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The Emotional Aftermath of Incivility: Anger, Guilt, and the Role of Organizational Commitment

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Past research has demonstrated that everyday disrespect on the job (i.e., incivility) is a stressor that undermines personal and professional wellbeing. However, it remains unclear how incivility interferes with target wellbeing, and for whom. To shed light on this process, we investigate how *emotional response* (both global negative affect and facet-based discrete emotions—namely, anger and guilt) and *organizational commitment* mediate and moderate (respectively) incivility outcomes. Social Identity Theory and Affective Events Theory frame this work. We tested hypotheses using 2 samples: women working in the Midwest of the United States ($N = 419$) and women and men working across the United States ($N = 479$), including coworkers of those women and men ($N = 160$). We found incivility-driven emotion to mediate personal and professional outcomes, including reduced empowerment and self-esteem and greater job and work withdrawal. Feelings of guilt, but not anger, predicted decreased performance (as rated by coworkers). Significant interactive effects between incivility and commitment also emerged, such that individuals high in commitment reported more negative emotional response—especially guilt—compared to their less committed counterparts. These moderated-mediation results expose a dilemma when it comes to commitment: the people whom organizations value the most, those who are highly committed, are most harmed when interpersonal stressors arise.

Keywords: incivility, negative affect, discrete emotion, commitment

Your boss brushes you off during a meeting. Your coworker sends you a condescending e-mail. Your client interrupts you. Rude and condescending interactions infiltrate many aspects of life, including work. When subtle and ambiguous in intent to harm, these behaviors constitute incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Employees targeted with this stressor endure a variety of outcomes, including poor health, dissatisfaction, and psychological and behavioral withdrawal (e.g., Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008). However, it remains unclear how incivility derails personal and professional wellbeing, and for whom. To shed light on this process, we turn to person-level experiences of emotion and commitment.

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This project makes three noteworthy contributions. First, we investigate how different facets of emotion translate interpersonal stress into target harm. Incivility-driven emotion is relatively uncharted territory, and we take a comprehensive approach by examining not only global *negative affect* but also facet-based *discrete emotion*. This broadens the incivility conversation to consider a range of emotional responses, both outward-focused (anger) as well as subtle, inward-looking (guilt). Second, the incivility literature has neglected the role of target organizational commitment; we theorize and test this individual difference as a moderator of the stress-to-strain process. Commitment, we suggest, may intensify emotional reactions to incivility. Organizations of all kinds (e.g., business, educational, religious) seek highly committed individuals. However, we propose that strong commitment comes with costs, exacerbating the emotional aftermath of uncivil events. Last, we investigate individual outcomes that have received little attention in incivility research, including declining *empowerment* and *performance*. Figure 1 provides a conceptual overview of the ideas that follow.

Translating Insult Into Injury: The Role of Negative Affect and Discrete Emotions

Broadly speaking, emotions are responses that have "beneficial or harmful consequences for the individual's concerns" and may interrupt thought processes (Frijda, 1993, p. 387). More specifically, *negative affect* is conceptualized as a higher order factor that encompasses *discrete emotional states* (Tellegen, Watson, & Clark, 1999). We use the term negative affect to refer to the general negative domain and reserve discrete emotions to refer to specific negative feelings (i.e., anger and guilt). Affective Events Theory (AET; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) suggests that emotion is a central pathway between stressful work events and outcomes. AET focuses on the "structure, causes and consequences of affective experiences at work" (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996, p. 11), wherein people have emotional reactions to adverse work events, which then affect behaviors and attitudes. We use AET as a framework to conceptualize how the emotional reaction to uncivil treatment mediates, at least in part, individual effects of incivility.

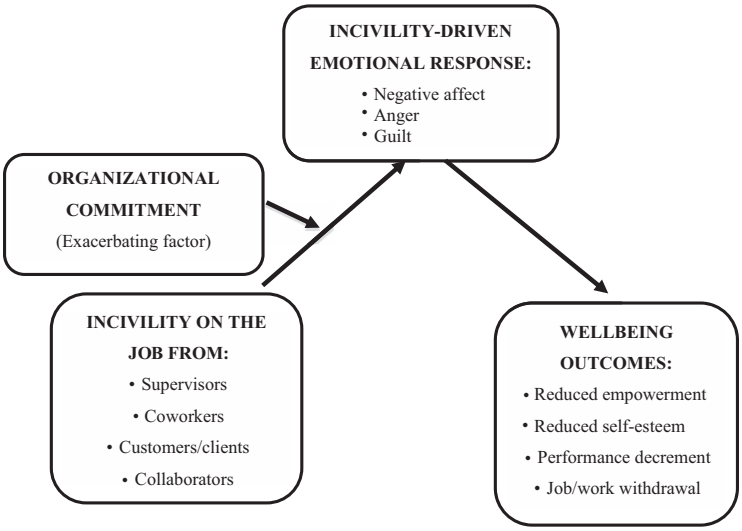

Figure 1. Conceptual model of organizational commitment moderating the effect of incivility on negative emotional response, which in turn influences personal and professional well-being.

Negative Affect in Response to Incivility

A handful of studies have demonstrated that uncivil work experiences fuel negative affect. Pearson, Andersson, and Wegner (2001, p. 1404) found, in open-ended interviews, that most participants noted negative affect (e.g., feeling "down," "moody") following uncivil treatment. Employing a daily diary method, Zhou, Yan, Che, and Meier (2015) found that workplace incivility related to afterwork negative affect. In a survey study, Bunk and Magley (2013) reported links between incivility frequency and "emotionality" (a composite of four emotional reactions: anger, guilt, fear/anxiety, and disgust). Finally, recent experimental work by Giumetti and colleagues (2013) found participants described greater negative affect following supervisor-instigated incivility online. Expecting to replicate these general patterns, we hypothesize:

> *Hypothesis 1:* Greater experiences of incivility will be associated with greater negative affect in response.

Taking a Closer Look: Discrete Emotional Response

Investigating the incivility–emotion link from different perspectives, we consider not only global negative affect but also *discrete emotional response* (e.g., Ekman, 1992). There is debate regarding the structure of general affect versus discrete emotions (e.g., Russell, 2003); however, scholars have provided evidence of the utility of discrete emotions, as well as their unique predictors and outcomes (see Izard, 2007). We follow this tradition and consider two discrete emotions: anger and guilt. These emotions are types of "high negative affect" (i.e., emotions especially characteristic of negative affective reactions) and therefore may be particularly relevant and powerful in organizational life (Watson, Wiese, Vaidya, & Tellegen, 1999). Anger, in particular, is a discrete emotion often discussed in the incivility literature, playing a pivotal role in the "incivility spiral" theory (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), whereby targets experience anger and outwardly aggress following incivility. We chose a second discrete emotion similar in its categorization as high negative affect, but different in its focus: guilt. Whereas anger is theorized to focus on forces outside the individual, guilt is considered an inward-focused emotion. This distinction is important, as it presents a somewhat counterintuitive response to rudeness: individuals may experience transgressions and turn to themselves as a source of blame.

Incivility-Driven Anger

Focused outward, anger is distinguished by having an external locus of control or a tendency to blame someone else for a stressful situation (Smith, Haynes, Lazarus, & Pope, 1993). Similar to the "tit for tat" model of the incivility spiral, the AET-Based Model of workplace aggression (Glomb, Steel, & Arvey, 2002) emphasizes anger as a key affective response to aggressive experiences in organizations.

Empirical investigations of anger as a reaction to workplace incivility have been limited. Bunk and Magley (2013) found incivility frequency correlates with anger, $r = .42$, $p < .01$ and Porath and Pearson (2012) reported a similar relationship, $r = .32$, $p < .01$. Qualitatively, Pearson and colleagues (2001) found that some managers responded to incivility with anger; others, however, explained that anger is "too hot" an emotional descriptor given the ambiguous nature of uncivil transgressions. The role of anger in the incivility process thus deserves further attention. The strong theoretical emphasis on incivility-driven anger leads us to hypothesize that:

> *Hypothesis 2:* Greater experiences of incivility will be associated with greater anger.

Incivility-Driven Guilt

We extend the examination of discrete emotions to include guilt, an inward-focused emotion. The ambiguity surrounding the nature, cause, and intent of incivility leaves room for individuals to assign different meanings to the transgression, including questioning their own culpability in eliciting the behavior: "Was that person rude because I did something wrong?", "Was it something I said?", or simply, "What did I do to deserve this?" These thoughts could precede guilt, which is "aroused by attributions to causes of an internal and controllable nature" (Ferguson, Brugman, White, & Eyre, 2007, p. 332).

An additional reason to focus on guilt is its potential to trigger restorative action. Guilt in-

cites the desire to undo or make amends for a behavior (Niedenthal, Tangney, & Gavanski, 1994). At the same time, guilt may undermine one's sense of self-confidence and self-worth, as people second-guess and dwell on their role in the interaction. In the context of incivility, guilt could be an important emotional precursor to conflict diffusion and relational repair (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). For these reasons, guilt merits scholarly attention in this area. We hypothesize:

> *Hypothesis 3:* Greater experiences of incivility will be associated with greater guilt.

Further, for both Hypotheses 2 and 3, we acknowledge the possibility that discrete emotions can, and do, co-occur (Ganem, 2010). We allow for these relationships by including both discrete emotions in an integrated model of the incivility experience.

The Role of Commitment

Incivility is unlikely to trigger the same emotional responses in all targets, and this variation may depend on organizational commitment. We focus on affective commitment (i.e., an individual's attachment, identification, and involvement with the organization), because past research finds it to be the most potent predictor of positive organizational and individual outcomes (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002), including well-being (Meyer & Maltin, 2010). However, theory suggests that commitment has costs in certain situations.

Theorists have positioned commitment as a component of social identity (Leach et al., 2008), so we use Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) as a framework to consider costs of commitment. Broadly speaking, SIT posits that group membership becomes self-referential when an individual values the group. This applies to organizational membership: strong identification with the organization can foster a "perceived oneness with the organization" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 23) and trigger incorporation of the organization's values and interests into one's self-concept (Van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006). As a result, highly committed individuals may feel stronger negative emotions following workplace mistreatment, as they view the problems of the organization as their own.

Incivility is often used to exclude individuals from events and affairs in organizations. Employees who feel committed to and invested in an organization likely take exclusionary behaviors to heart, elevating their negative emotions. This is consistent with theory that stressors related to one's social identity (e.g., occupational membership) may damage psychological well-being (Thoits, 1991). As such, we expect highly committed employees to interpret uncivil events through a lens of personal identification with the organization, amplifying negative emotions.

Past research has found support for the exacerbating role of commitment. Irving and Coleman (2003) reported that commitment increases the negative effect of role ambiguity on job tension. Likewise, in a sample of nurses, commitment intensified the relationship between work stressors (e.g., workload, criticisms) and burnout (Reilly, 1994). In the current study, we expect organizational commitment to amplify the impact of incivility on emotional response:

> *Hypothesis 4:* Organizational commitment will exacerbate effects of incivility on (a) negative affect, (b) anger, and (c) guilt.

We expect a worsening of targets' personal and professional outcomes following their negative emotional responses to incivility. These outcomes are the focus of the next section.

Outcomes of Incivility

Incivility affects target well-being in many ways. Given our focus on SIT, we examine personal outcomes related to self-cognitions (psychological empowerment, self-esteem). To demonstrate the practical relevance of emotion, we also consider professional outcomes related to the organization's bottom line (performance decrement, job withdrawal, work withdrawal).

Personal Outcomes Related to the Self

Empowerment

Empowerment is "a set of psychological states that are necessary for individuals to feel a sense of control in relation to their work" (Spreitzer, 2008, p. 56). Thomas and Velthouse (1990) theorized that empowerment is a state-like set of cognitions that vary according to the work climate, suggesting that social (and anti-

social) job experiences are relevant. Empowerment becomes especially salient in ambiguous situations in which individuals must make sense of the situations and choose a course of action (Brockner et al., 2004). Incivility provides this context of ambiguity, with intent to harm being uncertain (e.g., Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina, 2008). From an evolutionary perspective, humans experience physiological changes and negative emotions in preparation for fight-or-flight responses to threat (Levenson, 1999). We posit that the negative emotions associated with incivility experiences will undermine employees' abilities to feel empowered because negative emotions narrow cognitive abilities and behaviors (e.g., Fredrickson, 2001). Applying this to a work setting, we propose that negative emotions related to incivility are associated with lower feelings of empowerment.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem, or sense of self-worth, is the most fundamental form of core self-evaluation (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997) and one of the best dispositional predictors of organizational outcomes (Judge & Bono, 2001). Incivility research has overlooked self-esteem as an outcome, but general studies of social exclusion find associations with diminished self-esteem, especially when the social exclusion is for personal reasons (e.g., Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Incivility can foster similar perceptions of social exclusion (Caza & Cortina, 2007), and its ambiguous nature may lead targets to question causes of the maltreatment. Targets may attribute incivility to personal deficits, which could lower self-esteem. Further, the link between incivility and self-esteem is likely mediated by negative emotions. Experiencing negative emotions and cognitions following incivility requires coping to constructively remove sources of distress and actively manage difficult situations (Epstein & Meier, 1989). Successful management is possible; however, it relies heavily on the ability to avoid negative coping mechanisms such as rumination and defense mechanisms such as distorted perceptions (Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003). Unsuccessfully coping with incivility and associated negative emotions may leave individuals susceptible to self-doubt and decrements in self-esteem.

Professional Outcomes Related to the Bottom Line

Performance

Pearson and Porath (2009) theorized that uncivil dynamics may undermine team performance as members experience less psychological safety and risk taking. Empirical research in this area is burgeoning; however, results have been mixed. Sliter, Sliter, and Jex (2012) found customer incivility, but not coworker incivility, to predict decrements in sales performance. Nevertheless, Sakurai and Jex (2012) reported that coworker incivility decreases (self-rated) work effort. In a promising step in identifying pathways through which incivility interferes with performance, Chen and colleagues (2013) reported that incivility links indirectly to task performance through work disengagement. We theorize that negative emotions are also essential in this linkage, proposing that incivility-driven emotion undercuts performance, as rated by coworkers. Meta-analytic research supports a negative relationship between negative affect and performance (Shockley, Ispas, Rossi, & Levine, 2012). Research on the relationship between anger and performance is less clear, with large variability in effect sizes (Shockley et al., 2012). Work on guilt is limited, with one study finding no effect on performance (Brown, Westbrook, & Challagalla, 2005). The present study adds to this nascent line of research on the relationship between discrete emotions and performance.

Job and Work Withdrawal

Incivility targets often think about leaving—and ultimately do exit—their organizations at greater rates than nontargets (Cortina et al., 2001; Lim et al., 2008; Pearson et al., 2001). Incivility also relates to work withdrawal (i.e., reducing or avoiding time spent on work tasks; Cortina et al., 2001; Hanisch & Hulin, 1991). Work withdrawal undermines organizations by reducing productivity and success (e.g., Sagie, Birati, & Tziner, 2002). Both kinds of withdrawal affect the bottom line, and we expect emotion to mediate this process, translating incivility experiences into intentions and actions that remove one from his or her job. Negative emotions are likely to promote actions aimed at

improving the situation for the target, alleviating the unwanted state of negative affect (Elfenbein, 2007). In the case of negative interpersonal interactions at work, targets may remove themselves from the situations by withdrawing (Scott & Barnes, 2011). This is consistent with evidence that workgroup negative affect predicts absenteeism and turnover (Pelled & Xin, 1999). In sum, we predict:

> *Hypothesis 5:* Incivility will link (indirectly, via emotion) with decreased (a) empowerment, (b) self-esteem, and (c) performance, as well as increased (d) job and work withdrawal.

The Current Project

This research draws on self-report (Studies 1 and 2) and multisource (Study 2) data to illuminate links among incivility, emotion, and commitment. In Study 1, we test hypotheses regarding incivility-driven negative affect using data from working women in the United States. Study 2 utilizes data from a nationwide sample of U.S. working adults to address incivility-driven discrete emotions. Study 2 also adds coworker-rated measurement of performance.

Given the personal nature of our constructs (e.g., uncivil acts that may not occur publicly; private emotional response; sense of empowerment), self-report measurement was essential (Chan, 2009). While this increases concern over correlations inflated due to common method bias, we incorporated features into the research design to minimize this possibility, including separating items assessing mistreatment from those measuring outcomes, assuring participants of their anonymity, and supplementing self-reported outcome measures with performance ratings by coworkers. These design elements protect against the possibility of undue influence from monomethod bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). More information about the participants and procedures of these data collections appears in Marchiondo, Cortina, and Kabat-Farr (2016).[1]

Study 1 Method

Participants and Procedure

In Study 1, we used data from a larger survey investigating women's work experiences in the Midwest United States. We invited women to participate in an initial short online "snapshot survey" through a range of outlets (e.g., e-mails to regional women's organizations, social media posts). Of the 4,776 respondents, 3,593 indicated interest in the longer primary survey.

We then sent paper surveys to a random sample of 500 respondents (oversampling women of color, who are underrepresented in organizational research). To maximize survey response rates we adhered to Dillman, Smyth, and Christian's (2008) recommendations (e.g., reminder postcards, replacement surveys, $2 token incentives). Participants were compensated $10 for completing the survey and were mailed brief summary reports. We obtained an 85% response rate (N = 424). We omitted five surveys based on invalid completion (e.g., reporting a positive work event, not incivility), resulting in n = 419.

The sample was racially diverse (54% White, 19% Black or African American, 16% Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander, 6% Hispanic/Latina) and averaged 42.24 years of age (SD = 10.34). Approximately 50% had a graduate or professional degree, 39% had a college degree, and 11% had less than a college degree. Participants worked an average of 43.71 hours per week (SD = 9.39) and had been with their current organization an average of 9.23 years (SD = 8.21). They worked in a variety of industries, from dentistry to transportation to law.

Measurement

Descriptive statistics, alphas, and intercorrelations for all variables appear in Table 1. Unless noted, response scales ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Incivility and related affect. To measure experiences of incivility on the job, we used the six highest-loading items from Cortina and colleagues' (2001) Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS). This scale assesses the frequency of disrespectful, rude, or condescending conduct from supervisors, coworkers, clients/customers, or collaborators in the past year (from 1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*). Sample items read "paid

[1] Although drawing on the same larger data sets, this other study has a different focus from the current article, testing the relationships between incivility, intentionality, appraisal, and different outcomes.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, Scale Reliabilities, and Intercorrelations Among Study 1 Variables

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Incivility	1.89	.78	(.88)							
2. Incivility-driven negative affect	1.93	.71	.41**	(.86)						
3. Empowerment	5.48	.87	−.18**	−.25**	(.85)					
4. Work withdrawal	1.90	.61	.13*	.15**	−.11*	(.69)				
5. Job withdrawal	3.26	1.82	.33**	.22**	−.40**	.25**	(.79)			
6. Organizational commitment	4.64	1.32	−.24**	−.12*	.54**	−.11	−.63**	(.84)		
7. Perpetrator power	2.85	1.23	.26**	.27**	−.23**	.06	.26**	−.19**	(.87)	
8. Pessimism	2.18	.67	.14**	.16**	−.34**	.03	.20**	−.23**	.06	(.83)

Note. Scale reliabilities (alpha) are along the diagonal.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

little attention to your statements or showed little interest in your opinion" and "addressed you in unprofessional terms, either publicly or privately." In total, 85% of the sample reported at least one uncivil workplace experience over the past year.

Participants who reported past-year incivility were immediately asked a series of questions about the most recent uncivil event. When asked about the source of that incivility, 96% noted that it came from a fellow member of the organization (64% of instigators were superiors, 20% were colleagues, and 12% were subordinates). They also described their emotional responses to that uncivil event, using the Positive and Negative Affectivity Scale (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Participants indicated the extent to which they felt each of 10 negative emotions (e.g., distressed, upset, irritable) following their most recent uncivil experience, using a scale ranging from 1 = *very slightly or not at all* to 5 = *extremely.*

Empowerment. We used Spreitzer's (1995) 12-item scale to assess the psychological experience of empowerment at work. Sample items include "The work I do is meaningful to me" and "I am confident about my ability to do my job".

Job withdrawal. We used two items to measure job withdrawal (Balfour & Wechsler, 1996; Porter, Crampon, & Smith, 1976): "I often think about quitting this job" and "I will probably look for a new job in the next year."

Work withdrawal. We used a 5-item scale (Hanisch & Hulin, 1991) to assess work withdrawal. Sample items include "completed work assignments late" and "made excuses to get out of the office," and participants responded on a scale from 1 = *never* to 5 = *many times*. Respondents were reminded of the anonymity of their answers.

Organizational affective commitment. Organizational affective commitment was measured using Meyer, Allen, and Smith's (1993) six-item scale. Sample items include "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization" and "I do not feel a strong sense of 'belonging' to my organization" (reverse coded).

Control variables. Perpetrator power is a construct that assesses the amount of control or power an instigator has over the target (Swan, 1997), such as an ability to influence promotional decisions or performance evaluations. Because prior research has found workplace victimization experiences to depend on power dynamics (e.g., Porath & Pearson, 2012), we expected that power disparities between perpetrator and target might affect emotional response of the target. In order to rule out this alternative explanation for negative emotional response, we therefore added perpetrator power as a control in all analyses, using Swan's (1997) Perpetrator Power Scale (e.g., "chances of moving up in the company," "performance evaluations").

There is also a common argument that "whiny" individuals perceive more negative events and then report inflated outcomes through skewed survey responses. For example, negative trait disposition may cause some people to be sensitive to every behavior that might

be considered rude. Likewise, a negative disposition may cause negative reactions on the job (e.g., withdrawing from work tasks). Therefore, incivility may be the primary cause, but the individual's response (work withdrawal) may be amplified by their overall negative disposition (Munson, Hulin, & Drasgow, 2000). One indicator of negative disposition is pessimism, which we measured with six items from the Life Orientation Test–Revised Scale (e.g., "If something can go wrong for me, it will"; Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994).

Study 1 Results

Model of Incivility-Driven Negative Affect

We conducted structural equation modeling in LISREL 8.80 using maximum likelihood estimation with latent variables to test pathways from experiences of incivility to outcomes via negative affect. We controlled for perpetrator power in the analyses by modeling it as an exogenous variable predicting negative affect in response. Excluding participants who reported no past-year incivility experience (and therefore no emotional response to incivility), we had an effective sample size of 336. Following recommendations by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), we conducted a two-stage approach to modeling. First, we estimated the measurement model for the latent variables to evaluate the extent to which the manifest indicators adequately measured their corresponding latent constructs. Next, we formed latent variables. For constructs with more than three items, we created three multiitem indicators. For constructs with three items or fewer, each item represented a single indicator of the construct. To support model identification, the first factor loading of each indicator was set to 1.0. We evaluated fit using guidelines for both "incremental" and "absolute" fit (e.g., Hu & Bentler, 1995, 1999).

The goodness of fit indices for the measurement model indicated a good fit to the data, $\chi^2/df = 2.11$, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .058 (90% confidence interval [CI] for RMSEA = .05 to .07), Nonnormed Fit Index (NNFI) = .96, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .97. Standardized factor loadings ranged from .53 to .96, and all were statistically significant. The structural model also fit the data well, $\chi^2/df = 2.41$, RMSEA = .066 (90% CI for RMSEA = .06 to .08), NNFI = .95, CFI = .96); see Figure 2 for completely standardized path coefficients. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, after controlling for perpetrator

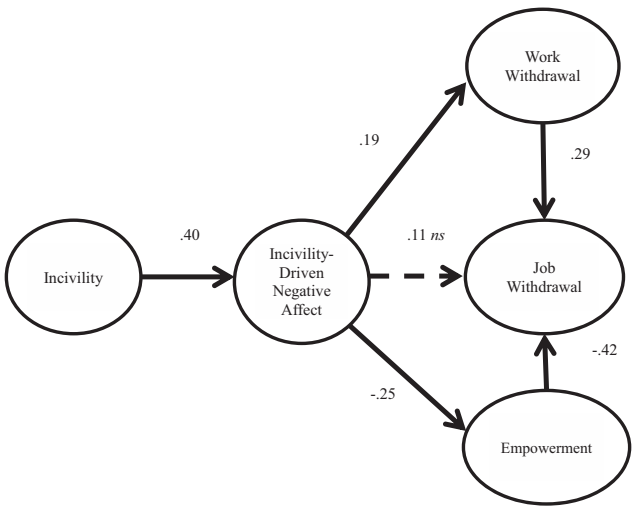

Figure 2. Structural model results for incivility-driven negative affect (Study 1). Paths with solid arrows are significant, $p < .05$. Not shown is the path from the control variable, perpetrator power, to negative affect ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$). Results are virtually unchanged when controlling instead for trait pessimism, which also predicts negative affect ($\beta = .14$, $p < .05$).

power, greater experiences of incivility were associated with increased feelings of negative affect (β = .40). Negative affect, in turn, was associated with greater work withdrawal (β = .19) and decreased feelings of empowerment (β = −.25). There was no direct relationship between incivility-driven negative affect and job withdrawal (β = .11, *ns*). However, we found an indirect link between negative affect and job withdrawal, via work withdrawal and feelings of (dis)empowerment (β = .29 and −.42, respectively). In addition, we calculated the standardized indirect effect of incivility on outcomes, through incivility-driven negative affect and found significant effects on empowerment, work withdrawal, and job withdrawal (β = −.10, .08, and .11, respectively), providing support for Hypotheses 5a and 5d.

To rule out an alternative explanation, we reran the structural model, controlling for pessimism, and found pessimism to link to incivility-driven negative affect (β = .14). Results were virtually unchanged, indicating that our findings cannot be attributed to negative disposition.

The Role of Commitment in the Incivility-to-Affect Link

To test whether organizational commitment moderates the relationship between incivility and affect, we tested a moderated regression model, looking for a significant interaction between incivility and commitment. To reduce problems of multicollinearity, continuous variables were centered in both their main effect and interaction terms (Aiken & West, 1991).

Recall that in Hypothesis 4 we expected organizational commitment to amplify the incivility-to-affect relationship. When predicting negative affect, main effects of incivility and commitment explained 21% of the variance, $F(4, 323) = 21.88$, $p = .00$, after controlling for perpetrator power (see Table 2). The interaction term significantly improved the model's predictive ability, $\Delta F(1, 323) = 4.75$, $p = .03$. To illustrate this effect, we graphed the significant interaction by those high in commitment versus those low in commitment (see Figure 3). Figure 3 demonstrates that, when experiencing high levels of incivility, highly committed individuals respond with greater feelings of negative affect (unstandardized B = .46, $p < .001$), compared to their less committed counterparts (unstandardized B = .26, $p < .001$). Consistent with our hypothesis, organizational commitment exacerbated the negative emotional impact of incivility.

In summary, we found incivility-driven negative affect to be a key mediator of the link between incivility and the two outcome variables (i.e., increased work withdrawal and decreased empowerment). We did not find a direct path between affect and job withdrawal; however, there was evidence of an indirect link through work withdrawal and empowerment. We also found evidence of organizational commitment intensifying the relationship between incivility and its associated negative affect. We now move to Study 2, where we examine emotional response more closely with an analysis of incivility-driven anger and guilt.

Table 2
Moderated Multiple Regression Analysis of Negative Affect, Predicted by Incivility, Commitment, and Incivility × Commitment Interaction (Study 1)

	Incivility-driven negative affect							
	Step 1				Step 2			
Variable	ΔR^2	B	*SE* B	β	ΔR^2	B	*SE* B	β
Step 1	.20**							
Incivility		.36**	.05	.40**				
Commitment		−.003	.03	−.005				
Perpetrator power		.10**	.03	.18**				
Step 2					.01*			
Incivility × Commitment						.08*	.04	.11*
Total R^2					.21**			

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

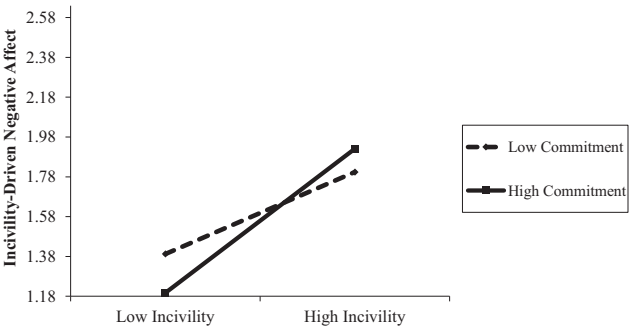

Figure 3. Moderating role of organizational commitment on incivility-driven negative affect (Study 1).

Study 2 Method

Participants and Procedures

Study 2 utilized data from a nationwide sample of adults and enabled us to test our hypotheses regarding discrete emotion, as well as linkages to performance (as rated by coworkers). Participants were recruited via StudyResponse, which connects researchers with participants diverse in age, race, education, and occupation.

StudyResponse recruited potential participants via e-mail based on prescreening requirements (at least 18 years old, living in the United States, working at least 30 hours/week). The survey contained multiple items to measure attention (e.g., "Please answer *strongly disagree"),* and we excluded any participant who incorrectly answered. We also screened for careless responding (e.g., excluding respondents who answered *strongly agree* to both positively and negatively valenced items of the same scale). StudyResponse compensated participants $10 upon receipt of complete and valid data. Following these procedures, we obtained usable data from 43% of invited participants, for a sample size of $N = 479$.

With an average age of 41.91 years ($SD = 11.43$), the sample was 60% female and 83% White (and 6% Black or African American, 9% Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander/Hawaiian Native, 5% Hispanic/Latina/o; participants could identify more than one race/ethnicity). Participants' educational levels ranged from 23% holding a graduate or professional degree to 47% holding a college degree or some graduate school to 30% with less than a college degree. Participants had been employed in their current organizations an average of 9.80 years ($SD = 7.30$). About half of the sample worked 40 hours/week (48%), whereas 16% worked between 30 and 39 hours/week, and 36% worked more than 40 hours/week. Occupational industries varied widely, including information technology, real estate, and retail.

We also collected coworker-rated data. StudyResponse recontacted our 479 Study 2 participants and asked them to invite one colleague to complete a short survey. Interested participants forwarded a survey link to a coworker, who entered an anonymous StudyResponse identifier to enable matching the data. A total of 160 coworkers returned complete and valid data, yielding a response rate of 33%. The coworker survey was not incentivized and was completely anonymous, limiting the likelihood of primary survey participants completing a survey on their own behalf. This coworker sample was 51% female, and 95% had known the primary participant more than a year.

Measurement

Descriptive statistics, alphas, and intercorrelations for all variables appear in Table 3

Incivility and related emotion. To measure incivility, we used six items from Cortina and colleagues' (2001) Workplace Incivility Scale as in Study 1, with an additional three items from the Cyber-Incivility Scale to assess uncivil e-mail experiences (Lim & Teo, 2009). Sample cyber items read: "sent you e-mails

Table 3
Means, Standard Deviations, Scale Reliabilities, and Intercorrelations Among Study 2 Variables

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Incivility	1.64	.75	(.92)									
2. Incivility-driven anger	2.30	1.05	.43**	(.90)								
3. Incivility-driven guilt	1.45	.74	.37**	.37**	(.90)							
4. Empowerment	5.66	.88	−.27**	−.15**	−.03	(.90)						
5. Self-esteem	3.23	.53	−.29**	−.17**	−.23**	.46**	(.90)					
6. Job withdrawal	3.10	1.90	.42**	.24**	.14*	−.42**	−.35**	(.85)				
7. Organizational commitment	4.70	1.55	−.37**	−.16**	.04	.58**	.38**	−.70**	(.92)			
8. Performance	4.46	.65	−.44**	−.19	−.42**	.17*	.44**	−.23**	.15	(.72)		
9. Perpetrator power	2.85	1.32	.30**	.21**	.26**	−.08	−.14*	.21**	−.09	−.34**	(.90)	
10. Pessimism	2.42	.83	.28**	.24**	.13*	−.42**	−.71**	.36**	−.45**	−.25**	.14**	(.89)

Note. Scale reliabilities (alpha) are along the diagonal.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

using a rude and discourteous tone" and "used ALL CAPS to shout at you through e-mail." Participants responded using a 5-point scale from *never* to *very often*. In total, 73% reported experiencing at least one uncivil incident on the job in the past year.

Paralleling Study 1, participants who reported any past-year incivility received questions about their emotional response to their most recent uncivil event. We used two subscales of the PANAS–Extended Form (PANAS-X; Watson & Clark, 1994). Six items tapped incivility-driven anger, including "hostile", "angry", and "irritable". Incivility-driven guilt was measured using another six items (e.g., "guilty" and "dissatisfied with self"). Participants indicated the extent to which they felt each emotion following their most recent uncivil experience (from 1 = *very slightly or not at all* to 5 = *extremely*).

Self-esteem. With the 10-item Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), participants rated their sense of self-worth (e.g., "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself" and "I feel that I'm a person of worth") from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

Job withdrawal, organizational commitment, perpetrator power, and pessimism. Measurement of these four constructs was identical to that in Study 1.

Job performance (coworker-rated). We obtained coworker ratings of focal respondents' job performance, using seven items (Williams & Anderson, 1991; see Fritz, Yankelevich, Zarubin, & Barger, 2010). Coworker ratings of performance help to overcome the limitations of self-report data, and given the likelihood of coworkers knowing typical work patterns of coworkers, we expect these other reports to be highly convergent with actual performance (Fox, Spector, Goh, & Bruursema, 2007). With a 5-point response scale (from *never* to *many times*), sample items read: "Fulfilled responsibilities specified in his/her job description" and "Failed to perform essential duties" (reverse coded).

Study 2 Results

Model of Incivility-Driven Anger and Guilt

Again using structural equation modeling with latent variables, we tested pathways from

experiences of incivility to outcomes, via the discrete emotions of anger and guilt (controlling for perpetrator power by modeling it as an exogenous variable predicting emotion).[2] Outcomes were empowerment and self-esteem. We had no directional prediction between these two endogenous variables, and there is no theoretical precedent to expect one to logically antecede the other; we therefore allowed their error terms to correlate.

Excluding participants who reported no past-year incivility experience (and therefore no emotional response to incivility), the effective sample size was 352. We estimated the measurement model, finding good data-model fit, χ^2/df = 1.86, RMSEA = .05 (90% CI for RMSEA = .04–.06), NNFI = .98, CFI = .98. Loadings were all significant, ranging from .69 to .97. Next, we tested the structural model and found an overall satisfactory fit of the model to the data, χ^2/df = 2.08, RMSEA = .056 (90% CI for RMSEA = .05–.06), NNFI = .97, CFI = .98.

Structural model results (see Figure 4) demonstrate that, consistent with Hypothesis 2, anger is an important response to incivility (β = .47), one that translates into detrimental personal (i.e., decreased empowerment; β = −.22) and professional (i.e., increased job withdrawal; β = .15) outcomes. Interestingly, in support of Hypothesis 3, we found that individuals also reported increases in guilt in response to incivility (β = .32), which was associated with decrements in self-esteem (β = −.22). Notably, we did not find evidence of guilt as a pathway between uncivil experience and psychological (dis)empowerment or job withdrawal. That is, incivility-driven guilt influenced cognitions about one's self-worth, but did not translate into negative views about self-efficacy regarding one's work role (i.e., empowerment) or one's potential career trajectory (i.e., intention of leaving the organization). In addition, we calculated the standardized indirect effect of incivility on outcomes, through both incivility-driven anger and incivility-driven guilt (included in the same model) and found significant effects on empowerment, job withdrawal, and self-esteem (β = −.08, .13, −.13, respectively), providing additional support for Hypothesis 5.

As in Study 1, to rule out a potential alternative explanation, we reran our model replacing perpetrator power with pessimism, which related to guilt (β = .18) but not anger (β = .10, *ns*). The rest of the model was largely unchanged, however, suggesting that key results are not attributable to negative disposition.

The Role of Commitment in the Incivility-to-Discrete Emotion Link

Guilt. Parallel to Study 1, we used moderated regression to test the interactive effect of commitment and incivility on feelings of guilt. The first block, including incivility, commitment, and perpetrator power as predictors, explained 18% of the variance in guilt, $F(4, 329) = 19.85$, $p = .00$ (see Table 4). Adding the interaction term to the model led to a significant improvement in the amount of variance explained, $\Delta F(1, 329) = 5.27$, $p = .02$. The relationship between incivility and guilt was stronger for employees high in commitment (unstandardized B = .53, $p < .001$) than for employees low in commitment (unstandardized B = .28, $p < .001$). These results are consistent with Hypothesis 4 and with our findings regarding negative affective response to incivility, demonstrating the exacerbating effect of organizational commitment. Figure 5 displays this significant interactive effect.

Anger. To assess the moderating role of organizational commitment in the incivility-to-anger link, we reran the moderated regression analysis using anger as the dependent variable. Table 4 displays the results. Incivility, commitment, and perpetrator power accounted for 20% of the variance in anger, $F(4, 335) = 21.11$, $p = .00$. However, adding the interaction term of incivility and commitment did not significantly improve the predictive ability of the model, $\Delta F(1, 335) = 1.47$, $p = .23$. These results do not support Hypothesis 4.

[2] Because negative discrete emotions can and do co-occur (Ganem, 2010), we included both anger and guilt in the same structural model and allowed their error terms to correlate.

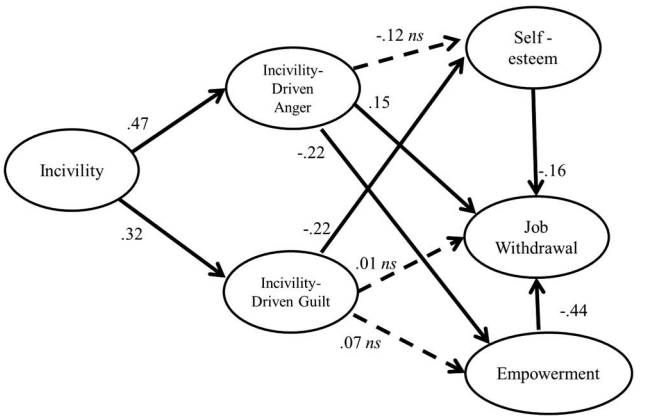

Figure 4. Structural model results for incivility-driven discrete emotions (Study 2). Paths with solid arrows are significant, $p < .05$. Not shown are the paths from the control variable, perpetrator power, to anger ($\beta = .10$, *ns*) and guilt ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$). Results are virtually unchanged when controlling instead for trait pessimism, which also predicts anger ($\beta = .16$, $p < .05$) but not guilt ($\beta = .06$, *ns*).

Discrete Emotions and the Link to Performance

We next tested our hypotheses regarding the influence of discrete emotions (as reported by oneself) on one's performance (as reported by a colleague). A total of 160 coworkers rated the performance of the focal respondents, and we analyzed the 108 cases in which the focal respondent detailed an experience of (and subsequent emotional response to) incivility. Before proceeding to main analyses to examine the relationship between discrete emotions and performance, we compared participants who did and did not have coworker data on major study variables (incivility, emotional response, and commitment) and found no significant differences for incivility, $t(357) = -.67$, $p = .51$; guilt, $t(240) = .84$, $p = .40$; or anger, $t(242) = -1.06$, $p = .29$. We found participants with coworker data did have higher organizational commitment, $t(354) = 2.57$, $p = .01$. To test our hypotheses, we used regression and after controlling for perpetrator power, anger and guilt explained 10% of the variance in performance, $F(3, 94) = 9.40$, $p = .00$. Guilt predicted decreased performance ($\beta = -.37$, $p = .001$), but anger did not ($\beta = .08$, $p = .48$). These results appear in Table 5. To test whether incivility had a significant indirect effect on performance, via incivility-driven anger and guilt, we calculated the indirect effects for each emotion separately, and found a significant indirect effect for incivility on performance through incivility-driven guilt ($z = -2.73$, $p = .006$), but no significant indirect effect via incivility-driven anger ($z = .71$, $p = .48$).

Discussion

Past research has documented the negative effects of incivility (for a review, see Cortina, 2008); however, we know little about the mechanisms that translate such mundane, low-level stressors into measurable harm. The current project demonstrated affective pathways linking incivility to individual wellbeing. This included attention to not only anger but also guilt—an emotion that workplace mistreatment scholars rarely discuss. In addition, we identified an important individual difference moderator in the incivility-to-emotion relationship: organizational commitment. Commitment, it seems, can take an affective toll on people.

In line with hypotheses, we found an anger pathway, such that when people feel angry in response to incivility, they also report decreased empowerment and self-esteem and increased thoughts of leaving the organization. The idea that incivility fosters outward-focused anger aligns with theories of the "incivility spiral"

Table 4
Moderated Multiple Regression Analysis of Guilt and Anger, Predicted by Incivility, Commitment, and Incivility × Commitment Interaction (Study 2)

	Incivility-driven guilt								Incivility-driven anger							
	Step 1				Step 2				Step 1				Step 2			
Variable	ΔR^2	B	*SE* B	β	ΔR^2	B	*SE* B	β	ΔR^2	B	*SE* B	β	ΔR^2	B	*SE* B	β
Step 1	.18**								.20**							
Incivility		.41**	.06	.41**						.55**	.08	.40**				
Commitment		.08**	.02	.17**						−.02	.03	−.03				
Perpetrator power		.09**	.03	.16**						.08	.04	.10				
Step 2					.01*								.00			
Incivility × Commitment						.08*	.03	.12*						−.06	.05	−.06
Total R^2					.19**								.20**			

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

(Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Feelings of anger can fuel aggressive, retaliatory behavior (Barclay, Skarlicki, & Pugh, 2005), acting as a mechanism through which incivility proliferates throughout an organization. A second pathway links uncivil experiences to negative outcomes through feelings of guilt, an inward-focused emotion that incivility research and theory have neglected. Uncivil experiences predicted increased guilt, which in turn related to decreased self-esteem. Additionally, we found evidence of an indirect effect on job withdrawal through self-esteem, highlighting the importance of self-worth for outcomes that weigh heavily on the bottom-line.

By examining discrete emotions, we uncovered potential departure points from the incivility spiral. An emotional pathway involving guilt may lead to reparative actions or positive problem-solving efforts, interrupting any possible spiral via target (in)actions. Self-focused guilt, rather than other-focused anger, may result in introspection rather than destructive retaliation and escalation by the target. Guilt may trigger apologies or confessions, in a "proactive pursuit" of "undoing the consequences of the behavior" (Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007, p. 350). For example, recent research has found that feelings of guilt are associated with compensatory behavior for inadvertent misdeeds (Ghorbani, Liao, Çayköylü, & Chand, 2013). At the same time, inward reflection and feelings of guilt may result in rumination and other negative, internal states. Past research has focused on retaliatory emotions, cognitions, and behaviors as responses to mistreatment, but we show that responses to incivility are more multilayered and complex and may not always perpetuate an outward spiral.

Due to the ambiguous nature of incivility, highly committed individuals may be vulnerable to attributing the cause of the maltreatment to personal misgivings. For example, people who are emotionally attached to their organizations and make efforts to be good citizens may be less likely to brush off rude behavior or blame it on others. Instead, highly committed persons may look inward in an attempt to make sense of the mistreatment, attributing it to their own actions. This finding has implications for any organization (e.g., business, political, volunteer) that strives to recruit and retain highly

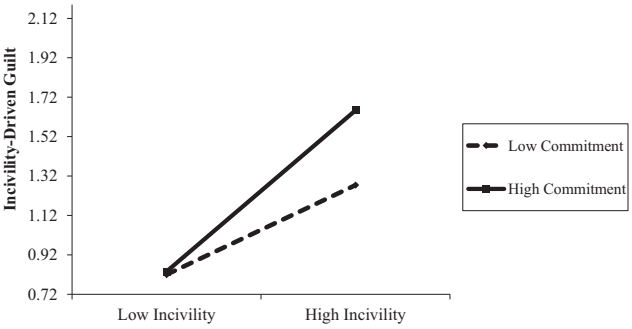

Figure 5. Moderating role of organizational commitment on incivility-driven guilt (Study 2).

committed members; it is these most-valued persons who endure the most emotional harm when rudeness arises.

Importantly, this study includes an other-reported measure of performance. While incivility-driven anger did not significantly link to decrements in performance, guilt did. These findings speak to the need to expand the focus of incivility research beyond outward expressions of anger, hostility, and "spiraling," to include self-focused, ruminative emotions such as guilt.

Implications for Organizations

The results of this study have clear implications for individuals and organizations alike. First, everyday rude behavior should not be disregarded as inconsequential. Acts of incivility are subtle and inconspicuous, but we show multiple ways that they can undermine personal and professional well-being (including lowered performance). These results underscore the benefits of managing incivility in the workplace. For example, Cisco Systems Inc. is one of the first corporations to introduce an employee training program to promote civility (Pearson & Porath, 2009). Through workshops, case studies, coaching, and video presentations, employees and managers learn to both recognize and address incivility.

Second, targets of incivility can and do respond with a variety of emotions, both externalizing (i.e., anger) and internalizing (guilt). As organizations develop interventions to interrupt incivility and its impact, both types of emotional response should be acknowledged, affirmed, and discussed. These differential emotional responses also suggest that different interventions may be needed, rather than one universal intervention. Organizations may also benefit from the

Table 5
Multiple Regression Analysis of Coworker-Rated Performance, Predicted by Incivility-Driven Guilt and Anger (Study 2)

	Coworker-rated performance of incivility target							
	Step 1				Step 2			
Variable	ΔR^2	B	*SE* B	β	ΔR^2	B	*SE* B	β
Step 1	.13**							
Perpetrator Power		−.18**	.05	−.36**				
Step 2					.10**			
Anger						.05	.07	.08
Guilt						−.28**	.09	−.37**
Total R^2					.23**			

** $p < .01$.

development of stress management interventions such as relaxation and coworker support groups to mitigate negative emotions (Giga, Cooper, & Faragher, 2003).

Third, the strength of emotional response varies by individual person-level characteristics. We found organizational commitment, a quality valued by virtually all organizations, to amplify negative emotional reactions to workplace incivility. This suggests that incivility—a so-called "low-level" stressor—can be more damaging than many managers realize. In particular, managers may view highly committed employees as exemplary employees who are able to cope with less than ideal situations, such as interactions with a bristly coworker. Contrary to this assumption, we found that the most committed employees were also the most harmed (emotionally) by incivility on the job. In the interest of retaining these valuable members of the organization, it is critical that managers monitor everyday interactions and intervene as needed, even in seemingly small instances of rudeness

Limitations and Future Directions

This project, like any research, has limitations. We designed our surveys to minimize threats of common method bias, as noted earlier. Moreover, common method bias would not explain our significant interactions. Our results imply a causal relationship between incivility, emotional response, and subsequent outcomes. Due to the cross-sectional nature of the data, however, any conclusions of causality would be premature. Longitudinal and experimental research is needed to parse out the directionality of these relationships.

We focused on two discrete emotional responses to incivility; however, there may be other discrete emotions relevant in this process, namely fear and sadness (Porath & Pearson, 2012). Future work is needed on emotional responses to incivility to further understand the complex nature of affective response. We see the role of attribution as potentially fruitful in teasing apart both the type and nature of emotional response. Interesting questions remain as to the attributional (e.g., internal vs. external) processes that drive different responses. For example, external attribution processes might mediate certain emotions (e.g., hostility or fear); whereas internal attribution might trigger emotions such as guilt or sadness.

Conclusion

The results of the current project suggest that employees can and do experience multiple forms of negative emotional response (i.e., negative affect, anger, and guilt) to incivility, and that discrete emotional responses to incivility serve as differential pathways to outcomes. Additionally, we found that those employees whom organizations value the most, those who are highly committed, face the worst aftermath of interpersonal mistreatment. Organizations that are reluctant to address incivility in their ranks are likely to suffer loss of human potential, especially among their most committed members.

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