agreed to, is a time and place for the meeting mentioned? If not, a clarifying e-mail would have to be resent).

The way in which the message ended: Did the e-mail end with a "Thank you for your concerns", etc. type-tag? How did the individual identify themselves – Rikaine or R. Doe, etc.? Could the e-mail have ended in a way that would be more polite?

Use of Acronyms: Given the workplace setting in which these e-mails are written, the use of any acronyms would be inappropriate.

Footnotes

1. Three of these participants were in the low workload condition and one was in the high workload condition.

2. The number of males and females was not proportional across the between subjects factor: there were 18 males and 58 females in the low workload condition, and 29 males and 50 females in the high workload condition. However, independent samples t-tests indicate no significant mean differences across gender within workload condition for any of the outcome variables (perceptions and self and other ratings of incivility).

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