Work and Nonwork Outcomes of Workplace Incivility: Does Family Support Help?

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This study extended incivility research beyond the confines of the workplace by exploring the relationships between incivility, work-to-family conflict and family support. Data collected from 180 employees from various organizations in Singapore showed that incivility is not a rare phenomenon in Asian cultures. Employees experienced more incivility from superiors than coworkers or subordinates, and these experiences were related to different outcomes. Coworker-initiated incivility was associated with decreased coworker satisfaction, increased perceptions of unfair treatment, and increased depression. On the other hand, superior-initiated incivility was associated with decreased supervisor satisfaction and increased work-to-family conflict. Results also revealed that employees with high family support showed stronger relationships between workplace incivility and negative outcomes, compared with employees with low family support.

**Keywords:** incivility, work–family conflict, social support, power, culture

Having one’s opinion ignored, being excluded from a meeting, and having one’s credibility undermined in front of others—all these experiences fall under the lens of workplace incivility. Such uncivil behavior may be easily dismissed as subtle and trivial, yet it is ubiquitous within the workforce. Einarsen and Raknes (1997) found that approximately 75% of Norwegian engineering employees had endured generalized, nonspecific harassment at least once during the previous 6 months. Cortina, Magley, Williams, and Langhout (2001) reported that 71% of 1,180 public sector employees in the United States had experienced some form of workplace incivility in the previous 5 years.

Although such findings suggest that it is important to understand how incivility might affect organizations and employees, past research has largely focused on the incivility targets and their work or health outcomes (e.g., Cortina et al., 2001; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008). It has also been argued that workplace incivility may function as a means of asserting power (e.g., Cortina et al., 2001; Lim & Cortina, 2005), but little empirical work has examined the relative power status of the instigator and target and its relationship with different incivility outcomes. The first goal of our study was thus to examine the power differentials between incivility instigators and targets and to investigate how incivility initiated by instigators of a different relative status (superiors, coworkers, or subordinates) might be related to the personal and professional well-being of incivility targets.

Second, workplace incivility has traditionally been viewed as an organizational phenomenon that only affects employees within the workplace context. This study seeks to propel incivility research beyond the confines of the workplace by examining possible associations between workplace incivility and work-to-family conflict. Third, little is known about the potential moderators of the incivility–outcome relationship and how family might play a role in this relationship. To address this gap, we examined the possibility that social support from the family is a potential moderator of the relationship between incivility and various outcome variables. In addition, this study explored the extent to which incivility research conducted in the United States is replicable in the context of an Asian country, specifically Singapore. Although the country’s population is predominantly Chinese, Singapore adopts English as its first language. This allows the research to be conducted in an Asian context with the original (rather than translated) measures previously used by researchers.
In the following sections, we first provide a brief overview of the definition of workplace incivility and explain the need to study such behaviors. Thereafter, we outline our research questions and hypotheses in the following order: (a) relative instigator status and incivility, (b) incivility outcomes, (c) family support as a moderator of the incivility–outcome relationships.

### Theoretical Background

#### What Is Workplace Incivility?

Workplace incivility is a distinct form of interpersonal mistreatment. Andersson and Pearson (1999) conceptualized workplace incivility as a subset of counterproductive work behavior, an umbrella term that refers to behavior that harms organizations and organizational members. Counterproductive work behaviors tend to differ along several dimensions, including the perpetrator’s intent to harm, the target, the type of norm violation, and the intensity and breadth of behaviors enacted (Martinko, Gundlach, & Douglas, 2002; O’Leary-Kelly, Duffy, & Griffin, 2000). 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, p. 457). Incivility is typically described as “treatment that is discourteous, rude, impatient, or otherwise showing a lack of respect or consideration for another’s dignity” (Kane & Montgomery, 1998, p. 266). Workplace incivility is thus differentiated from other forms of mistreatment in organizations, such as aggression, violence, and sexual harassment, as incivility is characterized by an ambiguous intent to harm, is of a lower intensity, and encompasses generalized behaviors that are nonsexual in nature.

#### Why Study Incivility?

Despite its low intensity, Andersson and Pearson (1999) argued that incivility has the potential to spiral into increasingly intense aggressive behaviors. Lim, Cortina, and Magley (2008) further suggested that workplace incivility not only affects direct targets but may also penetrate the work environment as an “ambient” stimulus (Hackman, 1992), and adversely affect workgroup members. Researchers have also asserted (Cortina et al., 2001; Lim et al., 2008) that workplace incivility is comparable with insidious low level stressors such as daily hassles, which become fixed and ongoing in everyday settings, including work settings (e.g., DeLongis, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1988; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Such chronic stressors may impair mental and psychological health as they occur in a fixed and persistent manner in everyday life. Indeed, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) argued that researchers could gain greater insight into the source of life’s stresses by focusing less on major events and more on daily hassles and uplifts. In fact, research carries evidence that the primary sources of stress are not major life events, but the experience of daily “wear and tear” (Baker, 2006; Jacobs et al., 2006).

However, despite the relatively recent interest in understanding such phenomena (e.g., Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2001; Lim et al., 2008), research on incivility has mostly taken place in Western nations, especially in North America; these nations are often considered more individualistic than non-Western nations, such as those in Asia. As independence, personal distinctness, and individual gain are more valued in the Western cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), one could argue that incivility is a problem of the West. This could be because conformity to social norms is less of a concern in Western cultures. This study attempts to investigate the generalizability of past incivility research findings by examining the extent to which such rude and disrespectful behaviors occur in an Asian context.

#### Research Questions and Hypotheses

**Relative instigator status and incivility.** Although little is known about the characteristics of incivility in non-Western cultures, we believe that many of the theories and findings of past research would hold in Asian cultures. Social power theory and other related work suggest that workplace incivility may function as a means of asserting power (Cortina et al., 2001; Raven & French, 1958). These theories argue that society confers greater power on particular individuals through social expectations and norms, and individuals lacking power are more likely to have power exercised against them. In the organizational context, one could argue that being in a subordinate position increases one’s vulnerability to mistreatment; thus, the instigator is likely to hold a relatively higher status than the target in the organization. Empirical research provided some support for such an argument. For example, Keashley, Trott, and MacLean (1994) reported proportionately more targets identifying superiors as perpetrators of abuse (57.8%) than coworkers (37.7%) and subordinates.
Hypothesis 1: Employees are most likely to experience incivility from their superiors and least likely to experience incivility from their subordinates.

Incivility outcomes. Pearson, Andersson, and Porath (2005) explored organizational outcomes of incivility, arguing that incivility causes its targets, witnesses, and stakeholders to act in ways that erode organizational values and deplete organizational resources. They theorized that, when incivility is not curtailed, it leads to diminished job satisfaction and organizational loyalty, which affect turnover intentions. Supporting such arguments, other studies have shown that uncivil workplace experiences were associated with negative work outcomes such as reduced job satisfaction and increased job withdrawal (Cortina et al., 2001; Lim & Cortina, 2005; Lim et al., 2008). In addition to job-related outcomes, Barling and colleagues (Barling, 1996; Barling, Rogers, & Kelloway, 2001) have theorized that experiences of abusive behaviors at work lead to negative mood, cognitive distraction, and fear. Consistent with such theory, evidence revealed that uncivil experiences at work were negatively associated with employee psychological and physical health (Cortina et al., 2001; Lim & Cortina, 2005; Lim et al., 2008).

Although past research has linked workplace incivility to both job-related and health outcomes, researchers have yet to explore outcomes related to the work–family interface. In particular, we are interested in examining the potential association between workplace incivility and work-to-family conflict. According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), work–family conflict is a form of interrole conflict in which role demands from one domain (work or family) are incompatible with role demands from the other domain (family or work). Consistent with past research (e.g., Kossek & Ozeki, 1998), we define work-to-family conflict as the interference of work with family. Research has shown that incivility targets often spend time worrying about the incivility incidents, suffer increased psychological strain, or developed maladaptive coping behaviors such as becoming aggressive or withdrawn (e.g., Cortina & Magley, 2009; Lim et al., 2008; Pearson et al., 2005). Such reactions at work could potentially interfere with targets’ ability to meet role demands from their family. For example, worries about the incivility incidents at work can reduce targets’ ability to devote their full attention to matters at home. They could also become more easily agitated with their family members because of the frustration arising from the mistreatment at work. Spillover theory (e.g., Williams & Alliger, 1994) also suggests that negative emotions or thoughts from incivility at work could potentially spill over to the family, thus increasing work interference with the family. Building on such theories and past findings of incivility outcomes, we propose the following.

Hypothesis 2: Experiences of workplace incivility will be associated with both work outcomes (perceived fairness, job satisfaction, and intent to quit) and nonwork outcomes (work-to-family conflict, life satisfaction, psychological distress, and health satisfaction).

Although we hypothesized earlier that the frequency of incivility experiences is likely to differ on the basis of the power differentials between the instigator and the target, it is unclear how incivility outcomes might be related to the relative instigator status. Aquino, Tripp, and Bies (2001, 2006) argued that when the offender has greater control over organizational decisions and reward opportunities, the lower status victims are motivated to minimize the possibility of conflict escalation and let go of negative emotions generated by the offense to preserve harmony in their relationships. However, Cortina and Magley (2009) showed that employees appraised incivility incidents more negatively when they perceived the instigators to have more power. This suggests that targets might suffer worse outcomes when incivility is initiated from someone with a higher status.

Frone (2000) argued that, because the supervisor controls structural aspects of the job (e.g., work schedules, pay, and promotions), interpersonal conflict with the supervisor is likely to affect one’s feelings and attitudes toward the job, rather than one’s personal health. On the other hand, interpersonal conflict with coworkers is likely to affect one’s psychological health, because relationships among coworkers are based on communal sharing and a common identity, so conflicts with coworkers would likely undermine one’s self-concept or identity (Frone, 2000).

It is also unclear whether experiencing incivility from a subordinate would be related to the same outcomes as incivility from a coworker or superior. Given that the target has higher relative status and power than the instigator, one could argue that the
target might easily seek redress (e.g., reprimand the subordinate, withdraw reward opportunities) and is thus less likely to suffer distress. It is interesting to consider whether such mechanisms would apply in an Asian society, where individuals are motivated to preserve harmony in their group relationships and respect existing power differentials (Hofstede, 1980; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Given the lack of research examining the influence of the relative status of instigator and target on incivility outcomes, we pose this research question: Do incivility-related outcomes differ based on the relative status of the instigator (superior, coworker, or subordinate)?

Family support as a moderator of the incivility–outcome relationships. Although work can influence family, family can also influence work. In particular, social support from family members could potentially affect one’s reactions to workplace incivility. Leavy (1983) defined social support as the availability and quality of helping relationships. In the organizational literature, there is considerable empirical support for the role of social support in reducing work stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Viswesvaran, Sanchez, & Fisher, 1999). However, it is not clear whether social support could also buffer the negative effects of work stressors. Specifically, could support from family members moderate the relationship between workplace incivility and its outcomes?

Stress and coping theories from Lazarus and colleagues (e.g., Lazarus & DeLongis, 1983; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) provided a cognitive explanation for how social support may help people cope with work stressors such as incivility. They theorized that a person first evaluates whether anything is at stake in a stressful encounter (primary appraisal), and then evaluates whether anything could be done to prevent or overcome harm (secondary appraisal). Social support was postulated as a form of resource for coping with stress, which should consequently reduce the stress experienced. Even when people do experience strain, social support from others would help them to cope better, thus decreasing the likelihood of a negative psychological or health outcome (DeLongis et al., 1988).

In a similar vein, Hobfoll (1989) proposed that people invest resources to protect against resource loss. Conceptualizing family support as a type of resource, people could potentially invest in their family as a resource to help cope with stressors encountered at work. Furthermore, drawing from self-perception theory (Bem, 1967a, 1967b), experiencing incivility might reduce one’s well-being because it conveys negative implicit information about one’s self-worth (i.e., “My colleagues are treating me badly, so I must be a bad person”). Conversely, receiving social support from one’s family could neutralize such negative messages by conveying positive implicit information about one’s self-worth (i.e., “My family is treating me well, so I must be a valuable person”).

Past research has provided some evidence that family support helps buffer the negative effects of work stressors. For example, Revicki and May (1985) showed that occupational stress was less likely to be related to depression when social and emotional support was received from the family. However, overall empirical evidence for the buffering role of social support is mixed. While studies have found that social support moderated the stressor-outcome relationships (e.g., Abdul-Halim, 1982), several interactions were in the reverse direction, that is, stressors were associated with more negative outcomes when there was a high level of social support (e.g., Kaufmann & Beehr, 1986).

Kaufmann and Beehr (1986) offered some possible explanations for the reverse moderating effects of social support. First, they argued that it may matter whether the support sources are independent of the sources of stressors (Blau, 1980). For example, a supportive family member may also be the cause of tension at home: Although the family member offers support regarding the work experience, interaction with the family member could also be a stressful stimulus within the family context. Second, they hypothesized that supportive exchanges between employees and their sources of support may induce distressed employees to believe that circumstances may not be as bad as they seem or that they are worse than they first thought.

Similarly, Beehr, Farmer, Glazer, Gudanowski, and Nair (2003) suggested that the buffering effect of support might be more likely to occur when the sources of support and stressor are similar. This is because someone from the same setting might be in the best position to understand the stressful situation and provide effective support. In the case of workplace incivility, family members might not be privy to the work situation or be in any position to change the workplace. In fact, they might even provide advice or offer ideas that are counterproductive (e.g., retaliate against the instigator through aggression).

_1 We thank an anonymous reviewer for providing this argument._
On the basis of such contradictory arguments, it appears that family support could potentially buffer or exacerbate the negative relationship between incivility and employee well-being. We therefore test two competing hypotheses in this study.

Hypothesis 3a: Family support will moderate the incivility–outcome relationships, such that the relationship between incivility and negative outcomes will be weaker when family support is high.

Hypothesis 3b: Family support will moderate the incivility–outcome relationships, such that the relationship between incivility and negative outcomes will be stronger when family support is high.

Method

Participants

Data for this study were collected from a survey of 180 full-time employees from over 20 different organizations located in Singapore. We recruited undergraduate students enrolled in business and social science classes to identify working adults from different industries and occupational status to participate in the study. Many studies have utilized this approach to collect data from a wide range of firms and industries (e.g., Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Eddleston, Veiga, & Powell, 2006) and have shown that data collected with such procedures are of comparable quality with that of data collected through more traditional procedures (e.g., Smith, Tisak, Hahn, & Schmieder, 1997). A cover letter informed the participants that the aim of this research was to examine attitudes about work and family life, and that they were to return the completed questionnaires in sealed envelopes within three to five days. Participants were encouraged to respond as accurately and honestly as possible, and they were assured that their participation would be kept confidential, anonymous, and used strictly for academic research purposes only. Participants received a pen or a gift voucher as a token gesture of appreciation.

Of the 250 surveys distributed, 2% of them were completed and returned. Participants’ age ranged from 18 to 60 years, with a mean of 32 years ($SD = 9.60$). Their average work experience was 9.90 years ($SD = 10.03$), and average organizational tenure was 5.12 years ($SD = 6.73$). About half of the participants were female (56%) and single (59%). Consistent with the population profile, a majority of the respondents was Chinese (89%), followed by 3% Indian, 3% Malay, and 5% of Caucasian or other minority races. The respondents worked in different industries, including finance and banking (19%), education (18%), service (12%), construction and real estate (11%), government (9%), technology (7%), manufacturing (5%), aviation (4%), health care (3%), and others (12%). Six percent of the respondents were in senior management, 18% in middle management, 53% in lower management, and 24% in nonmanagement positions.

Measures

Workplace incivility. The Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS; Cortina et al., 2001) measured the frequency of participants’ experiences of disrespectful, rude, or condescending behaviors from superiors or coworkers within the past 5 years. The seven-item WIS was modified in this study to allow participants to separately account for how often “superiors” ($\alpha = 0.92$), “coworkers” ($\alpha = 0.91$) or “subordinates” ($\alpha = 0.93$) expressed incivility toward them. Participants who did not have subordinates did not complete the incivility measure pertaining to subordinates. Responses were indicated on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (many times). Sample items included, “made demeaning or derogatory remarks about you,” “addressed you in unprofessional terms,” and “paid little attention to your statements or showed little interest in your opinion.” Cortina et al. (2001) demonstrated the reliability and construct validity of this measure.

Perceived social support. The six-item Social Support Scale by Vinokur, Caplan, and Schul (1987) was used to measure perceived social support from family members ($\alpha = 0.91$). Participants rated how much the family member closest to them “provides you with encouragement,” “provides you with useful information,” “says things that raise your self-confidence,” and so on. Responses were recorded on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal). This scale has been used widely in past research and has been shown to predict positive psychological outcomes in longitudinal studies (e.g., Vinokur & van Ryn, 1993).

Job satisfaction. Items from the Job Descriptive Index (JDI; Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969;
revised by Roznowski, 1989) measured satisfaction with work ($\alpha = 0.87$), coworkers ($\alpha = 0.74$), and supervisors ($\alpha = 0.84$). Responses were based on a 3-point scale on which $0 = no$, $1 = can’t decide$, and $3 = yes$. The work, coworker, and supervisor satisfaction subscales consisted of nine, eight, and nine items respectively. Sample items from each subscale included, “a source of pleasure,” “work well together,” and “knows how to supervise.” The JDI is a widely used facet-based measure of job satisfaction, and extensive psychometric data support its construct validity, interitem consistency, test–retest reliability, and response-option scoring (e.g., Kinicki, McKee-Ryan, Schriesheim, & Carson, 2002; Roznowski, 1989).

**Perceived fairness.** The 18-item Perceptions of Fair Interpersonal Treatment scale (Donovan, Dragow & Munson, 1998) was used to assess employee’s perceptions of fair treatment at the workplace ($\alpha = 0.91$). Items included, “Employees are treated fairly,” “Employee’s complaints are dealt with effectively,” and “Coworkers treat each other with respect.” The scale has proven to be reliable and valid in past studies and has been used in research examining workplace incivility (Cortina et al., 2001; Donovan et al., 1998).

**Intent to quit.** A three-item scale from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Camman, Fichman, Jenkins, & Klesh, 1979; Seashore, Lawler, Mirvis, & Camman, 1982) measured turnover intentions ($\alpha = 0.87$). Sample items are, “I often think about quitting,” and “I will probably look for a new job in the next year.” Hanisch and Hulin (1990, 1991) provided psychometric support for such measures, linking earlier job attitudes to subsequent job withdrawal behaviors.

**Life satisfaction.** The five-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) was utilized to measure respondents’ global life satisfaction ($\alpha = 0.80$). Responses were recorded on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Sample items are, “In most ways, life is close to ideal,” “The conditions of my life are excellent,” and “I am satisfied with my life.” Diener et al. (1985) documented evidence supporting the reliability and construct validity of this measure.

**Psychological distress.** An abbreviated 12-item version of the Mental Health Index (Veit & Ware, 1983) measured symptoms of anxiety ($\alpha = 0.81$) and depression ($\alpha = 0.87$). This psychometrically sound scale has appeared in various studies of general health, as well as studies of mistreatment (Koss, Koss, & Woodruff, 1991). It was constructed specifically for use in the general population and focuses on the more prevalent symptoms of distress. Respondents indicated on a 5-point response scale ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (most of the time) how often they had “felt depressed,” “felt tense or high strung,” and so on within the past month.

**Health satisfaction.** The health satisfaction subscale of the Retirement Descriptive Index (Smith et al., 1969) was used to assess this construct ($\alpha = 0.73$). Seven items assessed the extent to which short, health-related phrases or adjectives described participants’ health (e.g., “have a lot of minor illnesses,” “need little or no medical care”) on a 3-point scale on which $1 = no$, $2 = can’t decide$, and $3 = yes$. Hanish and Hulin (1990) reported strong links between health satisfaction and actual health conditions.

**Work-to-family conflict.** The four-item scale from Grzywacz and Marks (2000) was used to measure work-to-family conflict ($\alpha = 0.84$). Items were, “Your job reduces the effort you can give to activities at home,” “Stress at work makes you irritable at home,” “Your job makes you feel too tired to do the things that need attention at home,” “Job worries or problems distract you when you are at home.” Responses were based on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (many times). Grzywacz and Marks (2000) provided evidence supporting the reliability and validity of the measure, showing that it was associated with negative work factors and independently predicted measures of health and marital quality.

**Control variable.** To ensure that general work stress would not drive significant relationships between workplace incivility and related outcomes, we measured and controlled job stress in all analyses. This was measured with nine items from the Stress in General scale (Stanton, Balzer, Smith, Parra, & Ironson, 2001). Using 0 I the same 3-point response scale as the JDI, respondents indicated whether a list of adjectives (e.g., hectic, tense, calm) described their “job in general” ($\alpha = 0.80$).

**Results**

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations of the variables in this study. Items for measures were summed to create the corresponding scale composites.

**Relative Instigator Status and Incivility**

Hypothesis 1 predicted that employees are most likely to experience incivility from their superiors and least likely to experience incivility from their
Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Study Variables (N = 180)

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<th>Variable</th>
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<td>Intent to quit</td>
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<td>3.27</td>
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<td>-.27</td>
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<td>-.34</td>
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<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>-.29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Work-to-family conflict</td>
<td>11.78</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.33</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>-.30</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>-.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job stress</td>
<td>13.36</td>
<td>7.73</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.47</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>-.33</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>-.29</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05. **p < .01.
subordinates. Frequency analysis showed that most of the respondents (91%) reported some experience with incivility from superiors, coworkers, or subordinates within the past 5 years or less. Specifically, 22.2% of respondents reported experiencing at least some forms of superior incivility “often” or “many” times, followed by 40% of respondents reporting such experiences “sometimes,” and 23.3% “once or twice.” Concerning coworker incivility, 14.4% of respondents reported such experiences “often” or “many” times, followed by 41.7% reporting such behaviors “sometimes,” and 22.2% “once or twice.” Last, none of the respondents reported subordinate incivility “often” or “many” times, less than 1% reported “sometimes,” and 12.2% reported “once or twice.”

Supporting Hypothesis 1, an ANOVA revealed that levels of incivility differed by relative instigator status, \( F(2, 288) = 20.89, p < .01 \), partial \( \eta^2 = .13 \). Respondents reported greater levels of incivility from superiors (\( M = 6.82, SD = 5.93 \)) followed by coworkers (\( M = 6.15, SD = 5.53 \)) and subordinates (\( M = 4.84, SD = 5.50 \)). Paired-sample \( t \) tests also revealed significant differences between superior incivility and subordinate incivility, \( t(144) = 5.30, p < .01, d = 0.36 \); between coworker and subordinate incivility, \( t(144) = 4.98, p < .01, d = 0.29 \); as well as between superior and coworker incivility, \( t(176) = 2.01, p < .05, d = 0.10 \).

We conducted additional tests to explore whether other demographic variables are associated with frequency of incivility experiences. The total score on the WIS (collapsing across superior, coworker, and subordinate incivility) was first regressed onto gender, followed by age. The model containing only gender accounted for 4% of the variance in workplace incivility (\( \beta = -0.22, p < .01 \)). Men experienced greater levels of incivility (\( M = 20.08, SD = 16.07 \)) than women (\( M = 14.14, SD = 13.12 \)). Age accounted for an additional 3% of the variance in workplace incivility, with results showing that younger respondents reported more frequent experiences of workplace incivility (\( \beta = -0.17, p < .05 \)). The Gender \( \times \) Age interaction was not found to be a significant predictor of respondent’s vulnerability to incivility. With regard to job position, an ANOVA reported no significant differences among the groups of respondents belonging to senior management, middle management, lower management, and non-management levels, \( F(3, 171) = 1.07, p > .05 \). Marital status was not found to be a significant predictor of incivility experiences. For ethnicity, the predominantly Chinese sample did not have sufficient ethnic minority numbers to allow meaningful comparisons among the different ethnic groups.

Incivility Outcomes

Hypothesis 2 predicted that experiences of workplace incivility would be associated with both work and nonwork outcomes, including work-to-family conflict. A series of multiple regressions was performed to identify potential relationships between incivility and the various outcome variables. To address the research question that incivility outcomes might differ on the basis of the relative status of the instigator (superior, coworker, or subordinate), each dependent variable was regressed onto the following set of predictors: general job stress as a control variable, followed by superior incivility, coworker incivility, and subordinate incivility. Note that because job stress was added in as a control variable, we did not focus on its effects; results discussed here address only the outcomes of incivility.

Hypothesis 2 was partially supported as analyses revealed that incivility was associated with several work and nonwork outcomes, after controlling for job stress (see Table 2). Specifically, superior incivility was negatively associated with supervisor satisfaction (\( \beta = -0.30, p < .05 \)) and positively associated with work-to-family conflict (\( \beta = 0.31, p < .05 \)). On the other hand, coworker incivility was negatively associated with perceived fairness (\( \beta = -0.38, p < .05 \)) and coworker satisfaction (\( \beta = -0.53, p < .01 \)) and was positively associated with depression (\( \beta = 0.34, p < .05 \)). Subordinate incivility was not significantly related to any of the outcomes.

Family Support as a Moderator of the Incivility–Outcome Relationships

Next, we examined competing hypotheses regarding family support as a moderator of the incivility–outcome relationships. Hypothesis 3a predicted that the relationship between incivility and negative outcomes would be weaker when family support is high, whereas Hypothesis 3b predicted that the relationship would be stronger when family support is high. To test these hypotheses, we performed a hierarchical linear regression using procedures recommended by Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003). All variables were standardized before entering them into the regression equations to reduce multicollinearity. In the regression analysis, job stress was first entered as a control variable, followed by superior or coworker
incivility, then family support, and finally the interaction term between incivility and family support. The two-way interaction terms were computed using standardized component variables.

Results showed that the Superior Incivility × Family Support interaction term significantly predicted work-to-family conflict (β = 0.18, p < .01; see Table 3), whereas the Coworker Incivility × Family Support interaction term significantly predicted perceived fairness (β = −0.12, p < .05) and depression (β = 0.24, p < .01; see Table 4). Using Aiken and West’s (1991) approach, we plotted the interactions using 1 standard deviation above and 1 standard deviation below the mean to represent high and low levels of the predictors, respectively. As shown in Figure 1, the relationships between superior incivility and work-to-family conflict, between coworker incivility and perceived fairness, as well as between coworker incivility and depression were stronger when family support was high. Thus, Hypothesis 3a was rejected and Hypothesis 3b was supported.

Discussion

Results demonstrated that over 9 in 10 employees reported some forms of disrespect, condescension, and/or social exclusion at the workplace. Supporting past studies on Norwegian and American workforces,

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Table 2
Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Work and Nonwork Outcomes From Job Stress and Workplace Incivility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Job stress</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>Step 2: Add workplace incivility</th>
<th>Job stress</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived fairness</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>−.43**</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>−.13**</td>
<td>−.30**</td>
<td>−.05</td>
<td>−.38*</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor satisfaction</td>
<td>.09**</td>
<td>−.29**</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>−.15**</td>
<td>−.14</td>
<td>−.30*</td>
<td>−.07</td>
<td>−.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coworker satisfaction</td>
<td>.05**</td>
<td>−.23**</td>
<td>.13**</td>
<td>.08**</td>
<td>−.19*</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>−.53**</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work satisfaction</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>−.10</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>−.07</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>−.17</td>
<td>−.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent to quit</td>
<td>.09**</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>.07*</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>−.17</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonwork outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Life satisfaction</td>
<td>.09**</td>
<td>−.29**</td>
<td>.11**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>−.23**</td>
<td>−.08</td>
<td>−.16</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.47**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.04*</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>−.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>.12**</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.08**</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.34*</td>
<td>−.12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health satisfaction</td>
<td>.04*</td>
<td>−.20*</td>
<td>.04*</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>−.18*</td>
<td>−.02</td>
<td>−.09</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-to-family conflict</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.51**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>.31*</td>
<td>−.01</td>
<td>−.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Standardized regression coefficients are represented by β.
* p < .05. ** p < .01.

Table 3
Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Tests of Superior Incivility × Family Support Interaction Effects on Incivility Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Supervisor satisfaction</th>
<th>Work-to-family conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>Step 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job stress</td>
<td>−.34**</td>
<td>−.18**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior incivility</td>
<td>−.41**</td>
<td>−.41**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family support</td>
<td>−.03</td>
<td>−.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior Incivility × Family Support</td>
<td>.11**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.11**</td>
<td>.14**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05. ** p < .01.
the present study showed that workplace incivility is not a rare phenomenon in Asian cultures. This suggests that the workplace environment might be more similar across different cultures than one might expect. With globalization, there may be a decreased emphasis on traditional cultural values (e.g., the importance of harmony, conformity to social norms) in many Asian societies, thus rendering workplaces more susceptible to social problems such as incivility. More important, the present study extended past research by demonstrating links between workplace incivility and work-to-family conflict, as well as the association between family support and incivility-related outcomes. We also showed that outcomes related to incivility differed depending on the relative status of the instigator.

Relative Instigator Status and Incivility

In the present study, reports of incivility experiences from superiors, coworkers, and subordinates were measured relative to the respondent’s position within their respective organizations. Thus, we were able to examine whether social power is related to the occurrence of incivility. Supporting Hypothesis 1, results showed that respondents reported more incidents of incivility from superiors, followed by coworkers and subordinates. Such findings supported the tenets of social power theory (e.g., French & Raven, 1959). Johnson (1976) argued that those having more resources and perceived social authority tend to exert greater coercive and reward power on those with less resources and authority. Within an organization, individuals who have more social and organizational resources should be more prone to abuse power (Pryor & Whalen, 1997). Consistent with such theories, our findings revealed that employees were more likely to be mistreated by others who possess relatively higher status at work. At the same time, one could also argue that employees tend to pay more attention to behaviors of superiors (compared with behaviors of coworkers or subordinates), which could make subordinates more sensitive to potentially uncivil behaviors of the superiors. This is an interesting issue that could be explored in future research.

Results also revealed that younger employees reported more incivility experiences than older employees. Although hypothesized, such findings did not surface in Cortina et al. (2001) and could reflect an Asian mentality, which emphasizes the need to treat elders with respect, because of the association of age with experience and seniority (Bond, 1986). Nonetheless, this finding is consistent with previous research on harassment, in which younger workers have been found to encounter more harassment than older workers (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997). Overall, such findings appear to provide further support for the argument that social power is an important determinant of incivility behaviors. Future studies could explore whether such findings can be replicated in other Asian societies.

It is interesting that our results showed that men reported greater levels of incivility than women. This contradicted some of the past research findings in which women were found to report more uncivil experiences at work (Lim et al., 2008; Montgomery, Kane, & Vance, 2004). Explanation for such results could be attributed to different cultural contexts or differences inherent in the samples being analyzed.
For example, research on relational and overt aggression has suggested cross-cultural differences in male relational aggression (e.g., Tomada & Schneider, 1997). Tomada and Schneider (1997) reported that men displayed higher levels of relational aggression than women in Italy, contradictory to studies in the United States, where women were reported to display higher levels of relational aggression as compared with men. One could argue that Asian men may possess a greater tendency for overt and relational aggression than Asian women and are thus more likely to engage in reciprocal uncivil behaviors or
“incivility spirals” (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Although this theory could not be tested using the present data, future studies using longitudinal or qualitative designs would be helpful in uncovering such potential spirals among employees.

In addition, we speculate that the saliency of the gender power difference in Asian cultures might help explain the present findings. Montgomery et al. (2004) proposed that differences in norms of respect shared by people may result in different thresholds for perceiving a violation of norms of respect. In Asian societies, men might expect to be treated with greater respect because of their higher social status relative to women. As a result, men might actually develop lower thresholds for disrespectful behaviors and thus become more sensitive to uncivil behavior than women. This is an interesting proposition that could be tested in future research; in particular, experimental studies could allow subjects of different gender and culture to be assigned to different incivility conditions.

### Incivility Outcomes

Following previous research (e.g., Cortina et al., 2001), the present study examined both job-related and psychosomatic outcomes of incivility. Controlling for general job stress, we found that employees who experienced incivility at work were more likely to perceive themselves as being unfairly treated at work and displayed less satisfaction with their supervisors and coworkers. In addition to these job-related outcomes, employees exposed to incivility at work were also more likely to experience psychological distress. Such findings offered some support for Hypothesis 2 and suggested that seemingly trivial hassles experienced in ordinary daily work life may exert a toll on one’s work and psychological functioning.

Although we did not find a significant relationship between incivility and work satisfaction, this result is somewhat consistent with the study by Lim et al. (2008), who found that incivility exhibited a stronger relationship with interpersonal aspects of job satisfaction (supervisor and coworker satisfaction) than work satisfaction. Furthermore, we found that superior incivility was negatively associated with supervisor satisfaction, whereas coworker incivility was negatively associated with coworker satisfaction, suggesting that dissatisfaction associated with incivility was specifically directed toward the relevant instigator(s).

We also extended past research on incivility outcomes to the work–family domain, demonstrating that superior incivility was associated with increased work-to-family conflict. The relationship between superior incivility and work-to-family conflict might make sense, given that there is little one can do to get even with one’s superiors in the workplace. Thus, targets of incivility from superiors might find it safer (or more convenient) to transfer their frustrations from work to the family. We suspect that the need to suppress one’s negative thoughts or feelings about the superior is likely to be more important in Asian societies that are characterized by high power distance and where organizational hierarchy is more strongly imposed (Bond, 1986). Furthermore, because superiors control important organizational resources and opportunities, victims of superior incivility might find it more difficult to meet job demands, which could in turn reduce their time or ability to meet family demands.

Our results also showed that coworker incivility was associated with lower perceived fairness and increased depression. In contrast to superior incivility, when the incivility is initiated by a coworker, employees might be more likely to feel that they are being treated unfairly (given their same social status at work as the coworker) and become more concerned with the need to seek redress at work. Thus, they might be more likely to think about the uncivil incidents and become increasingly depressed. These findings suggest that, although employees might experience less incivility from their coworkers, such incivility experiences may not necessarily be less damaging than incivility received from superiors. It is interesting that subordinate incivility was not independently associated with any outcome, although it is understandable that targets could easily deal with such transgressions either by confronting the subordinate instigators or punishing them. Overall, our findings suggest that it is important for researchers to consider the relative status of instigators to targets, as workplace power may be differentially related to outcomes of incivility.

### Family Support as a Moderator of the Incivility–Outcome Relationships

In support of Hypothesis 3b, family support was shown to moderate the incivility–outcome relationship so that incivility targets with high family support experienced greater negative outcomes than those with low family support. This is in line with the explanations provided by Kaufmann and Beehr (1986), which suggest that family members may of-
ten be a source of tension or that ineffective advice from family members could potentially exacerbate a stressful situation. Given the cross-sectional nature of this study, alternative causal interpretations for the results are also possible. For example, social support may be mobilized when stressors are encountered: Predictable patterns of stressors and strains in the victim’s lives may cause them to proactively seek support (Kaufmann & Beehr, 1986). This is opposed to the idea that social support helps reduce stressors or strains. However, it is interesting to note that family support was negatively correlated with subordinate incivility ($\beta = -0.19, p < .05$) and not with superior or coworker incivility. When subordinates are uncivil, family members may offer constructive feedback and advice to help curtail subordinate incivility in the workplace. Because of their higher status, the incivility targets will have the autonomy to address such behaviors of their subordinates at the workplace. On the other hand, when superiors or coworkers are uncivil, one might be less likely to seek support from family members because there is little they can do to alleviate the situation at work.\footnote{We thank an anonymous reviewer for offering this insight.}

Future studies that measure these constructs at repeated time points will be useful for inferring causation. In addition, it would be worthwhile to assess the perceived helpfulness of support together with the perceived amount of support. In general, social support may intuitively lead to positive consequences, but this does not mean that more support is always beneficial. The amount of support received on relevant outcomes could be dependent on how effective such support is perceived to be. For example, if high levels of support result in targets feeling stifled or smoldered, this could aggravate the strain that they are already undergoing.

Limitations and Future Directions

In studies that involve comparisons between organizations, cultures, or countries, establishing equivalence in terms of sample and construct definition is essential. Past studies of incivility characteristics in the United States have typically made use of employee samples exclusively from one or two organizations (Cortina et al., 2001; Lim et al., 2008). In the present study, responses were gathered from employees from more than 20 different organizations in different industries. The wide range of organizations sampled is an advantage, as results gleaned are not biased to a certain type of organization. We also included job stress as a control variable in the present study to control for potential industry or job specific differences whereby negative outcomes associated with incivility could be exacerbated for employees with highly demanding positions. Nonetheless, it would be meaningful for future research to identify job characteristics and design elements (e.g., scheduling and environment), as well as organizational factors (e.g., organizational hierarchy and culture) that could affect the occurrence and potential outcomes of incivility.

Pearson, Andersson, and Porath (2005) highlighted that, because organizational norms and values are enacted through organizational culture, it seems reasonable to assert that culture and incivility will be interrelated. They also raised some pertinent issues: Will organizational or industrial practices facilitate or inhibit the escalation or spread of incivility? Do some workplace cultures unintentionally encourage incivility? Does incivility prevail in specific organizational functions or industrial sectors? These issues can be better understood when organizational culture is examined as an independent variable affecting the nature and incidence of incivility. Meaningful comparisons of incivility experiences from different organizational cultures can then be made.

Montgomery et al. (2004) also argued that there are differences in internalized personal norms of respect across individuals. These differing perspectives could be due to differences in social, cultural, or even political orientations. (e.g., Mechanic, 1974). In fact, different cultures may share differing social orientations, which in turn influence their norms of respect. If this is indeed the case, the conceptualization and operational definition of workplace incivility may be culture specific: What constitutes uncivil behavior in the United States may not be considered uncivil in Singapore. For example, individuals from a certain culture may react more adversely toward condescending attitudes from superiors, whereas individuals from other cultures may be more tolerant of such behaviors. An explanation for this can be found in Hofstede’s (1980) study on power distance, which suggested that different countries have different degrees of encouraging or maintaining power and status differentials between individuals. Uncivil behaviors might also be more salient in countries such as Singapore because of the juxtaposition of Asian and Western values, which can send confusing signals about norms of respect in the workplace. These arguments highlight some of the possible factors that
could produce cross-cultural differences in prevalence rates and the perceptions of what constitutes rude and discourteous behaviors.

One might also question whether work-to-family conflict is relevant to respondents who are single and have no children. In the present sample, work–family issues are relevant to both single and married individuals. This is because most single adults in Singapore live with their immediate family (parents and/or siblings) or close relatives until they are married; thus, it is rare for singles to reside alone. This phenomenon is common in Asian societies where there is a strong focus on the family as a social unit. In fact, 90% of the households in Singapore comprise at least one family nucleus, consisting of parents, siblings, spouse, and/or children (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2006). On the basis of such trends, we expect work–family issues to affect both single and married working adults in the sample. As an additional check, participants who felt that the work-to-family conflict scale did not apply to them could also indicate “not applicable” on the questionnaire. None of the respondents chose this option, which suggests that work–family issues were relevant to all the respondents in this sample.

The use of cross-sectional data limits our ability to make causal inferences about the effects of incivility. More longitudinal work is needed to enable inferences about changes over time, and causality between incivility experiences and their outcomes. In the work–family domain, researchers (e.g., Story & Repetti, 2006) have started to make use of longitudinal designs of daily measures. Such designs could be used to explore the mediating mechanisms linking workplace incivility and work-to-family conflict on a daily basis. Given the bidirectional relationship between work and family, one could also examine whether incivility from family members might affect work outcomes, as well as the possibility that social support from one’s supervisors or coworkers could buffer the negative effects of family-to-work conflict. Longitudinal measures would provide greater sensitivity when examining such issues because daily fluctuations in incivility experiences and corresponding effects on work or family outcomes could be recorded over a period of time.

Single-source self-reported data are also prone to biases. To partial out the potential influence of common method variance as well as the influence of job-specific demands, we used job stress as a control measure in our analyses. In addition, the existence of nonsignificant correlations among some of the variables (e.g., superior incivility and family support, subordinate incivility and health satisfaction) gave us greater assurance that the relationships among the study variables were not driven by common method bias (Lindell & Whitney, 2001). Spector (2006) also provided additional evidence to suggest that common-method variance is generally not a problem in organizational research. Nonetheless, third-party references could serve as a more objective indicator of actual incivility prevalence. When examining the issues pertaining to the work–family domain, it would also be beneficial to obtain third-party information from spouses or family members. Furthermore, given that studies in the work–family field tended to be quantitative in nature, a qualitative approach with data gathered from in-depth interviews could provide a more nuanced explanation for understanding the phenomenon of work–family conflict.

Conclusion

This study extends past research to show that the occurrences of incivility and associations between incivility and outcomes are to a certain extent, replicable in an Asian context. Although incivility may appear to be subtle and trivial, its potential consequences are not. Furthermore, this study demonstrated linkages between workplace incivility and work-to-family conflict, suggesting that incivility-related outcomes are not limited to the workplace context. The surprising finding of family support being associated with a stronger relationship between incivility and negative outcomes also raise deeper questions about the role of social support as a moderator of incivility-related outcomes: Under what conditions would social support mitigate these ill outcomes? Are there other moderators that could help reduce the negative outcomes associated with incivility?

Although it is useful to investigate how the negative consequences associated with workplace incivility can be buffered, effort must first be made to curtail incivility at the organizational level. Employees and managers must realize that not only do such behaviors carry substantial costs to organizations and individuals, but they also have the potential to spiral into increasingly aggressive behaviors (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). To ignore incivility is to allow the erosion of organizational norms of respect and courtesy, resulting in self-interest and organizational deterioration. Management leaders can begin by modeling appropriate, respectful behavior at the workplace (Pearson et al., 2005; Pearson et al., 2001).
and ensuring that norms of respectful interaction are present at all organizational levels.

References


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