Workplace Incivility and the Low-Status Target

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WORKPLACE INCIVILITY AND THE LOW-STATUS TARGET

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By
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WORKPLACE INCIVILITY AND THE LOW-STATUS TARGET

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WORKPLACE INCIVILITY AND THE LOW-STATUS TARGET

Sonia Maria Windhorst  April 2006  Pages:

Directed by: Dr. Kathi Miner-Rubino, Dr. Jacqueline Pope, Dr. Tony Paquin

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The goal of the present research was to discover if employees in low-status social groups (i.e., women, people of color, sexual minorities, and non-Christians) experience more incivility in the workplace compared to their high-status counterparts. Data come from four different samples of working adults: employees from a property management company (N = 90), employees of a northwestern university (N = 1,843), a national sample of law school faculty (N = 1,256), and employed students from a southern university (N = 243). Participants in all studies completed measures of demographics and personal experiences of incivility at work. A series of t-tests revealed that gender and sexual orientation are most related to experiences of incivility.
Workplace Incivility and the Low-Status Target

Incivility in the workplace is an important organizational issue that is pervasive and can cause harm to individuals. Workplace incivility is defined as low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). According to a recent poll conducted by U.S News and World Report, 89% of respondents reported incivility as a serious problem (Pearson, Andersson & Wegner, 2001). In another poll, more than half of the 327 front-line workers surveyed indicated that they had experienced acts of mistreatment at work, such as incivility, during the preceding three years (Pearson, Andersson & Porath, 2000). Seventy-eight percent of respondents in another study agreed it had worsened in the past ten years (Pearson, Andersson & Wegner, 2001). It is a type of mistreatment that may lead to disconnection, breach of relationships, and erosion of empathy because uncivil behaviors are characteristically rude and discourteous and display a lack of regard for others (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Examples of incivility include putting others down, being condescending toward others, and ignoring or excluding others from professional camaraderie (Cortina & Magley, 2001).

Workplace incivility may lead to extreme organizational costs, costing companies millions of dollars a year, partly because of the loss of workdays (Johnson & Indivik, 2001). An uncivil climate at work has also been linked with higher turnover, lower productivity, and lost customers (Pearson, Andersson & Wegner, 2001). For example, statistics show that 12% of the people who experience incivility or rude behavior at work quit their jobs to avoid the perpetrator (Johnson & Indvik, 2001). Other research suggests an uncivil work climate may cause employees to be overall less satisfied with all aspects
of their employment including their jobs, supervisors, coworkers, pay and benefits, and promotional opportunities (Cortina & Magley, 2001).

Research shows that acts of incivility in the workplace can also lead to many negative consequences for the targeted individual and workgroup relations. For example, relationships at work may become strained because of uncivil acts (Pearson, Andersson & Wegner, 2001). As a result, it may be difficult to accomplish workgroup related goals partly because incivility reinforces isolation and shuts people down; they go into a shell and do not come out of it (Pearson, Andersson, & Wegner, 2001). Acts of incivility may also result in cognitive and affective impairment of employees because targets of incivility experience hurt feelings (Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000). Examples of cognitive and affective reactions in targets are confusion, fear, or a sense of panic (Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000).

Although research shows that incivility relates to negative consequences for targets, workgroups, and whole organizations, little is known about who is most likely targeted for incivility. The present research will address this gap in the literature. Theory and preliminary empirical research suggest that low-status social group individuals may be particularly vulnerable to incivility in the workplace. Some individuals considered to be in low-status groups are women, people of color, sexual orientation minorities (i.e., lesbians, gay men) and non-Christians. In general, members of these groups are conferred little power and status in society and moreover, research has documented more severe mistreatment for these groups such as harassment and discrimination. However, less is known about the frequency with which low-status group individuals experience low-
intensity mistreatment, such as incivility. The goal of the present research was to discover if employees in these low-status groups experience more incivility in the workplace compared to their high-status counterparts: men, whites, heterosexuals, and Christians. In the next section, I discuss how individuals might become targets of incivility simply because they are members of low-status social groups.

The Low-Status Target

Research and theory suggest that certain individuals may become targets of incivility and more severe forms of mistreatment simply because they are members of low-status social groups. For example, research indicates that men are seven times more likely to instigate incivility on someone of lower status, such as women, than on someone of higher status (Pearson, Andersson, Porath, 2000). Research also indicates that workers who occupy high-status positions are less likely to be harassed than those in low-status positions (Jackson & Newman, 2004) and that the instigator of incivility is three times as likely to be of higher status than the target (Pearson, Andersson & Porath, 2000). Simply being a female and a member of an ethnic minority group makes one vulnerable to mistreatment (Cortina & Magley, 2001). I propose that other groups such as sexual orientation minorities and non-Christians are also likely targets.

There are various reasons why individuals in low-status groups may be more likely to be targeted. For example, social power theories (Carli, 1999; French & Raven, 1959; Johnson, 1976; MacKinnon, 1979, 1987; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Wagner & Berger, 1993, 1997) propose that social power and status differences make less powerful people more vulnerable to being targeted for hostility and mistreatment. These theories start from the proposition that power differences between groups of individuals derive
from social structural processes, and society confers greater power to some individuals compared to others. Social power is defined as the potential to influence and control others, and having access to socially valued resources; individuals with high social power have high status and possess valued resources compared to those with low social power (Cleveland, Stockdale, & Murphy, 2000a; French & Raven, 1959). In many cultures, including the U.S., men hold higher social status than women (Peoples & Bailey, 1997) and have more power than women in the workplace (Deaux & LaFrance, 1998). Social power theories maintain that men tend to hold more power than women because they possess greater influence and control, and they have more socially-valued resources compared to women. Because many positions occupied by men are high in status, people are more likely to act deferentially to men than to women (Jackson, Esses, Burris, 2001). Similarly, because they are in lower status social groups, people of color, sexual minorities, and non-Christians also tend to have little social power. As a result, people may also be less likely to act deferentially toward members of these groups.

Social power and status difference theorists also maintain that power is linked not only with the possession of external influence, status, and resources, but also with interpersonal interactions. According to French and Raven (1959), an important power base in these situations is called legitimate power. This refers to the “right” to control others, demand respect, and expect deference from those with little legitimate power. Through the maintenance of hierarchical social structures and cultural socialization processes, some individuals are considered to have greater legitimate power than others. For example, research indicates that men have more legitimate power than women...
(Carli, 1999; Johnson, 1976). As a result, men have access to more social and interpersonal power. Similarly, whites, heterosexuals, and Christians tend to have more legitimate power in our society.

Similarly, Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) proposes that social groups are structured as systems of group-based hierarchies with dominant and subordinate groups. Group-based hierarchies refer to the social power, prestige, and privilege that an individual receives because of her or his membership in a particular socially constructed group such as gender, race, and sexual orientation. Individuals with dominant group membership hold a large share of “positive social value,” such as power and social status. For example, people associate masculine stereotypic traits (e.g., independence, dominance) with work success (Van Vianen & Willemsen, 1992), particularly for male-dominated occupations (Cejka & Eagly, 1999). In contrast, individuals with subordinate group membership hold a disproportionately large share of “negative social value” such as low power and low social status.

Theories of social power and status help explain why some groups may be more likely to be targeted in the workplace. They propose that members of the dominant group are more likely to mistreat, abuse, and be hostile toward those with little power because the individuals in the dominant group are motivated to retain their power and status. These theories also suggest that lesser, more subtle forms of hostility, such as incivility, may be disproportionately directed toward the subordinate group.

Women as Targets

The Dominance Approach (MacKinnon, 1979, 1987) to inequality between social groups, and gender inequality in particular, contends that differences between social
groups stem from differences in the distribution of power in society similar to the theories described above. This approach focuses on the gender-specific abuses of women (i.e., domestic violence, rape) that result from the socially situated subjection of women.

MacKinnon (1979, 1987) argues that because society is constructed as a system of male supremacy and female subordination, women are more vulnerable to sexual violence and harassment. One site of possible mistreatment is the workplace. For example, organizational features such as power hierarchies, skewed gender ratios in work groups, and gendered organizational norms may facilitate sexual harassment and other forms of mistreatment (Cleveland, Stockdale, & Murphy, 2000b). According to this approach, women may be more likely to experience incivility in the workplace than men because of the system of dominance and subordination.

Empirical research suggests that women may be vulnerable targets for rude, condescending behavior at work. One preliminary study shows that, on average, women experience more incivility than men (Cortina & Magley, 2001). Research also shows that harassment and gender discrimination most commonly occur for women (Bildt, 2005; Parker & Griffin, 2002). For example, Bjorkqvist and colleagues (Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Hjelt-Back, 1994) examined how organizational position relates to harassment in a university setting and found proportionately more targets being female. Other research shows that women experience more serious forms of sexual harassment than men and women are more likely than men to suffer serious consequences from sexual harassment such as job loss and emotional disturbance (Stockdale, 1998). Based on this research and social power theories, I expect that women will experience more rude, disrespectful
treatment at the workplace because of their low-status compared to men. Thus, hypothesis one states:

Hypothesis 1: Women will experience more workplace incivility compared to men.

People of Color as Targets

Females are not the only group of individuals that are vulnerable to mistreatment because of their low-status characteristics. Because racial minorities have low-status characteristics as well, they too are vulnerable to mistreatment. In fact, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission received 27,696 charges of race discrimination during the 2004 fiscal year. Also, according to the EEOC (2004), color bias filings have increased by 125% since the mid-1990s. Most research has been conducted on African-American workers’ experiences of discrimination and harassment. For example, in a study of urban inequality in Los Angeles, almost 60% of black respondents reported experiencing some form of work-related discrimination (Dipboye & Colella, 2005). Studies also indicate that African Americans are particularly likely to be clustered at the very bottom level of the organizational hierarchies, suggesting promotion discrimination (Brief & Buttram, 1997). Also, blacks make up less than 5% of the management ranks and considerably less than 1% of senior executives (Brief & Buttram, 1997). Numerous studies often also show that blacks are treated more poorly than whites, they are recruited less, and their performance is rated lower (Brief & Buttram, 1997). In fact, differences in treatment and opportunities between blacks and whites begin even before applicants appear at the organization’s door (Dipboye & Colella, 2005). Given the low-status of other racial minorities, they too seem vulnerable to mistreatment, including more subtle kinds of mistreatment such as disrespect. Based on this empirical research and social
power theories, I predict that people of color in general will also experience a disproportionate amount of incivility in the workplace because of their low status.

*Hypothesis 2: People of color will experience more workplace incivility compared to whites.*

**Sexual Orientation Minorities as Targets**

Sexual orientation minorities such as lesbians and gay men are another group of individuals that may be vulnerable to uncivil behavior at work. One reason may be the pervasiveness of heterosexism in the workplace. Heterosexism is defined as “an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior, relationship or community” (Ragins, Cornwell & Miller, 2003, p. 2). Heterosexism incorporates antigay attitudes, prejudice, and discriminatory behavior.

According to the literature, sexual minorities face discrimination and antipathy on a daily basis (Hebl, Foster, Mannix, & Dovidio, 2002). They also experience both formal and interpersonal discrimination at work. *Formal discrimination* refers to discrimination in hiring, promotions, access, and resource distribution (Hebl, Foster, Mannix, & Dovidio, 2002). *Interpersonal discrimination* is more subtle than formal discrimination and includes nonverbal harassment, lack of respect, hostility, and prejudice (Hebl, Foster, Mannix, & Dovidio, 2002). This type of discrimination is very similar to workplace incivility.

Discrimination against employees who are gay, or simply appear to be gay, is not illegal in most workplaces in the United States (Ragins, 2004). A national study of 534 gay and lesbian professionals indicated that over a third had faced verbal or physical harassment in prior positions because of their sexual orientation, 37% faced discrimination because others suspected they were gay, and 12% left their last job because of discrimination
(Ragins, 2004). Results from a national random sample even found that gay and bisexual male workers earned from 11% to 27% less than heterosexual male workers with the same experience, education, occupation, marital status, and region of residence (Badgett, 1995). Also, sexual minority employees who reported more discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation reported less career satisfaction, less satisfaction with opportunities for promotion, and received significantly fewer promotions than those who reported less workplace discrimination (Ragins, 2004). Based on this research and social power theories, I predict that sexual orientation minorities will also experience more incivility in the workplace compared to heterosexuals because of their low status. Therefore, hypothesis three states:

*Hypothesis 3: Sexual orientation minorities will experience more incivility compared to heterosexuals in the workplace.*

*Non-Christians as Targets*

In the United States, a solid majority of citizens claim Christianity as their “religious preference” (Hicks, 2005). With rising interest in religion, religious discrimination cases have increased (Krahneke & Hoffman, 2002). For example, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission received 2,466 charges of religious discrimination during the 2004 fiscal year. Non-Christians might also be targeted for rude, disrespectful treatment because of their non-dominant religious affiliation. Because non-Christians are the minority, and tend to have less power and status, hypothesis four states:

*Hypothesis 4: Non-Christians will experience more incivility compared to Christians in the workplace.*
The Present Study

Workplace incivility is a pervasive form of workplace mistreatment that violates workplace norms for mutual respect. Based on theory and preliminary empirical research, low-status social group individuals (women, people of color, sexual orientation minorities, and non-Christians) may be especially vulnerable to this type of treatment in the workplace. Even though research has documented more severe types of mistreatment such as harassment and discrimination for these low-status groups, less is known about low-intensity mistreatment such as incivility. Therefore, the goal of the present research was to discover if employees in low-status groups experience more incivility in the workplace compared to their high-status counterparts.
Method

Participants and Procedure

This study includes four samples: Employees from a property management company, staff and faculty from a northwestern university, a national sample of law school faculty, and employed students from a southern university. The measures used for the present study represent a subset of those included in the overall surveys. The most relevant measures were those assessing participant demographics and aversive workplace experiences. For all samples, survey construction focused on minimizing response bias and utilizing valid and reliable measures. In some cases, participants in all studies completed identical measures (e.g., workplace incivility). In other cases, they received slightly different measures that assessed the same underlying construct (i.e., race and religion). In two cases, key demographic variables were not assessed (i.e., race for the northwestern university staff and faculty sample, and sexual orientation and religion for the property management company sample).

Property management company sample. The first sample included employees of a property management company. This organization owns and operates 35 separate apartment complexes in the Southeast, each staffed with its own manager, assistant manager, leasing agent(s), and maintenance workers. Participants were mailed a questionnaire assessing “workplace experiences.” After sending 203 surveys, 90 were returned, for a response rate of 45%. The first page of the survey emphasized that the responses given would be completely anonymous and privacy would be protected. The gender breakdown of the sample was 60% female (N = 54) and 39% male (N = 36). In the sample, race was broken down as 79% white (N = 70) and 21% non-white (N =
29). Twenty-nine percent of the participants were employed as property managers, 18% as assistant managers, 14% as leasing consultants, 30% as maintenance workers, and 9% as other. Participants had been employed with the property management company for an average of 3 years (with a range of less than 6 months to 18 years).

**Northwestern university faculty and staff sample.** For this sample, all staff and faculty at a Northwestern public university were invited to participate in a study assessing the workplace climate for employees at the university (N = 2,773). Participants who had access to a computer completed the survey on-line; those without access to a computer were mailed a paper survey. Each questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter from the President of the university that encouraged employees to participate and emphasized the importance of the study (to assess the workplace climate for employees), assured confidentiality, and reminded employees that they could skip any items on the questionnaire. Using these procedures, 1,843 participants returned the questionnaire (67% overall response rate; 51% female and 49% male). Because of extensive missing data, 66 participants were excluded.

The final sample contained 902 women (49%) and 857 men (51%); 92% identified as white (N = 1,557) and 8% as non-white (N = 132). Regarding sexual orientation, 94% (N = 1,547) identified as completely heterosexual and 6% (N = 94) identified as something other than completely heterosexual. Sixty-nine percent reported that their religion was Christian (N = 1,165) and 30% (N = 515) as non-Christian. Their job classifications were as follows: 31% were employed in technical/paraprofessional/skilled craft positions, 12% secretarial/clerical, 3% administrator, 16% non-faculty exempt, 3% irregular help, 2% service/maintenance, 20% full/associate professor, and 12% assistant
professor/lecturer/instructor. They had worked for the university for an average of 10 years, with scores ranging from less than 6 months to 41 years.

*Law school sample.* Participants for this research also included a national sample of law school faculty members. In June 2004, they were contacted by e-mail and invited to participate in a study examining “quality of life in law academia.” The e-mail contained a short description of the research and a link to an on-line survey. The survey was completed by 1,256 individuals (15% response rate). The first page of the survey itself included a more detailed description of the study, assured anonymity, and described to participants their rights as a research participant.

The demographic breakdown of this sample was 44% female (N = 553) and 56% male (N = 703), 86% white (N = 1,080) and 14% non-white (N = 176), 89% (N = 1,118) completely heterosexual, and 11% (N = 138) as something other than completely heterosexual, and 46% as Christian (N = 578) and 54% (N = 678) as non-Christian. Fifty-seven percent of the participants were employed as full professors, 17% as associate professors, and 26% as assistant professors, clinical professors, skills professors or lecturers. Participants’ employment with the law school ranged from less than 1 year to more than 30 years.

*Southern university student sample.* There were also 243 participants recruited for this study from psychology, business, and nursing classes at a southern university. The survey was administered to participants in class, at which time the purpose, procedure, and the participants’ rights involved with completing the study were explained. Once participants read the informed consent sheet, participants who chose to take part in the
study (no one refused) were instructed to complete the survey and return it to the researcher.

The participants (83% undergraduate) were 66% female (N = 161) and 33% male (N = 79). Ninety percent of the students reported their race as white (N = 215) and 10% as non-white (N = 24). Ninety-three percent of the students identified as completely heterosexual (N = 221) and 7% (N = 16) identified as something other than completely heterosexual. Regarding religion, 88% of the sample reported they were Christian (N = 212) and 12% (N = 28) non-Christian. Twenty-two percent of the participants were employed in retail, 15% in food service, 13% in health care, 9% in clerical, 9% in academia/education, 5% in child care, and 28% in other (the “other” category was widely diverse and ranged from lifeguard to engineering consultant). Participants in this sample had been employed for an average of 2 years, with periods ranging from less than 6 months to 21 years.

Measures

Gender. Gender was assessed the same for all the samples; all participants were simply asked to indicate whether they were female or male.

Race. In the property management company sample, all participants were asked to indicate which of the following they most likely identify with: Black, African, or African American; Hispanic or Hispanic American; White, European, or European American; and other (please specify). In the northwestern faculty and staff sample, law school faculty sample and the student sample, all participants were asked to indicate one ethnic heritage they most likely identify with. Choices included those listed above with the addition of Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander; Middle Eastern, Arab, or Arab American; and Native American or Alaskan Native.
Sexual orientation. Sexual orientation was assessed identically for the northwestern university, the law school faculty, and the southern university student samples. In all three samples, participants were asked to indicate how they define their sexual orientation using the following choices: completely homosexual, lesbian, or gay; mostly homosexual, lesbian, or gay; bisexual; mostly heterosexual; and completely heterosexual. Sexual orientation was not assessed in the property management company sample.

Religion. In the northwestern university sample, participants were asked to choose from over ten religions (e.g., Protestant, Muslim, Catholic, Jewish, Buddhist). Religion was assessed similarly in the law school faculty sample. Religion was not assessed in the property management company sample.

Workplace incivility. Experiences of workplace incivility were assessed for all samples using the Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS; Cortina et al., 2001). The workplace incivility scale measures the degree to which respondents had been a target of disrespectful, rude, or condescending behavior in the workplace in the last year. Instructions ask respondents to indicate whether they have experienced any behaviors at work from a coworker (e.g., “put you down or was condescending to you,” “ignored or excluded you from professional camaraderie”) using a 3-point response scale from 0 (never) to 2 (more than once or twice) for the property management sample and the northwestern sample, and a 4-point response scale from 0 (never) to 3 (frequently) for the law school sample and the student sample.
Results

A series of independent samples t-tests was used to test the hypotheses. The groups were categorized as follows: gender (females and males), race (people of color and white), sexual orientation (sexual minorities and heterosexuals) and religion (non-Christian and Christian). The incivility variable was positively skewed for most of the samples; this is common in mistreatment research because people tend to report little or no mistreatment. Interestingly, this variable was not skewed for the law school sample. This may represent the tendency for many law schools to have (at least stereotypically) a somewhat “cut-throat” and generally uncivil climate. To correct the skewed variables, square root transformations were computed to normalize scores. These transformed variables were used for all analyses. In addition, because of the unequal cell sizes of some groups in some of the samples, I confirmed that relevant groups had equal variances on incivility (unequal variance would indicate that disparate cell sizes were a problem) before proceeding with the analyses. These tests revealed that in only one circumstance there were not equal variances on incivility: sexual orientation in the student sample. Therefore, in the student sample, a random sample (n = 20) was used because of unequal variances of incivility in the larger sample.

Hypothesis 1 stated that women will experience more workplace incivility compared to men. This was supported in the northwestern sample \( t = -1.92, p < .05, M = .50 \) for women and \( M = .47 \) for men, \( \eta^2 = .01 \) and the law school sample \( t = -4.37, p < .00, M = 1.63 \) for women and \( M = 1.48 \) for men, \( \eta^2 = .02 \).\(^1\) This hypothesis was not supported in the student sample \( t = 2.09, p = \text{n.s.}, M = .49 \) for women and \( M = .63 \) for men.\(^1\) \( \text{Recall that the response scales for incivility varied across the samples.} \)
men, $\eta^2 = .02$) or the property management sample ($t = -1.28, p = n.s., M = .42$ for women and $M = .31$ for men, $\eta^2 = .00$). In the student sample, males reported significantly more incivility compared to females, which disconfirms the hypothesis. Figure 1 displays experienced incivility for men and women in each sample. Note that incivility was z-scored in all figures because the measures for each sample had varying response scales.

**Figure 1. Incivility by Gender**

![Graph showing incivility by gender for different samples.](image)

*Note. PM = Property Management Sample, NW = Northwestern Sample, LS = Law School Sample, SS = Student Sample*

Hypothesis 2 stated that people of color will experience more workplace incivility compared to whites. This hypothesis was not supported in the property management sample ($t = -.38, p = n.s., M = .34$ for people of color and $M = .38$ for whites, $\eta^2 = .01$), northwestern sample ($t = -.47, p = n.s., M = .47$ for people of color and $M = .49$ for whites, $\eta^2 = .00$), law school sample ($t = .99, p = n.s., M = 1.59$ for people of color and
$M = 1.59$ for whites, $\eta^2 = .00$ or the student sample ($t = -.32, p = n.s., M = .50$ for people of color and $M = .54$ for whites, $\eta^2 = .00$). Figure 2 displays experienced incivility for whites and people of color for all samples.

*Figure 2. Incivility by Race*

![Figure 2](image.png)

*Note.* PM = Property Management Sample, NW = Northwestern Sample, LS = Law School Sample, SS = Student Sample

Hypothesis 3 stated that sexual orientation minorities will experience more incivility compared to heterosexuals in the workplace. Hypothesis 3 was supported in the northwestern sample ($t = 2.04, p < .04, M = .56$ for sexual minorities and $M = .48$ for heterosexuals, $\eta^2 = .01$), in the law school sample ($t = 2.18, p < .03, M = 1.65$ for sexual...
minorities and $M = 1.53$ for heterosexuals, $\eta^2 = .01$) and the student sample ($t = 2.37, p < .03, M = .90$ for sexual minorities and $M = .37$ for heterosexuals, $\eta^2 = .17$). Figure 3 displays experienced incivility for heterosexuals and sexual minorities for all samples.

Figure 3. Incivility by Sexual Orientation

![Incivility by Sexual Orientation](image)

Note. NW = Northwestern Sample, LS = Law School Sample, SS = Student Sample

Hypothesis 4 stated that non-Christians will experience more incivility compared to Christians in the workplace. Hypothesis four was not supported in the northwestern sample ($t = 1.06, p = n.s., M = .50$ for non-Christians and $M = .48$ for Christians, $\eta^2 = .00$), law school sample ($t = -.35, p = n.s., M = 1.54$ for non-Christians and $M = 1.55$ for Christians, $\eta^2 = .00$) or student sample ($t = -4.19, p = n.s., M = .50$ for non-Christians and $M = .54$ for Christians, $\eta^2 = .00$). Figure 4 displays experienced incivility for Christians and non-Christians in all samples as well.

---

3 Recall that sexual orientation was not assessed in the property management sample.

3 Recall that religion was not assessed in the property management sample.
In sum, results showed that women experienced more workplace incivility compared to men in all but one sample. In the student sample, males reported significantly more incivility compared to females. In addition, sexual orientation minorities experienced consistently more incivility compared to heterosexuals in the workplace. Finally, results showed that people of color did not experience more workplace incivility compared to whites and non-Christians did not experience more incivility compared to Christians in the workplace.
Discussion

The purpose of this research was to examine whether employees in low-status social groups (e.g., women, people of color, sexual minorities, and non-Christians) experience more incivility in the workplace compared to their high-status counterparts (men, whites, heterosexuals, and Christians). Past research has documented more severe mistreatment (i.e., harassment and discrimination) of low-status group members, but less is known about low-intensity mistreatment such as incivility.

Social power theories (Carli, 1999; French & Raven, 1959; Johnson, 1976; MacKinnon, 1979, 1987; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Wagner & Berger, 1993, 1997) propose that social power and status differences make less powerful people more vulnerable to being targeted for hostility and mistreatment. Some groups tend to hold more power because they possess greater influence and control. These power differences can even influence interpersonal interactions in the workplace. Some individuals potentially negatively affected by these power differences are women, people of color, sexual minorities and non-Christians. These individuals are negatively affected because they are in social groups with little power and status and therefore may be more vulnerable to being targeted for hostility and mistreatment.

Hypothesis 1, that women will experience more workplace incivility compared to men, was supported in two samples (northwestern sample and law school sample). These findings are consistent with one preliminary study which showed that, on average, women experience more incivility than men (Cortina & Magley, 2001). The northwestern sample and law school sample are similar in that both included employees in academic settings as participants. One possibility for women experiencing more incivility
compared to men in these contexts is that academia as a whole is typically male
dominated (Rutter & Hine, 2005). Since academia is male dominated and males are
considered high-status social group members compared to women, women may simply
report more experiences of incivility compared to men because the possibility for uncivil
interaction is more likely to occur.

Interestingly, in the student sample, males reported significantly more incivility
compared to females, which disconfirms my hypothesis. One possibility for this finding
is that most of the jobs that the participants have in this sample are typically female
dominated, such as retail, health care, clerical, and child care. In this particular situation,
there are more women than men (men are the minority); therefore, as a result, men may
simply report more experiences of incivility compared to women because women
numerically dominate. Women in these occupations are also more likely to hold lower-
level manager’s positions compared to men, mostly because women as a group tend to be
clustered in these low-status fields. As a consequence, there may be more female
managers, and thus more women who hold power, which could increase the likelihood of
men experiencing incivility instigated by women.

Hypothesis 2, that people of color will experience more workplace incivility compared
to whites, was not supported in any of the samples. This finding was surprising given past
research showing that people of color experience high-intensity mistreatment such as
discrimination with higher frequency than do whites (Brief & Buttram, 1997). One
possibility for this finding is that people of color may simply be less likely to receive low-
intensity mistreatment such as rude, condescending behavior. Indeed, explicit hostile
treatment of racial minorities is not perceived as an accepted behavior nor is it tolerated
in the workplace. Thus, one reason people of color might experience less incivility is because white individuals go out of their way to be civil and do not want to be stigmatized as a “racist.” Another reason people of color might experience less incivility is because status differences between whites and people of color may have actually lessened over time. As a result, there may be fewer differences in social power among the two groups and therefore people of color are not as vulnerable to mistreatment as originally hypothesized. Also, since three of the samples in the current study come from academic settings, which tend to be dominated by individuals who are professional, intelligent, and competent, people may create “subtypes” of people of color in these settings. In other words, people might view people of color in these contexts as the exception, rather than the rule of what people of color are like. Thus, when these subtypes are created, people of color and whites may be viewed more equally.

Hypothesis 3, that sexual orientation minorities will experience more incivility compared to heterosexuals in the workplace, was supported in all samples that assessed it. According to the literature, sexual minorities face severe mistreatment (i.e., discrimination) on a daily basis (e.g., Hebl, Foster, Mannix, & Dovidio, 2002). According to the present study, sexual minorities also face more incivility in the workplace. One possibility for this finding is that sexual minority mistreatment is simply a more accepted type of behavior. Social power theories explain why this type of behavior is possibly more accepted. Recall that social power theories (Carli, 1999; French & Raven, 1959; Johnson, 1976; MacKinnon, 1979, 1987; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Wagner & Berger, 1993, 1997) propose that social power and status differences make less powerful people more vulnerable to being targeted for hostility and mistreatment. Sexual minorities may
be negatively affected simply because they are in a social group with little power and status and therefore may be more vulnerable to being targeted for hostility and mistreatment such as incivility.

Hypothesis 4, that non-Christians will experience more incivility compared to Christians in the workplace, was not supported in any samples. One possibility for this finding is that religion is a less “visible” characteristic, compared to others I assessed, such as gender. If people do not know what religion an individual claims, they obviously will not mistreat the individual based on religious affiliation. On the other hand, sexual orientation is a less “visible” characteristic as well, yet I found strong evidence that sexual minorities are disproportionately targeted for incivility. This difference may be because homophobia is more rampant in our culture compared to prejudice based on religion and individuals may feel more threatened by sexual orientation minorities. It is also possible that people do know what an individual’s religion is but they are not treated badly because this particular group is not as much of a target compared to the other groups (females and sexual orientation minorities). Social power theories can explain why religious minorities may be less of a target compared to other groups. Among various religious groups, there may not be as many social power and status differences which ultimately can lead to less individuals being targeted for hostility and mistreatment. It is also possible that non-Christians may simply be less likely to receive low-intensity mistreatment such as rude, condescending behavior. Explicit hostile treatment of minority groups is not perceived as an accepting behavior in the workplace. Thus, one reason non-Christians, like people of color, might experience less incivility is
because individuals go out of their way to be civil and do not want to be stigmatized in the workplace as discriminatory.

Future Considerations. Although this research addresses some gaps in the literature, much work remains on the topic of incivility. There are a number of possibilities for future research. For example, researchers could categorize race and religion differently in the future in order to see if categorization makes a difference in the findings. Instead of categorizing individuals into two groups (people of color vs. whites and non-Christians vs. Christians), researchers could examine each race individually and each religion individually. If each race and each religion are examined individually, researchers may be able to identify differences of experienced incivility among each category of race and religion.

Future research might also investigate other status variables (e.g., age, tenure, disability) and incivility in the workplace. It would be interesting to discover if and which individuals of a particular age range, tenure, and disability are experiencing incivility in the workplace. I would hypothesize that older workers, individuals with less tenure, and individuals with disabilities would experience more incivility in the workplace because these individuals are considered to be low-status social group individuals. Recall that low-status social group individuals have less power and therefore are targeted more for incivility.

Limitations. The categorization of race and religion (each as two categories) in the current study is a limitation. There may be differences within the people of color and non-Christian groups that my categorization masked. Another limitation is that the
current study consisted of self-report data. Since the data was self-reported, participants could have misremembered the past and their experiences of incivility.

Also, the current study was cross-sectional. In the future, it could be beneficial to conduct a longitudinal study in order to see if these individuals are still experiencing incivility. Finally, since there were consistent findings with the larger samples but not with the smaller samples, there may be an issue of statistical power. In smaller samples, it may be difficult to detect the differences between the groups.

Conclusions. This study extends our understanding of particular individuals considered to be in low-status social groups and their experiences of workplace incivility. This study suggests that women may experience more workplace incivility compared to men (especially in male-dominated contexts), and sexual orientation minorities may experience more workplace incivility compared to heterosexuals. In the future, research on incivility and various low-status social groups could further our understanding of targets of incivility in the workplace.
References


