

How Observers Choose Voice During a Workplace Incivility Event

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Danielle Galbraith

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Michael R. Manning Ph.D.
Chair

June 2022

Committee Members

Mary C. Gentile, Ph.D.
Peter G. Northouse

University of Virginia
Western Michigan University

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Abstract

Workplace incivility is a pervasive and harmful phenomenon. Its impact affects both individuals and organizations and includes increased symptoms of depression and anxiety, increased absenteeism, decreased job satisfaction and performance, increased turnover intentions, and reduced organizational citizenship behaviors. Uncivil workplace behaviors include putting down colleagues, making demeaning comments, rudeness, and questioning the competence of coworkers. For workplace incivility to occur, there must be a perpetrator and one or more victims; however, in many situations, an observer is also present. This study investigates the thoughts and actions of the observer as an uncivil event unfolds. It seeks to answer the following question: “How do observers choose voice during a workplace incivility event?” The study uses in-depth qualitative interviews, gathering insights from 31 professionals across 10 different countries as they share their experiences of observing and reacting to workplace incivility. Participants were selected from among a population that had fully answered a qualifying questionnaire on the frequency of observation of uncivil work behaviors. The study identified a rapid three-step voice decision process. Consistent with previous research, in the first decision step, an observer must *recognize* an uncivil event. The second step, the responsibility assessment, focuses on an observer’s felt *responsibility* to voice. And in the third step, an observer is faced with a *choice of voice*, choosing either to address the perpetrator directly, to address the perpetrator indirectly, or to remain silent. Study findings underscore the importance of how different forms of indirect voice and understanding each of the

three decision steps can contribute to the creation of a more civil workplace environment.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Workplace incivility is a phenomenon that encompasses a breadth of behaviors, from behaviors that are difficult to detect to behaviors that are severe and blatant. It is a phenomenon that is significant in its impact on both individuals and the organizations the individuals belong to. Workplace incivility impacts all levels in an organization, though it is experienced disproportionately by some segments of the employee population. In an uncivil work event, in addition to the perpetrator and the victim, the observer plays an important yet understudied role. This study seeks to understand the thoughts and voice actions of an observer as an uncivil event unfolds.

What is Workplace Incivility?

Incivility in the workplace takes form in a range of disrespectful, demeaning, and discourteous behaviors. In their pioneering work, Andersson and Pearson (1999) introduced the concept of workplace incivility and defined it as “low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect” (p. 457). Classified by the authors under the umbrella of antisocial behavior, a perpetrator of workplace incivility may or may not have the conscious intent to harm the target by their uncivil behavior. For example, a person may be unaware of committing an uncivil act as they engage in the “expressive leakage” (Fraser, 1990) of an eye-roll.

In an occupational setting, workplace incivility covers a multitude of behaviors that include interrupting and putting down colleagues, making demeaning comments, spiteful gossip, rudeness, lack of regard for others, and questioning the competence of coworkers (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Taylor et al., 2012). It can also include behavior that does not take place, such as ignoring someone, excluding coworkers from meetings, lunch invitations, and after-work social events, as well as subjecting coworkers to the “silent treatment” (Blau & Andersson, 2005; Schilpzand, Pater, et al., 2016).

Originally seen as a phenomenon distinct from workplace bullying, the lines between workplace incivility and workplace bullying are becoming increasingly blurred. Modern definitions of workplace bullying now cover a wider range of behaviors, from subtle incivilities (gossip and rumors, erroneous blame for errors, insults, and jokes) to explicit threats (Fox & Cowan, 2015).

Why is Workplace Incivility Significant?

Workplace incivility is significant for several reasons. In addition to the sheer number of employees who are subjected to incivility on a regular basis, damage is also experienced by the observer and the organization at large. Porath and Pearson (2013) found that workplace incivility affected 98% of employees. Cortina et al. (2001) found that most employees experienced some form of workplace incivility in the past 5 years. In a 1996 poll of the American public, 90% of the respondents thought that incivility was a serious problem (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), while in a more recent

“Incivility in America” poll, 70% of Americans felt that incivility had reached crisis proportions. Furthermore, incivility has also been found to be contagious (Porath et al., 2015; Woolum et al., 2017) and addictive (Lim & Cortina, 2005).

Workplace incivility creates significant costs to both individuals and organizations. Its impact includes increased symptoms of sadness, fear, depression and anxiety; increased absenteeism; decreased job satisfaction; increased turnover intentions; reduced organizational citizenship and helping behaviors; reduced performance on routine and creative tasks; and the creation of a toxic work environment (Pearson et al., 2000; Porath & Erez, 2007; Porath & Pearson, 2012). Though considered a less intense form of antisocial behavior, the routine nature of daily incivility can have even greater consequences on employee well-being than major stressful events (Cortina et al., 2001). Workplace incivility can even negatively impact customers’ purchase intentions if a customer witnesses uncivil behavior from a company from whom they wish to buy (Porath & Pearson, 2013).

It is particularly distressing to note that in the U.S., workplace incivility is disproportionately experienced by certain employees, with racial minorities being more likely to experience incivility than white employees (Cortina et al., 2013). On average, women experience greater frequencies of incivility as do those with perceived lesser power (Cortina et al., 2001; Pinder & Harlos, 2001) . It has also been hypothesized that with the increased scrutiny of overt forms of sexism and racism that

is current in the workplace, uncivil behavior may be used more extensively toward minorities as a more covert form of discriminatory behavior (Schilpzand, Pater, et al., 2016).

Why look at Observers of Incivility?

Incivility is a complex process. For it to occur, there must be two players: the instigator and the target. However, there may be a critical third-party present at an event: the observer. These three players, as well as the social context, all contribute to, and are impacted by, an uncivil encounter (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Though the preponderance of incivility research concentrates on the role of the instigator and the target, the observer of workplace incivility is an important third player, particularly given that most uncivil events take place without a supervisor present and few employees report incidences of incivility up the management chain (Cortina & Magley, 2009). Research has shown that witnesses to peer incivility are also negatively impacted by merely being present at an uncivil encounter and that after the event, observers have been found to have “lower performance on routine and creative tasks, engaged less in citizenship behaviors, and had higher dysfunctional ideation than participants in the control condition” (Schilpzand, Pater, et al., 2016, pp. S65–S66). The lack of insight into third-party observers is a recognized research gap (Schilpzand, Pater, et al., 2016), which this dissertation research will help to address.

The Link Between Incivility and Employee Voice

In the extant research, employee voice is broadly understood to include three characteristics: an act of verbal expression, a discretionary behavior that an individual

can choose whether or not to engage in, and an intention that is constructive or positive (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Complaining and venting without intent to bring about positive change does not traditionally fall under the voice construct, as voice is considered to be a form of proactive behavior (Morrison, 2011), though some scholars disagree and include all forms of voice, both positive and negative in a broader construct (Gorden, 1988; Maynes, 2013).

Employee silence behaviors are more controversial. Scholars disagree as to whether or not silence and voice are at opposite ends of a single continuum (Morrison, 2011) or if silence is its own separate, multidimensional construct (Van Dyne et al., 2003). An employee may exhibit silence behaviors (withhold voice) when they have, or believe to have, valuable input to share but do not do so because of fear, concerns over backlash, or feelings of futility (Morrison, 2011). In an employee incivility situation, the risk of damaging career opportunities and interpersonal relationships makes speaking out even more problematic. This study, unless explicitly noted, will consider voice and silence to be at opposite ends of a single voice continuum.

Little research at the intersection of incivility and voice research exists, with even less examining processual or causal relationships between an incivility event and an observer's voice response. The following research provides a much-needed knowledge bridge between the research territories of incivility and voice. The research question, "How do observers choose voice during a workplace incivility

event?” is addressed using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014; Gioia et al., 2013), allowing theory to emerge from the research process itself rather than being tested during the research. The methodology focuses on “interaction, meaning, and social process” (Thornberg, 2010, p. 587), a methodology particularly suited to the socially constructed concept of incivility.

Chapter 2 will review the origins and most relevant literatures of the two primary constructs being examined: incivility and voice. It will explore the underpinnings of these constructs in an effort to explain their relationship with observer voice in the face of incivility. Chapter 3 will provide the research rationale and methodology used in the study. Chapter 4 will elaborate on the research’s findings, while Chapter 5 will situate the findings in the extant literature and discuss the ways that this literature can both explain these findings as well as create new insight into workplace incivility. Finally, Chapter 6 will discuss the limitations of the current research as well as the opportunities it creates for future research and practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following literature review examines the relevant theoretical origins, underpinnings, and developments of two separate constructs: workplace incivility and employee voice. By analyzing these two bodies of work, theoretical light is shed on the research question, “How do observers choose voice during a workplace incivility event?”

The first section of the literature review focuses on the origins of the construct of incivility and its earliest definitions. The review then progresses to some of the thornier questions addressed by incivility scholars. What does incivility look like? How can one measure incivility? How much does incivility cost? What causes incivility? Who is most likely to be targeted by incivility? What are the conditions that trigger incivility? Though only lightly covered, the review will touch upon some of the limited work that focuses on how to address the problem of workplace incivility. Lastly, this section of the review will highlight recent work by scholars to refine the definition of incivility.

In the second part of Chapter 2, the focus will turn to voice. After establishing the origins of the voice construct, the main questions posed by voice scholars will be addressed. How do macro, organizational, and individual contexts influence employee voice? How do the relational context and an observer’s relationship with the instigator and the victim influence observer voice? Finally, the chapter will

examine the literature that examines the process of voice deliberation in response to an uncivil event.

Workplace Incivility

The roots of incivility research

To better understand workplace incivility, it is essential to understand the history of incivility research and where the construct is situated in the broader family of anti-social behaviors.

Workplace deviance

Workplace deviance includes both lower intensity behaviors that fit the definition of workplace incivility as well as more severe behaviors such as stealing and sabotaging equipment. It is voluntary in nature, contravenes organizational norms, and harms either the organization or its individuals (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). In their typology of deviant workplace behavior (as shown in Figure 1), Robinson and Bennett classify various forms of deviant behavior along two axes. Along the horizontal axis, behaviors are placed according to the increased seriousness or harmfulness of the deviant acts. Along the vertical axis, acts are placed according to whether or not they harm the organization (above the X axis) or an individual within the organization (below the X axis). While the top right quadrant contains serious acts against the organization (accepting kickbacks, sabotaging), the acts in the bottom left corner represent “minor” acts against individuals (blaming coworkers, gossiping about coworkers). The significance of Robinson and Bennett’s (1995) work to this research proposal is the acknowledgement of minor acts against individuals as a

recognized form of workplace deviance. This bottom left-hand corner, which the authors named “Political Deviance,” is descriptive of workplace incivility.



Source: Adapted from Robinson and Bennett (1995)

Figure 1. Typology of Deviant Workplace Behavior

Antisocial behavior

Workplace deviance is considered to be a subset of the larger family of antisocial behaviors (Griffin & Lopez, 2005). As originally defined by Giacalone and Greenberg (1997), antisocial behavior in the workplace refers to “any behavior that brings harm, or is intended to bring harm, to an organization, its employees, or stakeholders” (p. vii). Criticized by some for a lack of clarity, the term *antisocial*

behavior has also been used interchangeably with the term dysfunctional behavior (Griffin & Lopez, 2005). Giacalone and Greenberg's (1997) research on antisocial behavior in the workplace was one of the first that was targeted at management scholars rather than social scientists. By writing for this audience, they redirected the responsibility to reduce antisocial behavior from the security department to the broader management team, in the recognition that management behavior could both trigger and ameliorate antisocial behavior.

Aggression, violence, and harassment

Acts of aggression, violence, and harassment, also part of the family of antisocial behaviors, are thought to be more severe than incivility with a more obvious intent to harm (Liu et al., 2009; Schilpzand, Pater, et al., 2016). Though some practitioners might sometimes refer to aggression in a prosocial context, academics almost universally use it in its negative form (Griffin & Lopez, 2005). As a form of non-physical, highly assertive behavior, it is "directed to the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment" (Liu et al., 2009, p. 166). Like aggression, the target and intent of violence is clear, though violence implies physical action that is of even higher intensity than aggression (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Liu et al., 2009). The term bullying, though sometimes used interchangeably with aggression, includes not just acts of criticism or abuse that create intentional harm, but acts that are repeated over time (Einarsen, 2000; Naimon et al., 2013).

A key distinguishing feature of harassment, particularly in an American context, is the targeted nature of its victims (see Figure 2) and its consequent openness to legal sanctions (Trudel & Reio, 2011). A particular form of harassment, sexual harassment, is thought to consist of three sub-categories: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion (Lim & Cortina, 2005). Of these three sub-categories of sexual harassment, Lim and Cortina (2005) believed that gender harassment is the most closely related to incivility, as the hostile characteristics of both are absent explicit sexual motivation and intent. Of note, they found that as mistreatment became more particularized, from incivility, to gender harassment, to sexualized harassment, the more severe the impact to the victim as measured by job-related and psychological/health-related outcomes.

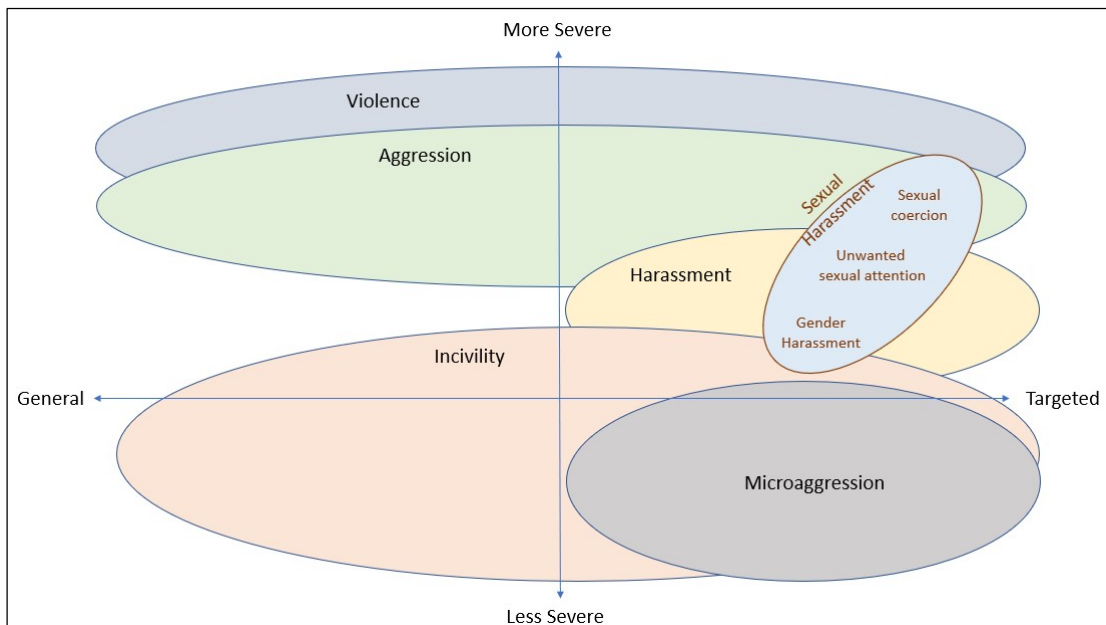


Figure 2. Deviant Behavior Mapped by Severity and Specificity of Target

Microaggression

Microaggression is a term first coined by Pierce et al. in 1977 and highlighted the biased treatment of African Americans in television commercials. As defined more recently by Sue et al. (2007), “Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (p. 271). Though the use of the term microaggression has since been popularized and expanded to include microaggression against other racial and gender categories, its origins focused on the African-American community.

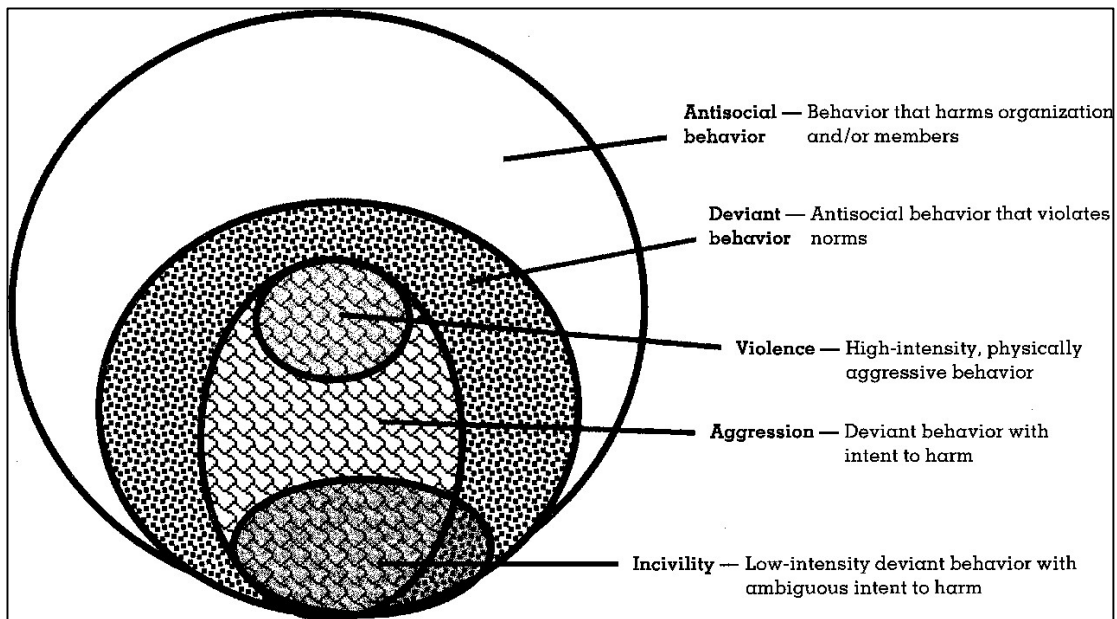
The three main categories of microaggression are: microassaults (intentional name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discrimination), microinsults (conveyed rudeness and insensitivity), and microinvalidation (negation of a person’s experiential reality as a person of color) (Sue et al., 2007). Nguyen’s (2020) research investigated the Asian-American experience of microaggression and described microinsults such as “Where are you from? No, where are you really from?” and “Your English is very good!” (Nguyen, 2020, p. 16).

Microaggression and incivility share similar characteristics; both in their forms, as well as in their subtle nature and ambiguous intent to harm. The distinguishing characteristic between them is the target. While workplace incivility can be experienced by anyone, microaggression is intended to “insult, demean, alienate and oppress marginalized groups” (Sue, 2010, p. 19). One additional gap should be noted

between the prevalent incivility and microaggression definitions; microaggression is not limited to human interchanges—it can also include environmental microaggression such as “the exclusion of decorations or literature that includes various racial groups” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274).

Workplace incivility

Published shortly after Giacalone and Greenberg’s (1997) work on antisocial behaviors, Andersson and Pearson (1999) introduced the concept and coined the expression “workplace incivility.” Unlike the more egregious constructs of violence and aggression, Andersson and Pearson considered workplace incivility to be a lower intensity form of workplace deviance with an ambiguous intent to harm (Figure 3); incivility could take place with intent to harm, without intent to harm (due perhaps to different behavioral norms), or without conscious intent to harm (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Because of its ambiguous nature, workplace incivility can be difficult to diagnose and can be interpreted differently by instigator, target, and witness. This makes it particularly complex to manage in organizations, with perpetrators able to claim ignorance of their act, that their intent was misunderstood, or that the victim was exaggerating the act’s impact.



Source: Adapted from Andersson and Pearson (1999)

Figure 3. Incivility and Other Forms of Mistreatment in Organizations

It should be noted that recent work by Miner et al. (2018) has challenged, or perhaps clarified, how modern scholars think about the ambiguity of incivility, reminding us that incivility, as originally defined, also includes acts driven by an instigator with conscious intent to harm. She has called upon scholars to examine ambiguity and intent separately and to investigate the degree to which these characteristics are intertwined. Hershcovis (2011) has similarly made a call to clarify overlapping constructs in the family of workplace mistreatment (incivility, bullying, social undermining, interpersonal conflict, emotional abuse, violence, abusive supervision) with a proposed model that would relegate both intent and intensity to a list of moderators in a broader, and clearer, model of workplace aggression.

A second core aspect of Andersson and Pearson's (1999) definition of incivility is the "incivility spiral." According to the authors, the target of perceived incivility can respond to incivility in an equal or more uncivil fashion which can at times result in an escalating situation of aggression or even violence. They propose that social identity threats, anger, and desire for revenge will combine to create an increase in the probability of escalation and that the escalation can be widespread and contagious. Similarly, Meyer (2004) noted that if unresolved, an organization's response to conflict can lead to antisocial behavior, covert retaliation, and even violence. Unsurprisingly, in narratives describing an uncivil event, it can be difficult to distinguish the instigator from the target, and those roles may even be exchanged as a spiraling narrative progresses.

Types of incivility

Uncivil acts are those that display rudeness and disregard for others, that violate norms for respectful interpersonal behavior, and that are of lower intensity as compared to violence or aggression; they are of ambiguous intent, either in the eyes of the instigator, the target, or the observer (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Uncivil acts include being put down or condescended to, being shown little attention or interest, being demeaned or shown derogatory behavior, being addressed unprofessionally either privately or publicly, being ignored or excluded from professional camaraderie, and being challenged on professional responsibility (Cortina et al., 2001). Incivility can be demonstrated in visible and audible acts such

as raised voices, eye-rolling, interrupting, and gossiping (Martin & Hine, 2005), or in harder to detect acts such as the silent treatment and the cold shoulder (Cicerali & Cicerali, 2017; Estes & Wang, 2008).

Measures of incivility

The oldest and most-used measure of incivility is the original seven-item Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS), developed by Cortina et al. (2001). Using this measure (as seen in Appendix A) employees are asked to indicate how often they have experienced a set of uncivil behaviors during the past five years. In 2013, the scale was updated and expanded to include a total of 12 items, adding targeted uncivil behaviors (yelling, swearing, angry outbursts, jokes), hostile looks, unfair ratings, and interruptions (Cortina et al., 2013). Also commonly used, Martin and Hine's (2005) Uncivil Workplace Behavior Questionnaire uses a 20-item scale grouped under the categories of hostility, privacy invasion, exclusionary behavior, and gossiping, and asks respondents to report the frequency of experienced uncivil behavior such as raised voices, eye-rolling, and being excluded. Several other incivility measures are available to scholars and practitioners, and are commonly adapted to target specific domain and/or gender concerns (Schilpzand, Pater, et al., 2016).

Impact of incivility

Incivility, though at times subtle, harms not just the target but the observer as well, incurring costs at both the individual and the organization level.

In survey responses from over 14,000 employees, Porath and Pearson (2013) gathered detailed information on the individual and team costs of workplace incivility and found it included less creativity, a decrease in quality or quantity of work, retaliation, reduced morale, and exit. Incivility has also been shown to decrease organizational trust, decrease job satisfaction, and increase exhaustion and disengagement (Miner-Rubino & Reed, 2010). Incivility can even cause customers to withdraw their patronage if they witness rude behavior at a company (Porath & Pearson, 2013). In addition to individual and workgroup costs, managers and executives suffer the opportunity costs of lost labor by spending on the order of 13% of their time managing and dealing with the aftermath of incivility (Porath & Pearson, 2013). In the case of targeted incivility, such as incivility directed towards those of a specific gender or race, individual costs can be multiplied for each target characteristic (Lim & Cortina, 2005). Lastly, the cost of incivility is cumulative over time; when incivility is experienced as a recurring, daily stressor, its psychological and health outcomes can be more severe than a single more significant incident (Cortina, 2008).

Porath and Pearson (2013) also found that witnesses to an uncivil event suffered its consequences, experiencing decreased cognitive ability as well as a decrease in citizenship behavior and volunteerism. Porath et al. (2015) proposed that decreases in observer performance, rather than being caused by a reduction in effort, were brought about by a kind of cognitive disruption triggered by an uncivil event. Further investigation attributed this disruption to an inhibition of working memory and an

increase in inattention blindness. Worryingly, the authors' findings also showed that observers of incivility were more likely to experience aggressive thoughts and had a greater tendency to engage in a contagious spiral of incivility (Porath et al., 2015).

Predictors of incivility

Individual context

Scholars have identified several individual characteristics that make an employee more likely to behave uncivilly. Trait anger, trait anxiety (Liu et al., 2009; Meier & Semmer, 2013), and Andersson and Pearson's (1999) more vividly described "hot temperament," are closely related antecedents that foretell an increased probability of incivility perpetration or incivility event escalation. An individual with high achievement orientation, a measure of an individual's motivation to achieve, is also more likely to behave uncivilly (Liu et al., 2009). On a more relational basis, perceiving oneself to have more positional power, gender power, or status also makes incivility perpetration more likely (Cortina et al., 2001; Lim & Cortina, 2005).

Trudel and Reio (2011) also found that instigators and targets with either integrating or dominating conflict management styles would be more likely to be uncivil, unlike those with more accommodating, avoiding, or compromising styles. Meyer (2004) found that of the similarly defined conflict handling styles, integrating was more effective for managers than compromising, obliging, avoiding, or forcing styles, while Liu et al. (2009) found that, paradoxically, an individual who believes

themselves to be more effective at managing conflicting directly would be more likely to be uncivil.

Organizational and cultural context

Though acknowledging the positive aspects of an informal work climate such as open communication and innovation, Andersson and Pearson (1999) warn that such a climate might “inadvertently encourage employees to behave in ways that are disrespectful of fellow coworkers” (p. 465).

Liu et al. (2009) are among the few scholars who examine incivility at the macro level, positing that national culture plays a key role in regulating incivility. In their study of Taiwanese and American students, they found that employees who are more strongly oriented to collectivism will have a greater ability to self-regulate, have more concern for others, and will be less prone to incivility. However, when considering behavior by their leaders, Chinese and Japanese employees found insults and anger directed at a subordinate to be a more acceptable form of expression than did American employees (Moon et al., 2018).

Target characteristics

Incivility, as a construct, is not targeted at a specific gender, race, or sociodemographic category. However, there has been significant research investigating the sociodemographic and behavioral characteristics of those who are more likely to experience incivility at work. Incivility that is targeted at a specific gender or race has been coined *selective incivility*, and has been thought of as a

modern and more insidious form of racism and sexism (Cortina et al., 2013). For example, research has found that males disproportionately control conversations and are more likely to interrupt female conversational partners (Zimmermann & West, 1996). In a further argument against incivility as an “equal opportunity” construct, data show that incivility is disproportionately experienced by women and people of color (Cortina, 2008; Cortina et al., 2001), with the greatest occurrence being experienced by women of color. In addition to the findings on the target characteristics of gender and race, studies have also found age and adiposity to be significantly related to incivility and withdrawal (Schilpzand, Leavitt, et al., 2016; Sliter et al., 2012). Adipose females suffer from acts of incivility more than adipose men, in apparent reinforcement of women being judged more than men on their physical characteristics, though incivility was less strongly related to adiposity in Black versus White women (Sliter et al., 2012).

In addition to sociodemographic characteristics, personality and behavior characteristics impact an individual’s likelihood of being the target of incivility, disproportionately affecting those who are “annoying, unusual, or bothersome” (Milam et al., 2009). In an investigation of the role that the “big five” personality traits play in experiences and perceptions of workplace incivility, Milam et al (2009) found that individuals either low in agreeableness or high in neuroticism were more likely to be the subject of incivility. Uncivil behavior was also more likely to be addressed at those with organizational and interpersonal counterproductive work

behavior such as cursing or inappropriately taking company property (Meier & Spector, 2013).

Conditions and trigger events

In surveys of hundreds of employees in 17 industries, over half of them cited overwork as a reason for their uncivil behavior, while over 40% said they had “no time to be nice” (Porath, 2015). Porath (2015) also noted that technology can increase incivility in several ways, for example, by increasing the pressures of an “always on” work environment, and by confusing the meaning and intent of electronic communications. In a similar vein, van Jaarsveld et al. (2010) found that employees who were treated uncivilly by customers were more likely to respond uncivilly when experiencing emotional exhaustion. Incivility has also been found to be used as a political tactic in situations of scarce resources, as instigators attempt to either defend or add to their territory (Cortina, 2008).

As stated by Trudel and Reio (2011), “uncivil behaviors may be considered a cause, trigger, or outcome of a conflict episode” (p. 396). In an environment of reciprocated, if not spiraling incivility, it is difficult to determine the instigator from the victim of any one uncivil event. Unsurprisingly, therefore, one of the leading antecedents of instigating incivility is having previously been on the receiving end of incivility (Trudel & Reio, 2011). This spiral may also contribute to some individuals being labeled with a “victim mentality” given that targets who have previously experienced

incivility are “more likely to notice even subtly biased behaviors” (Lim & Cortina, 2005, p. 489).

Roles and relationships

Though research into witnessed workplace incivility is growing (O'Reilly & Aquino, 2011; Reich & Hershcovis, 2015), the focus of the majority of the research has been on the instigator-victim dyad, with comparatively little written about the observer (Kluemper et al., 2019; Schilpzand, Pater, et al., 2016). In an exception to this, Kluemper et al.'s (2019) research on blaming the victim of employee deviance introduced the worrying idea that both leaders and observers may erroneously attribute deviance to the “socially constructed” role of victim, particularly in instances when the instigator and the leader have a high level of LMX or if the instigator is perceived to be a high performer (Kluemper et al., 2019).

Miner et al. (2018) challenged the prevailing belief that incivility roles (instigator-victim-observer) play out in dyadic relationships and posited that incivility is a behavior that can occur across a broader organizational system, not just at its currently conceptualized micro-level but at the meso- and macro-levels as well. By opening up the incivility construct, they allow future scholars to study how incivility is influenced by societal and industry norms and practices as well as by company and workgroup norms.

Incivility solutions

Management practices and norms

Porath and Pearson (2013) are among the small number of academics that promote practices to reduce incivility. Their strategies include role modeling, asking for feedback, creating group norms via deliberate hiring and training practices, penalizing bad behavior, and seeking behavior feedback from exiting employees. Liu et al. (2009) exhorted hiring managers to screen for individuals who combine high individual achievement orientation with high collectivism orientation, and to mitigate the uncivil effects of high achievement orientation with an organization-wide culture that stresses respect for others.

Illustrating the dangers of poor leadership, research has shown that 25% of managers who owned up to incivility attributed it to the rudeness role modeled by their leaders, though only 11% considered civility as part of their own hiring process (Porath & Pearson, 2013). To ensure that incivility does not go unchecked, managers are encouraged to take complaints seriously, to maintain an open door policy, and to refrain from “shooting the messenger” (Porath & Pearson, 2010).

Individual self-care

Porath et al. (2015) promoted self-care as an additional method of reducing the harmful impact of incivility. By familiarizing oneself with the phenomenon of incivility, steering clear of uncivil individuals, seeking support from friends and family, participating in healthy events, and engaging in mindfulness practices, the

authors suggest that individuals can increase their resistance to the detrimental effects of incivility.

Spirituality at work

Naimon et al. (2013) conducted a study on over 100 college students to investigate the relationships between negative affectivity, locus of control, agreeableness, and workplace spirituality with workplace incivility perceptions. Conceived as a “sixth personality variable” (Piedmont, 1999), spirituality has been found to be closely related to, but distinct from, extraversion and agreeableness. In their study, Naimon et al. (2013) found that the components of spirituality—meaning and spiritual blocks—predict incivility perceptions above and beyond that of traditional personality variables. Though the authors suggested that finding meaning in work through spirituality could buffer against ambiguous workplace stressors such as incivility, they encourage others to study the potentially negative side-effects that could be produced by workplace spirituality promotional efforts such as perceptions of proselytization (Naimon et al., 2013).

The CREW process

Osatuke et al.’s (2009) original research on a Civility, Respect, and Engagement at Work (CREW) intervention at a VHA organization and Leiter et al.’s (2011) study of a CREW intervention on five health organizations in Canada are two of the few studies that focus on incivility interventions, and both interventions showed positive and significant results. The focus of a CREW intervention is to improve civility in work groups by increasing consideration of others, improving ability to resolve

intergroup conflict, and increasing willingness to be attentive to one another (Leiter et al., 2011). The core elements of the CREW process include

- management-endorsed, public support of civility;
- civility baseline measurements;
- leader civility training;
- facilitated employee CREW meetings;
- mid-point leader gathering and check-in; and
- final facilitator and leader check-in for sustainability training (Leiter et al., 2011).

A broader incivility construct

Before transitioning to a discussion of the voice literature, it is important to address some of the questions raised by more recent incivility scholars. Miner et al. (2018) gently, but thoroughly, challenge the traditional bounds of the definition of incivility and question what they see as the five central characteristics of the incivility construct. Specifically, Miner et al. (2018) posited that “workplace incivility may also have clear intent to harm, be functional, be norm-abiding, show various response trajectories, and be a network phenomenon” (p. 321). Amongst some of their challenges, they suggest that intensity and intentionality are intertwined, with intensity being easier to measure while intentionality is more complex and influenced by factors such as individual differences in personality and previous experiences with the instigator. They also maintain that incivility can be functional, such as in the case of harsh reprimands for safety violations and can serve the purpose of “letting off steam” in the form of venting and gossiping. They also give the example of a group

of close colleagues whose in-group communication behavior includes “uncivil” humorous interchanges with polite interaction reserved for out-group members.

Though some scholars have made the call for workplace incivility to be more clearly defined, its basic characteristics reoccur throughout the majority of the literature; characteristics that are of low-intensity, ambiguous, and in violation of workplace norms. Workplace incivility might be expressed as a demeaning comment, the cold shoulder, an eye-roll, or in the acts of interrupting, berating, and shouting. Since the introduction of the concept by Andersson and Pearson (1999), scholars have created a growing body of knowledge on its antecedents, its significant impact to individuals and organizations, and the ways it can be manifested and measured. The ways that incivility can be reduced, however, remain underexplored in the literature—a gap that this research on the use of voice in the face of incivility will address.

Employee Voice

In this section, I will review and summarize the voice and silence literature that is most relevant to my research question, starting with a brief summary of the main characteristics of the voice construct. I will then cover the most influential works of the last 30 years of the 20th century, starting with the conceptualization of voice by Hirschman (1970).

At the turn of the century, research on employee voice and silence exploded, led by the work of Morrison and Milliken (2003) in the *Journal of Management Studies*’

special issue on voice and silence. This issue, which explores the research surrounding when and why employees choose voice or silence, began the modern history of voice and silence. Of these more recent works, the review will concentrate on the literature that investigates the macro, organizational, and individual contextual factors that influence voice as well as the more situational factors that influence the voice deliberation process. The literature review will then examine the voice deliberation “calculus” itself, highlighting the work of scholars who concentrate on the complicated and interrelated balancing act that an individual goes through as they assess the cost and benefits of using voice. Lastly, the literature review will touch upon one of the few works that investigates factors that influence voice effectiveness in response to an uncivil event.

An overview of voice and silence

In the extant research, employee voice is broadly understood to include three characteristics: an act of verbal expression, a discretionary behavior that an individual can choose whether or not to engage in, and an intention that is constructive or positive (Detert & Burris, 2007; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012; Wilkinson et al., 2020). Some authors limit voice to upward communication only, though more recent literature considers upward and lateral voice as part of the same construct.

Complaining and venting without intent to bring about positive change does not fall under most voice constructs that define voice as a form of proactive behavior (Morrison, 2011), though other scholars disagree (Gorden, 1988; Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014). It should be noted that a voice action contains an inherent element

of risk due to the nature of voice as a challenge to existing workplace norms (Morrison, 2011).

As traditionally defined, voice is constructive yet can vary significantly in its content, from ways to improve an organization or a work-related problem, the expression of a differing opinion, or, of particular interest to this study, the highlighting of a situation of unfairness or misconduct (Morrison, 2011). The research that exists on the outcome of using voice, however, is limited and contradictory, and has been identified as an important gap in the literature (Milliken & Morrison, 2003; Morrison, 2011). There exists even less literature examining the tactics used by employees who did choose to speak up. One such study was done by Piderit and Ashford (2003) and outlined the different influences on choices of voice behavior tactics by female managers experiencing gender equity issues.

Employee silence has been described as the act of an employee withholding input that has the possibility of being valuable or having thoughts or feelings that they wish they could express (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). An employee may choose silence due to fear, a desire to maintain group cohesiveness, or because of social pressures (Milliken & Morrison, 2003). No research has been found that includes the more mundane reasons for silence such as forgetting to speak up or silence due to a lack of relevant or useful information.

Compared to the literature on employee voice, academic literature that focuses primarily on employee silence is more limited, though in one of the earliest works on silence and voice, Elizabeth Noel-Neumann introduced the theory of the “spiral of silence,” which “provided insight into how silence may arise and perpetuate in conformance of public opinion” (Greenberg & Edwards, 2009, p. 11).

Scholars disagree as to whether or not silence is the opposite of voice on a single continuum (Morrison, 2011) or if it is its own separate, multidimensional construct (Van Dyne et al., 2003). An employee exhibits silence behaviors when they have, or believe to have, valuable input to share but do not do so because of fear, concerns over backlash, or feelings of futility (Morrison, 2011). In a peer incivility situation, the risk of damaging interpersonal peer relationships makes speaking out even more problematic. There are several arguments to support the idea that silence is a separate construct to voice. Firstly, Pinder and Harlos (2001) noted that using voice is a deliberate decision, while silence can be an automatic withdrawal response. Secondly, by defining silence as the conscious act of withholding information, one can see that silence may be more than the mere absence of voice (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). For reader ease, unless otherwise explicitly stated, this document will employ the term *voice* when referring to the broader voice continuum, which includes both voice and silence behaviors.

Historical background

Exit, voice, and loyalty

Albert Hirschman (1970) is thought to be the seminal scholar on employee voice. In his 1970 book, *Exit, Voice, Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*, Hirschman considered the conditions under which customers would choose voice over exit (Hirschman, 1970). In this first definition of voice, it was the customer, rather than an employee, who expressed their dissatisfaction with a company's performance. Hirschman (1970) defined voice in the following way:

[A]ny objectionable state of affairs, whether through individual or collective petition to the management directly in charge, through appeal to a higher authority with the intention of forcing a change in management, or through various types of actions and protests, including those that are meant to mobilize public opinion. (p. 30)

Hirschman (1970) thought of exit, the simple act of a customer ceasing to buy the products of a firm, to be an economic choice, while the messier choice of voice to be “political action par excellence” (p. 16). Though the majority of subsequent work on voice would consider voice from the perspective of employees, rather than from the perspective of customers, the interest in the construct of voice had begun.

Industrial relations versus organizational behavior

Subsequent research on employee voice could be divided into two academic fields:

Industrial Relations (IR) and Organizational Behavior (OB). One fundamental difference between these two disciplines is their different perceptions of the relationship between the employee and the organization. The field of Industrial Relations assumes that the interest of employees is in conflict with that of

management, while organizational behaviorists assume a more cooperative relationship between employee and employer (Wilkinson & Barry, 2016). For this research, I will concentrate on the OB perspective, which largely considers employee voice to be a form of individual discretionary behavior with constructive organizational intent (Detert & Burris, 2007; Morrison, 2011).

The MUM effect

Coincident in time with Hirschman's conceptualization of voice and silence, Rosen and Tesser (1970) introduced the concept of the MUM effect (keeping Mum about Undesirable Messages) or "the idea that people will be more reluctant to communicate information that is negative rather than positive" (p. 253). The authors identified a number of possible costs that drive an individual's reluctance to communicate, including fear of a negative reaction by the message receiver, fear of being infected by the negative emotions of the receiver, and guilt that they were not equally impacted by the negative news.

The spiral of silence

The third of the ground-breaking theories to emerge in the 1970s was the "spiral of silence." Brought forward by Noelle-Neumann (1974), the spiral of silence theory considered the broad public as the receiver of information. If public opinion for a topic were weak, Noelle-Neumann contended that individuals would tend to remain silent about their positions due to a combination of fear of isolation and self-doubt. If silence continued, the perceived lack of support for an unvoiced opinion would be reinforced in an ongoing spiral of silence. This idea of a spiral of silence continues

today and has more recently been used by Bowen and Blackmon (2003) to describe the contagious decision by invisible minorities to keep silent about their sexual orientation due to a perceived lack of support and a fear of isolation.

Organizational justice and the voice effect

Interest in voice and silence increased significantly in the remainder of the 20th century and, in the late 80s, the role of justice rose to the forefront as a factor influencing an employee's choice of silence or voice. At that time, Greenberg (1987) developed a taxonomy of "organizational justice" that would help scholars map peoples' perceptions of fairness in organizations. Greenberg mapped theories along a "reactive-proactive" and a "process-content" dimension where reactive theories focused on people's attempts to avoid perceived unfair states, while proactive theories focused on people's attempts to create just states (Greenberg, 1987). An interesting finding in this research became known as the "voice effect" whereby an individual's perception of the fairness of procedures would be increased merely by having a chance to be heard (Brinsfield et al., 2009).

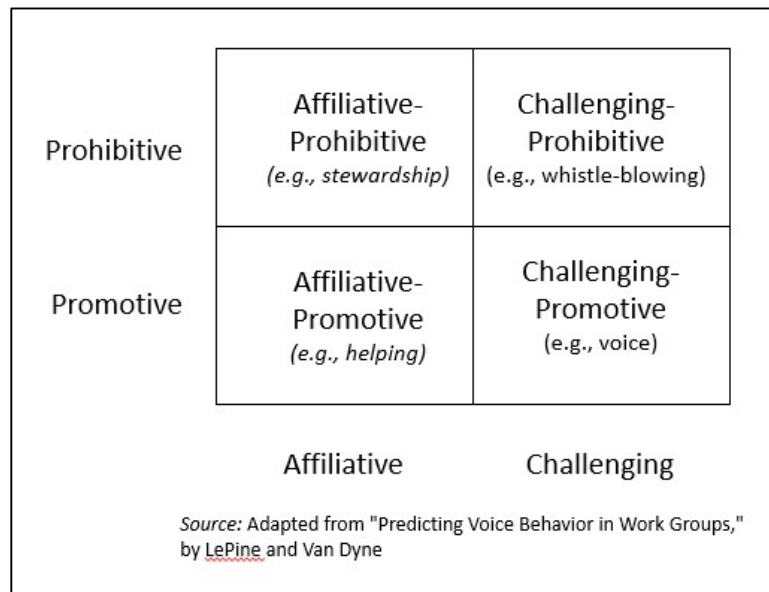
Whistleblowing

Continuing along the theme of justice and voice, Miceli and Near (1985) defined whistleblowing as "disclosure of illegal, immoral, or illegitimate practices under the control of their employers, to parties who may be able to effect action" (p. 525). Though many consider whistleblowing to be outside of the traditional voice-silence construct (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998a), whistleblowing also serves as an extreme case that can help test the boundaries of the situational, organizational, and individual

characteristics that lead an individual to use their voice. The study of responses to whistleblowing behavior also provides scholars with insight into the after-effects of using voice (whistleblower retaliation).

Extra-role behaviors and prosocial voice

As defined by Van Dyne and LePine (1998), organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) are both positive and discretionary; they are not included in an individual's job description, not subject to formal rewards, and do not lead to punishment if they are not performed. In their work on extra-role behaviors, Van Dyne and LePine (1998) defined a typology of extra-role behavior that mapped OCBs along two dimensions: promotive-prohibitive and affiliative-challenging (see Figure 4). In what Van Dyne and LePine (1998) called the "voice" quadrant (challenging-promotive), they define voice as "promotive behavior that emphasizes the expression of constructive challenge intended to improve rather than merely criticize" (p. 109). By linking these two terms, they reinforce the view of some scholars that the voice construct should be limited to positive forms of expression (Wilkinson et al., 2020). The other quadrants in their model (therefore distinct from voice) were helping (affiliative-promotive), stewardship (affiliative-prohibitive), and whistleblowing (challenging-prohibitive).



Source: Adapted from LePine and Van Dyne (1998)

Figure 4. Predicting Voice Behavior in Work Groups

The silent treatment

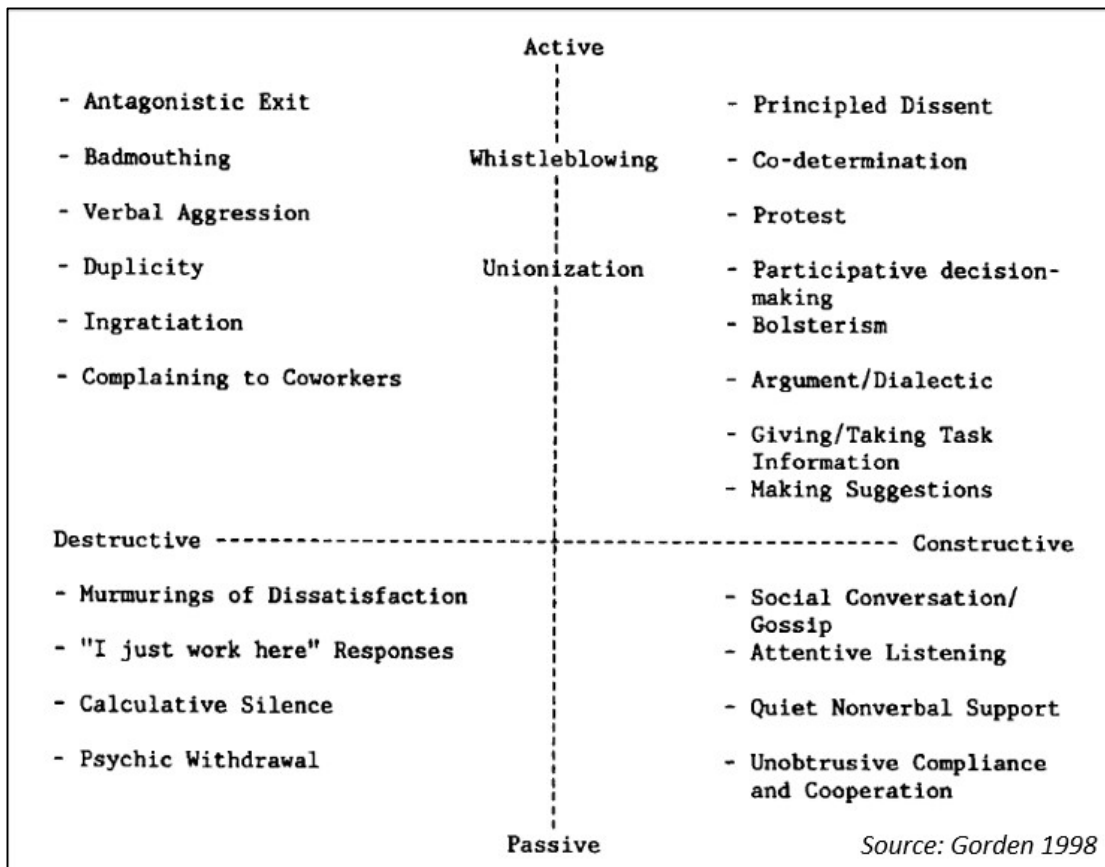
The latter part of the 20th century also introduced a concept that would become interrelated with later work at the intersection of employee silence and incivility: the silent treatment. Though later work would examine silence as a response to uncivil behavior, it was Williams et al. (1998) who included the “silent treatment” as a subset of ostracism, itself a form of uncivil behavior. In their study, Williams et al. (1998) found that 67% of the study population admitted to using this punitive form of silence. In its extreme forms, the silent treatment, shunning, and ostracism led to “internalized feelings of isolation, alienation, depression, and worthlessness” and caused serious psychological consequences (Williams et al., 1998, p. 135). Interestingly, and continuing with the theme of spirals, whistleblowers have often

found themselves to be the victim of ostracism after they have used their voices against breaches of ethics (Bjørkelo, 2013).

Broader typologies of voice and silence

Destructive forms of voice

Gorden's (1988) four factor model of voice distinguished itself from existing and most later voice literature by including negative forms of voice as part of its construct. As seen in Figure 5, Gorden's 2 x 2 model mapped voice behaviors along the dimensions of passive-active and constructive-destructive. His model also departed from Hirschman's original construct which had limited voice to "active" expression only. Though Gorden's (1988) broader definition did not initially garner as much academic attention as voice scholars of the "positive" tradition (Morrison, 2014; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998) other scholars would return to his more comprehensive definition over time.



Source: Adapted from Gorden (1998)

Figure 5. Typology of Voice Behaviors

In more recent research, Maynes and Podsakoff (2014), in keeping with Gorden’s thinking, proposed that restricting voice to expressions of constructive intent had served to unnecessarily narrow the field, particularly when it was obvious that other types of voice continue to exist in organizations. Their research into new ways of measuring voice created an expanded definition of voice that included behaviors that supported and challenged the status quo as well as behaviors with either positive or negative attributes: “an individual’s voluntary and open communication directed

toward individuals within the organization that is focused on influencing the context of the work environment” (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014, p. 88). To reflect more modern norms, they also clarified that voice need not be limited to verbal behavior and should include electronic communication such as sending e-mails and writing memos. To be considered voice, they maintained, expression must be “(a) openly communicated, (b) organizationally relevant, (c) focused on influencing the work environment, and (d) received by someone inside the organization.” (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014, p. 88). This last requirement disqualifies from voice any messages delivered via anonymous reporting tools such as the organizational suggestion box.

Maynes and Podsakoff’s (2014) simplified typology (Table 1) maps this newly expanded definition of voice using two primary dimensions; the first distinguishes between voice behaviors whose aim is to preserve rather than to challenge the status quo, while the second distinguishes between voice behaviors that are promotive versus prohibitive. In the matrix shown in Table 1, four types of voice emerge: constructive voice (promotive-challenge), destructive voice (prohibitive-challenge), defensive voice (prohibitive-preservation), and supportive voice (promotive-preservation). Their prohibitive-challenge quadrant of voice includes destructive forms of voice such as the “expression of voluntary hurtful, critical, or debasing opinions” (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014, p. 92). The authors, by pushing the limits of the definition of voice, have created an overlap between the voice and incivility constructs.

Table 1. Organizing Framework for Employee Voice Behaviors

	Preservation	Challenge
Promotive	<p><i>Supportive Voice</i></p> <p>Definition: Supportive voice is the voluntary expression of support for worthwhile work-related policies, programs, objectives, procedures, etc., or speaking out in defense of these same things when they are being unfairly criticized.</p>	<p><i>Constructive Voice</i></p> <p>Definition: Constructive voice is the voluntary expression of ideas, information, or opinions focused on effecting organizationally functional change to the work context.</p>
Prohibitive	<p><i>Defensive Voice</i></p> <p>Definition: Defensive voice is the voluntary expression of opposition to changing an organization's policies, procedures, programs, practices, etc., even when the proposed changes have merit or making changes is necessary.</p>	<p><i>Destructive Voice</i></p> <p>Definition: Destructive voice is the voluntary expression of hurtful, critical, or debasing opinions regarding work policies, practices, procedures, etc.</p>

Source: Adapted from Maynes and Podsakoff (2014)

Positive silence

Like Gordon (1998) and Maynes and Podsakoff (2014), Bies (2009) argued for a broader conceptualization, but this time of silence. Bies (2009) challenged the view of silence as a strictly dysfunctional behavior, arguing that it can also be used for positive organizational motives. Bies (2009) identified three types of silence that could improve problem solving and learning: silence to encourage information gathering, silence to encourage dissent, and silence as part of focused reflection. Bies

(2009) also spoke of the dark side of silence and its use for “dominance, revenge, and blame management” (p. 163).

Predictors of voice

There are many interrelated factors that influence an employee’s use of voice.

Outlined below are the macro, organizational, and individual contextual factors that predict an employee’s use of voice in general followed by a discussion of how an employee’s relationship with surrounding others impacts their use of voice.

Macro culture

In addition to a culture’s general inclination towards voice or silence, the attitudes about when to use voice vary significantly across cultures. In paternalistic cultures with higher power distance, more formal communication is encouraged, with a tendency towards top-down vertical communication (Lee & Jablin, 1992; Morrison & Milliken, 2000), while an employee from a collectivist culture will be more likely to have an indirect style, will favor courtesy over truth, and will use a more nuanced tone (Sallinen-Kuparinen et al., 1991). An observer from an individualistic culture, in addition to a tendency towards more direct communication, will also be more likely to perceive an instigator’s behavior as under their own control and will thus be more likely to report any deviant behaviors (Harvey et al., 2009).

Organizational context

Similar to the influence of the macro environment, an organization’s workplace climate influences behavior over and above individual perceptions and attitudes (Morrison et al., 2011). Morrison et al. (2011) defined the term *group voice climate* as

a group's "shared beliefs about speaking up" (p. 183). In keeping with other authors, they stress the importance of examining both the positive and the negative aspects of the voice phenomenon, fleshing out Morrison and Milliken's (2000) organizational climate of silence with factors that positively influenced voice.

Some of the organizational factors that influence voice are relatively "mechanical" and are a result of how an organization is constructed—something that is easily visible on an organization chart. The greater the number of layers in an organization, the more difficult it will be to communicate (Milliken et al., 2003; Morrison, 2011), potentially exacerbated by employee reluctance to communicate criticism to increased numbers of those of higher status (Morrison, 2011). Self-managed groups, which could be thought of as organizations with only one layer, have also been found to engage in more voice than traditionally-managed groups (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998). Group size has also been found to negatively influence voice behavior: As group size increases, diffusion of responsibility and conformity pressure increases, making it less likely that employees will express challenging or change-oriented ideas (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998).

The "softer" characteristics of an organization are reflected in its culture, behaviors, and norms, each of which influence an organization's shared beliefs about speaking up. Employees who identify with their organization, believe that their organization cares about them, and feel that they belong to a supportive work culture are more

likely to speak up about issues that concern them (Ashford et al., 1998; Knoll & van Dick, 2013; Milliken et al., 2003; Morrison, 2011). Top management openness is also a behavior that leads employees to see a higher probability of success in “selling issues” and a greater likelihood of being treated fairly (Ashford et al., 1998).

Organizational norms that support risk-taking, speaking out behaviors, and a favorable work climate can create a shared belief about the efficacy and safety of using voice (Ashford et al., 1998; Morrison & Milliken, 2000), while a culture of intimidation and fear can stifle voice (Pinder & Harlos, 2001).

Two additional organizational phenomena that impact voice behaviors have received significant scholar and practitioner attention and are worthy of covering in more detail: the climate of silence and psychological safety.

In the early parts of the 21st century, two separate streams of workplace silence emerged: organizational silence, a conceptualization of silence at the group or organization level, and employee silence as experienced at the individual level. Morrison and Milliken (2000) described organizational silence as a collective phenomenon, one where “the dominant choice within many organizations is for employees to withhold their opinions and concerns about organizational problems” (p. 707). Though my research interest lies more squarely in the domain of employee or individual silence, it is important to understand this contextual phenomenon, also called “a climate of silence,” as participant interviews have shown organizational

climate as a factor in influencing an individual to choose silence over voice. In Morrison and Milliken's (2000) model, organizational silence is attributed to two primary factors, a manager's fear of negative feedback and a manager's implicit beliefs about employees and the nature of management. One of the primary responses to a fear of negative feedback, that of ignoring it, had previously been dubbed the "deaf ear syndrome" by Peirce et al. (1998). Morrison and Milliken (2000) found that this fear of feedback might also lead to other management responses such as questioning the accuracy of the message or attacking the messenger.

Morrison and Milliken (2000) described the top management team characteristics they believed would also contribute to organizational silence: managers with a financial or economic background, managers of long tenure, managers from a high-power distance or collectivistic culture, or a management team of a makeup dissimilar to lower-level employees in race or gender. They also posited that organizational silence would be more common in companies that were from mature/stable industries, undergoing strict cost constraint, that hired from the outside, or held more paternalistic attitudes (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

In the 2003 special issue of the *Journal of Management Studies*, Edmondson (2003) published her groundbreaking work examining speaking up behavior in 16 operating room teams. Edmondson (2003) identified two team leader behaviors that could be used to help predict organizational learning; the first included the more traditional

tactics of change management success (communicating a rationale for change and soliciting employee input), while the second highlighted the new concept of psychological safety. In her study, she proposed that by reducing or eliminating differences in power as a reason for silence, a climate of psychological safety would be created that would encourage team members to communicate critical information and facilitate organizational learning (Edmondson, 2003). It can be argued that Edmondson's concept of psychological safety is similar to a combination of top management openness and trust in supervisor, two of the key variables Premeaux and Bedeian (2003) identified as organizational factors or "cues" that influenced speaking up behaviors. Detert and Burris's (2007) later work on the contextual factors that drove employees to voice ideas for organizational improvement also found support for the hypothesis that "perceived psychological safety mediates the relationships between change oriented leader behaviors and subordinates' improvement-oriented voice" (p. 872).

Individual context

Research by LePine and Van Dyne (2001) found that four of the "big five" personality variables were related to voice. Unsurprisingly, voice was most strongly and positively correlated with extraversion, followed closely by conscientiousness. Less strong, but still significant, neuroticism and agreeableness were negatively related to voice. LePine and Van Dyne's (2001) study also supported evidence of the bidirectionality of personality traits, hypothesizing that in some jobs, voice may be a

key dimension of overall performance, while in other, perhaps more traditional, jobs cooperative behavior would be the key dimension.

In their ground-breaking research, Pinder and Harlos (2001) focused specifically on the motives that would predict silence by an employee. It should be noted that unlike some scholars, these scholars believe that silence is more than the absence of voice; it is a form of communication in and of itself and it can be used for either endorsement or objection. In their definition, silence is “the withholding of any form of genuine expression about the individual’s behavioral, cognitive and/or affective evaluations of his or her organizational circumstances to persons who are perceived to be capable of effecting change or redress.” (Pinder & Harlos, 2001, p. 334).

Though their research studied silence reactions in response to severe forms of mistreatment (harassment and rape), their work remains highly relevant to the study of voice in response to incivility. In their study, they introduced two forms of silence in response to injustice: quiescence and acquiescence. They also described the dominant emotions and “enduring personality predispositions” (traits) that influenced behavior towards silence (Pinder & Harlos, 2001, p. 354). For the purposes of this review, both emotions and traits are considered “predictors of voice.” As seen in Table 2, the emotions the authors associated with quiescence, a state of having “not yet given up,” included the more active emotions of fear, anger, and despair, while the emotion they most associated with acquiescence was resignation. An acquiescent

employee in a state of resignation would therefore be less likely to express voice than a quiescent employee (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). In their model of employee silence in response to organizational injustice, they identified three key traits that played a major part in an employee’s appraisal process: self-esteem, communication apprehension (generalized fear of or anxiety towards communicating), and locus of control (Pinder & Harlos, 2001).

Table 2. Dimensions of Quiescence and Acquiescence

	Quiescence	Acquiescence
Voluntariness	Relatively voluntary	Relatively involuntary
Consciousness	Conscious	Less conscious
Acceptance	Low	Moderate to high
Stress level	Moderate to high	Low to moderate
Awareness of Alternatives	Relatively high	Relatively low
Propensity to Voice	Relatively high	Relatively low
Propensity to Exit	Relatively high	Relatively low
Dominant Emotions	Fear, Anger, Despair	Resignation

Source: Adapted from Pinder and Harlos (2001)

Van Dyne et al. (2003) built upon Pinder and Harlos’s (2001) definition of acquiescence but used it to describe both voice and silence behaviors. In their 3 x 2 model (seen in Figure 6), they used the terms acquiescent, defensive, and prosocial as descriptors of *both* voice and silence as part of separate, multidimensional constructs. In their work, they defined voice as “intentionally expressing relevant ideas, information, and opinions about possible improvements” and silence as “intentionally

withholding ideas, information, and opinions with relevance to improvements in work and work organizations” (Van Dyne et al., 2003, p. 1360). The authors felt there were three distinct motives that would drive voice and silence behaviors: resignation, fear, and cooperation.

<div style="text-align: center;"> Type of Behaviour → Employee Motive ↓ </div>	EMPLOYEE SILENCE: Intentionally withholding work-related ideas, information, and opinions	EMPLOYEE VOICE: Intentionally expressing work-related ideas, information, and opinions
Disengaged Behaviour Based on Resignation Feeling unable to make a difference	ACQUIESCENT SILENCE Examples: Withholding ideas based on resignation Keeping opinions to self due to low self-efficacy to make a difference	ACQUIESCENT VOICE Examples: Expressing supportive ideas based on resignation Agreeing with the group due to low self-efficacy to make a difference
Self-Protective Behaviour Based on Fear Feeling afraid and personally at risk	DEFENSIVE SILENCE Examples: Withholding information on problems based on fear Omitting facts to protect the self	DEFENSIVE VOICE Examples: Expressing ideas that shift attention elsewhere based on fear Proposing ideas that focus on others to protect the self
Other-Oriented Behaviour Based on Cooperation Feeling cooperative and altruistic	PROSOCIAL SILENCE Examples: Withholding confidential information based on cooperation Protecting proprietary knowledge to benefit the organization	PROSOCIAL VOICE Examples: Expressing solutions to problems based on cooperation Suggesting constructive ideas for change to benefit the organization

Source: Adapted from Van Dyne et al. (2003)

Figure 6. Examples of Specific Types of Silence and Specific Types of Voice

The motive of resignation could produce either acquiescent silence or acquiescent voice. Acquiescent silence, perhaps driven by low self-efficacy, might motivate an employee to keep quiet about opinions, while acquiescent voice might lead an employee to express unfelt agreement with the prevailing opinion. Fear, the second

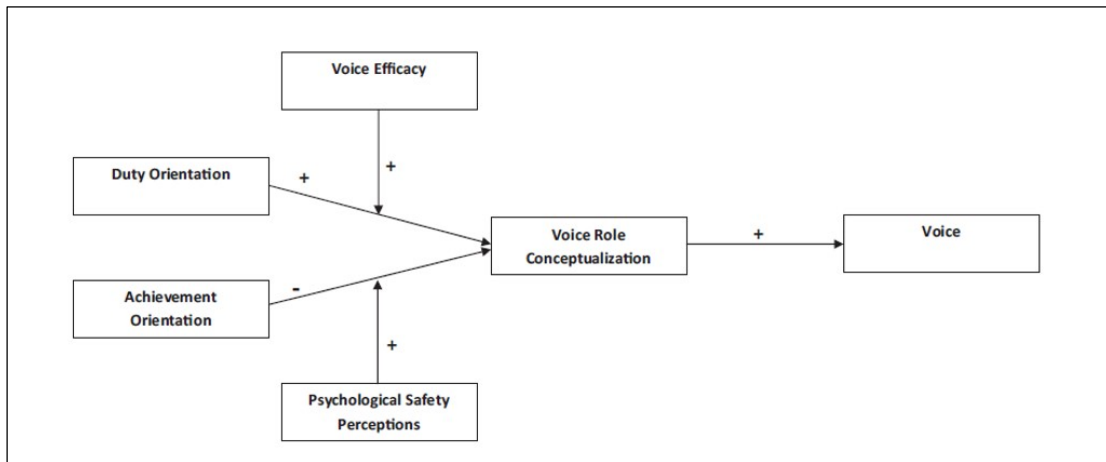
motive, could result in defensive silence (the conscious decision to withhold opinions, perhaps due to a fear of negative personal consequences) or defensive voice (a self-protective behavior, using voice to deflect attention elsewhere). The author's definition of "defensive silence" is similar to Pinder and Harlos's (2001) concept of quiescent silence (Van Dyne et al., 2003). Ashford et al.'s (1998) study of the reasons that women hesitated to speak out about gender equity issues also highlighted fear of image-risk, a form of defensive silence, as a key reason that women were reluctant to "sell" the issue of gender equity.

In a departure from the work of previous scholars, Van Dyne et al. (2003) maintained that the last of the motives, that of cooperation, could result in either prosocial voice or prosocial silence. Prosocial voice is the most commonly understood form of employee voice and includes other-oriented behavior with a desire to improve the situation with suggestions or ideas for change. However, in their definition of prosocial silence, Van Dyne et al. (2003) disconnected silence from its negative connotations and proposed that silence could also be used for altruistic purposes such as protecting proprietary knowledge or guarding potentially harmful company information. By distinguishing three very different kinds of silence, Van Dyne et al. (2003) transformed silence from an act of "non-voice" into a unidimensional model with its own nuanced construct.

Though Premeaux and Bedeian (2003) maintained that their definition of “speaking up” behavior was related to, but distinct from, voice and other forms of workplace expression, this study considers speaking up to be part of a broader definition of voice that includes the expression of both positive and negative opinions. Speaking up behavior is described by Premeaux and Bedeian (2003) as “openly stating one’s views or opinions about workplace matters, including the actions or ideas of others, suggested or needed changes, and alternative approaches or different lines of reasoning for addressing job-related issues” (p. 1538). As part of their research, Premeaux and Bedeian (2003) investigated the impact of self-monitoring on speaking up behaviors. According to Premeaux and Bedeian (2003), high self-monitors (HSMs) are sensitive to the context of a situation and modify their voice behavior to portray themselves in a positive light, whereas low self-monitors (LSMs) rely more on internal factors, emotions, and dispositions, and seek out situations that would allow them to speak out authentically.

Expanding on the ways in which an individual’s context or predisposition impacts their likelihood of using voice, Tangirala et al. (2013) shone a spotlight on an employee’s duty and achievement orientation. Interestingly, the authors found that duty-orientation, or “an employee’s dispositional sense of moral and ethical obligation at the workplace” had the opposite impact on voice to achievement orientation, or an employee’s “ingrained personal ambition to get ahead professionally” (p. 1040). As seen in Figure 7, employees high in duty orientation

would feel a strong obligation to speak up if they were in possession of thoughts or ideas that would benefit the organization. Employees who were more driven by ambition and personal success, characteristics that have also been shown to predict an increased inclination to commit uncivil acts (Liu et al., 2009), would pay more attention to the costs and risks of using voice (Tangirala et al., 2013). The authors also addressed the interaction of two moderators: voice efficacy (increasing likelihood of voice in those with high duty orientation) and psychological safety (increasing the likelihood of voice in high achievement orientation).



Source: Adapted from Tangirala et al. (2013)

Figure 7. The Effects of Duty and Achievement Orientation on Voice

Using a deontic model of organizational justice, Skarlicki and Rupp (2010) examined the motivation of third parties to seek retribution towards transgressors. Though retribution is a broader construct than voice, it does include voice behaviors directed towards a transgressor such as confronting, reprimanding, and filing a complaint. Of interest to incivility researchers, the authors identified an individual's moral identity

as a key driver of whether or not they would engage in retribution, primarily driven by a need to act in accordance with one's social-self schema. To confuse matters, some forms of retribution could also be considered to be uncivil acts themselves, such as gossiping, boycotting, and ostracism (Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010).

Though voice is traditionally conceived to be pro-social in nature (Wilkinson et al., 2020), Morrison (2014) reminded us that “when employees are deciding whether to engage in voice, they may consider not just how this behavior could lead to organizational or unit-level improvement, but also how it could potentially advance their own interests” (p. 184). This illustrates a duality of voice motives in which organizational pro-social motives might be combined with self-relevant outcomes such as self-promotion (Harvey et al., 2009; Morrison, 2014), or what Klaas et al. (2012) called political motives.

Relationship context

Rounding out the macro, organizational, and individual contexts that influence an employee's use of voice in general, one can consider how the relationship context influences voice using the example of an uncivil meeting. The macro, organizational, and individual predictors of voice that have been described above can be thought of as the “baggage” that an employee carries around with them and brings into the meeting. This baggage represents a set of beliefs and experiences that have accumulated over a lifetime. When an employee enters a meeting, they are met with a new set of influences that impact their likelihood of using voice, a unique, complex,

and time-bound set of power and social relationships between the players in the room. Just as relational power predicts incivility, an employee's perception of greater relational power is associated with a greater likelihood of using voice, while lower perceived relational power (positional power, gender power, lack of experience) contributes to a higher likelihood of remaining silent (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). This relational power context exists in the absence of, or prior to, any uncivil event.

When an uncivil event takes place, its occurrence forces those present to be assigned, or perhaps to self-select into, the established roles of instigator, victim, and of most interest to this study, observer. The relationship between the observer and the victim, as well as the one between the observer and the instigator, play an important role in the observer's choice of voice response. The phenomenon of victim empathy predicts whether an observer will use their voice in defense of a target; the more severe the incident, the more empathy an observer will experience (Thornberg, 2010).

Intuitively, if the observer has experienced similar negative acts by the instigator (Miner et al., 2018) or if the observer shares an "undervalued" characteristic with the target (Goldberg et al., 2011), they will have greater empathy for the target.

Conversely, if an observer holds negative feelings towards the target and considers the instigator behavior desirable, the more favorable they will be towards the instigator (Harvey et al., 2009). Harvey et al. (2009) also predict that observer bias leads to anger attributions and a greater likelihood of reporting negative workplace behaviors when the instigator is in the out-group, or in a different social or out-group.

That being said, there are two counterintuitive observer relational responses that are worthy of examination. The first, known as “victim derogation bias,” argues that knowledge of previous injustice towards a victim plays a part in a third party’s assessment of whether or not a victim “deserves” to be treated unjustly (Skarlicki & Turner, 2014). Unlike bias due to race or gender characteristics, victim derogation bias is not driven by who a victim is, but rather by things that have happened to them. If a third party observes motiveless mistreatment or incivility towards an employee, the third party’s belief in a just world is challenged. “To alleviate cognitive dissonance, just world believers must reconcile the two and thus can conclude that mistreatment was somehow deserved after all” (Skarlicki & Turner, 2014, p. 35).

The second counterintuitive phenomenon, proposed by Ellis and Van Dyne (2009), hypothesizes that a third-party observer’s likelihood of using voice depends on how the victim uses their voice. The observer assesses how appropriately a victim voices their defense of a situation, and uses intensity of communication as a critical component of appropriateness (Ellis & Van Dyne, 2009). The authors propose that as the judged appropriateness (as measured by the observer) of a victim’s voice goes down, the more likely a peer observer will react with silence, and the more likely a supervisor observer will react with voice (Ellis & Van Dyne, 2009).

The impact of time

Before discussing voice decision models, it is important to consider the potential impact of time on an observer's response to an uncivil event. If an event is of short duration, there is a limited period of time during which an observer can deliberate and react in real time while the "window of opportunity" is open (Harvey et al., 2009). If voice is thought to be preceded by a conscious and deliberate decision process (Premeaux & Bedeian, 2003), absent any emotions, a fleeting incivility event would predict silence on the part of observers. Additionally, fear, often experienced in response to an incivility event, can lead to an interruption or a "short-circuiting" of this decision-making process, producing silence as a result (Morrison, 2011). Kish-Gephardt et al. (2009) further connected silence with time, identifying non-deliberative-defensive silence as a form of silence that occurs quickly in response to high-intensity fear.

While most scholars view silence as the automatic response to fear, one can also think of voice as an automatic response to a safety or unfairness issue. For example, anger may be a potential trigger of an automatic voice response, as "a highly angry employee may speak up even when the rational choice would be to remain silent" (Morrison, 2014, p. 184). Skarlicki and Rupp's (2010) examination of third-party retribution as a deontic or "evolutionary-based emotional reaction" to mistreatment also points us in the direction of voice as an emotional and automatic response (p. 944). Nonetheless, the impact of non-conscious processes and emotions on voice is an

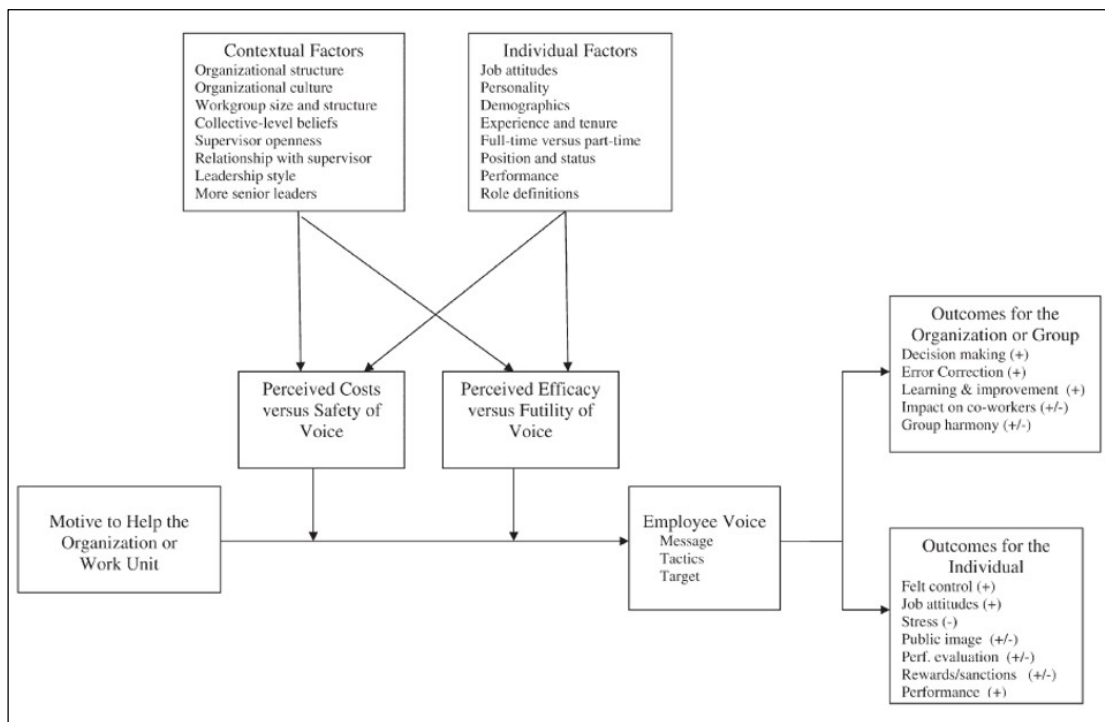
acknowledged gap in the literature (Morrison, 2011), a gap that studying voice during an event of limited time duration might help fill.

Voice deliberation process

Having established a detailed list of the contextual predictors of voice, this section analyzes the literature on the voice deliberation process itself. As previously highlighted, the literature on voice deliberation, specifically in response to an unjust or uncivil event is scarce. However, three models were of particular insight to this study. In her model of employee silence (seen in Figure 8), Morrison (2011) outlined the steps of what she called an employee's voice "calculus." Though she includes the macro, organizational, and individual contextual influences in her comprehensive model, the model does not include the characteristics of an uncivil event, nor does it detail the tactics and characteristics of effective voice. Pinder and Harlos's (2001) more elaborate model paints a nuanced two-step voice deliberation process but similarly omits the characteristics of the triggering act and any subsequent outcomes. Lastly, Harvey et al.'s (2009) voice decision model outlines the attributional and emotional processes that influence an observer's decision to speak up about organizational wrongdoing. It is a thought-provoking investigation of how an observer responds to a whistleblowing event based on motives attributed to the wrongdoer but does not cover in detail the perceived nature of the wrongdoing, nor the voice response.

Risk versus efficacy

In her model of employee voice (as seen in Figure 8), Morrison (2011) described the voice deliberation process as a calculus between “anticipated success and relative costs and benefits” (p. 384). Morrison (2014) considered the two main factors that an employee considers prior to deciding on voice or silence to be efficacy/instrumentality, or “the employee’s perception about whether engaging in voice will be effective in bringing about the desired result” and safety/risk, or “the employee’s perception of whether engaging in voice will have negative consequences for the self or for one’s relationships with others” (p. 180).

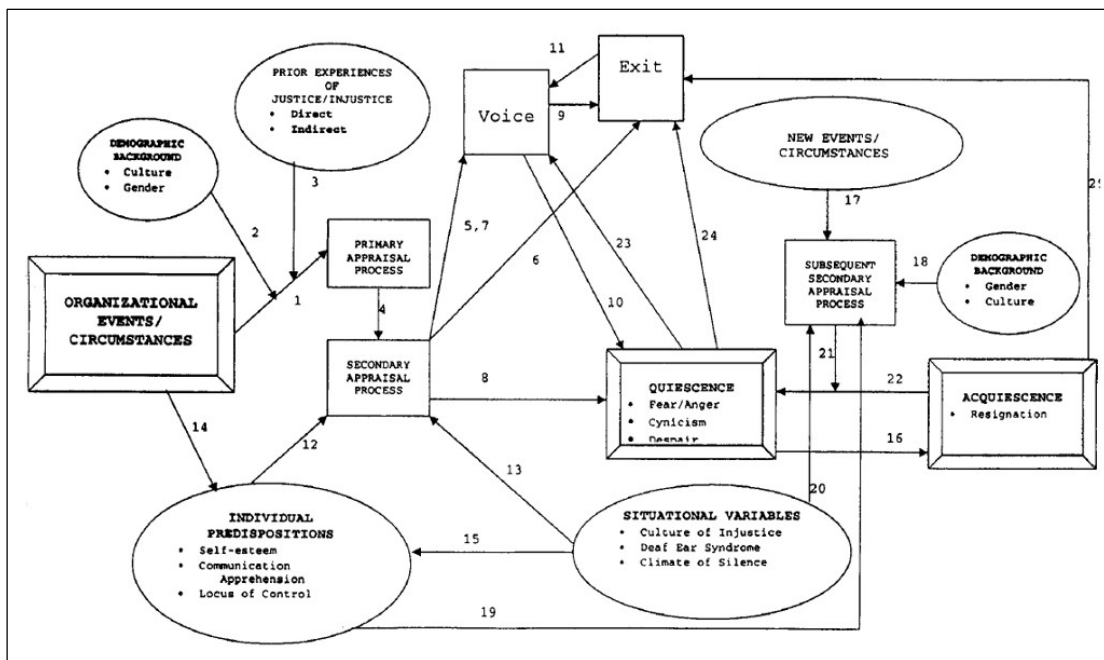


Source: Adapted from Morrison (2011)

Figure 8. Morrison Model of Employee Voice

Voice in response to an unjust event

It is the second process model, Pinder and Harlos's (2001) model of silence responses to organizational injustice, that best synthesized the voice deliberation process. In their model (seen in Figure 9), they describe how, in response to an unjust event, an employee uses a two-stage appraisal process; the primary appraisal process, driven by demographic characteristics (such as cultural upbringing) and prior experiences, will evaluate whether the act is unjust, while the secondary appraisal process will assess whether or not using voice will ameliorate the situation. Thus far, the Pinder and Harlos (2001) model best married together the concepts of incivility (an unjust event) and potential voice responses.

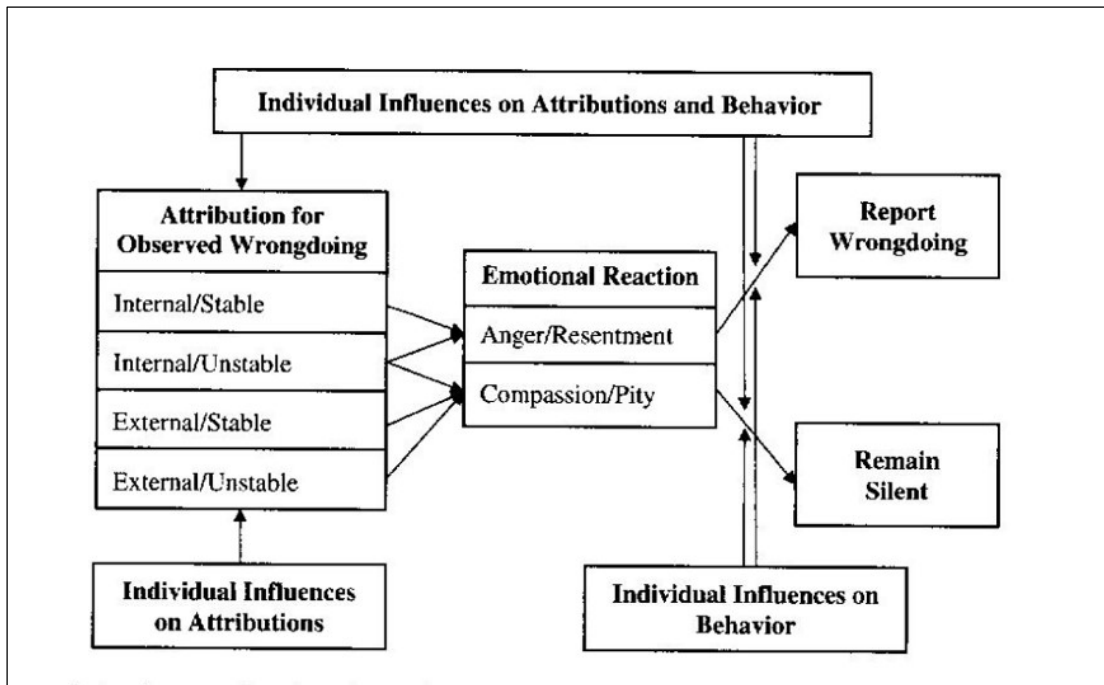


Source: Adapted from Pinder and Harlos (2001)

Figure 9. Silence Responses to Organizational Injustice

Attribution for observed wrongdoing, emotional reaction, and voice

Harvey et al. (2009) incorporated an observer's attribution for observed wrongdoing and the observer's subsequent emotional reaction into a third voice deliberation model. By doing so, they knit together some of the concepts of incivility and voice/silence into a single, though simplified, theoretical model. Like other scholars, they also acknowledge the influence of the severity of the undesirable behavior (Gundlach, 2003; Harvey et al., 2009) and the strength of rules and norms on the likelihood of speaking up. In their model (Figure 10), the authors mapped out how the attribution of observed wrongdoing along locus of causality and stability dimensions will influence an observer's emotions and, in consequence, how those emotions will ultimately determine the observer's voice behavior. The more internally motivated and stable the behavior of the instigator, the more prone an observer will be to anger and resentment, and the more likely the observer will be to report the behavior. If the behavior of the instigator is attributed to external and unstable causes, the more likely an observer will be to empathize with the instigator, lean towards compassion, and remain silent. One can imagine a case where a peer, known to be experiencing severe family issues, loses their temper and shouts at a coworker. According to this model, the trigger of the event would be attributed to external, unstable causes and the likelihood of the observer reporting the issue would be low.



Source: Adapted from Harvey et al. (2009)

Figure 10. Attributional Model of the Decision to Speak Up or to Remain Silent

Harvey et al. (2009) took pains to note that the attribution process is subject to different forms of bias such as in- versus out-group bias, cultural bias, and actor-observer bias. They also note that observers from individualistic cultures are more likely to attribute observed behaviors to individual causes. Harvey et al. (2009) are also among the few scholars to discuss the influence of organizational norms on speaking up behavior such as “open door policies” and the “stop snitching” phenomenon.

Voice effectiveness

By examining the organizational factors that predict voice, an enthusiastic practitioner could pull together a list of ways to foster an environment in which an

employee would be more likely to use voice. Though not extensively covered, there exist multiple works that make suggestions on ways a practitioner could reduce incivility in the workplace. However, the literature that focuses on how an observer could use voice against incivility effectively is scarce. Grant's (2013) work on emotion regulation and voice effectiveness, though not specific to the observer role, provides some insight into this area.

Emotion regulation's role in voice effectiveness

Grant (2013) found that managers were less likely to look favorably upon voice that was infused with negative emotions, viewing them as complaints or criticisms rather than constructive feedback. Though strong emotions may be needed for some individuals to overcome their fear of speaking up, Grant (2013) felt that it is those same strong emotions that could cause an employee's voice to be negatively evaluated. Grant (2013) developed the idea that through emotion regulation strategies and a combination of deep- and surface-acting, employees could harness the strong emotions needed to overcome the fear of speaking up while tempering their voice and facial expressions to maximize their perceived effectiveness. Grant's (2013) work is one of, if not the only, work that highlights that "voice is influenced by knowledge—not only personality traits and motivations" (p. 1716), and he encouraged scholars to address the gap with research on how knowledge, skills, and abilities can affect voice and other proactive and citizenship behaviors. Though Grant (2013) spoke compellingly of emotional regulation strategies, his work did not explicitly focus on uncivil or unjust events, and he spoke little about how employees could gain such

knowledge other than by enlisting peers with high emotion regulation to help them voice their ideas.

In the literature, employee voice most commonly refers to an act with three characteristics: the presence (or deliberate absence) of verbal expression, a behavior that is discretionary, and an intention that is constructive (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Predictors of voice include national culture, workplace climate, and individual predispositions (Ashford et al., 1998; Morrison, 2014; Pinder & Harlos, 2001). The choice of voice over silence can be motivated by emotions that range from resignation, to fear, to cooperation (Morrison, 2014; Van Dyne et al., 2003). An individual's voice decision is a complex process that considers risks, rewards, and beliefs in personal efficacy. Employee voice can be used to suggest constructive ideas for change, in support of organizational policies, and, most relevant to this study, to object to an unjust event.

Summary of the Literature

The goal of this research is to shed light on how observers choose voice during a workplace incivility event. The first part of the literature review summarizes the body of knowledge that gives depth and nuance to our understanding of a workplace incivility event: how an uncivil event might be recognized, what causes it, its impact, and ways to reduce its occurrence. The second part of the literature review summarizes the body of knowledge that helps explain the choice an observer is faced with: whether or not to choose voice or silence.

The literatures on incivility and voice are complex; there are overlapping constructs, disagreements by scholars on definitions, and calls by recent scholars to loosen the constraints of existing typologies. The literature at the intersection between incivility and voice is in its infancy with a limited amount of content. My research will attempt to help build a bridge between these two bodies of research and answer the question, “How do observers choose voice during a workplace incivility event?”

Chapter 3: Research Methods

This chapter provides a description of the methods and procedures used in this study that seeks to understand how an observer chooses voice during a workplace incivility event. It describes the study's research methodology, the participant solicitation and selection process, the interview methodology, and the data analysis and interpretation phases.

Grounded Theory Methodology

Before an observer can react to an uncivil incident, they must first give meaning to what they have seen and heard. Qualitative research's focus on the study of experiences, feelings, and behaviors (Holloway & Brown, 2016), makes it an ideal choice to explore the observer's sensemaking process and their reactions to the ambiguous phenomenon of incivility. Additionally, qualitative-based research on the topic of incivility is lacking (Schilpzand, Pater, et al., 2016; Vasconcelos, 2020), and research on voice and incivility is scant, making the qualitative research methodology a fitting choice to address the research question, "How Do Observers Choose Voice During a Workplace Incivility Event?"

A grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014; Gioia et al., 2013) to qualitative research allows theory to emerge from the research process rather than being chosen before the research begins. It is a methodology with a focus on "interaction, meaning, and social process" (Thornberg, 2010, p. 587). More specifically, the constructivist

grounded theory approach used in this study recognizes that people's responses to life experiences are socially constructed and that research subjects are "knowledgeable agents" who can explain their "thoughts, intentions, and actions" (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 17). Though this approach recognizes the subjectivity in the research process, as demonstrated in Chapter 4, it can be empirically grounded, structured, and flexible (Saracho, 2014).

Participant selection

To select participants for the study, I used snowball sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 2016) within my personal and professional extended networks. To identify potential interview candidates who had observed workplace incivility, I created a post on LinkedIn (see Appendix B), the world's largest professional social network, encouraging those reading it to share the post within their networks. Using a graphic with the tagline "Workplace Incivility—Have You Seen It," the post encouraged readers to learn more about incivility by taking a brief 5-minute survey, also letting them know that interview volunteers were being recruited. The survey could be accessed via a hyperlink within the post as well as via a QR code which was included in the post's graphic. LinkedIn, using its proprietary posting algorithm, made the post visible on the feeds of 842 of its subscribers. Of that potential audience, 17 reacted to it (via LinkedIn "thumbs up" and "support" emojis), 7 commented on it, and 14 reshared it. The bulk of survey responses (320 of 389) were completed in April of 2021 (see Figure 11) shortly after the LinkedIn post was uploaded, with the second spike in responses arriving after a re-post in August of 2021.

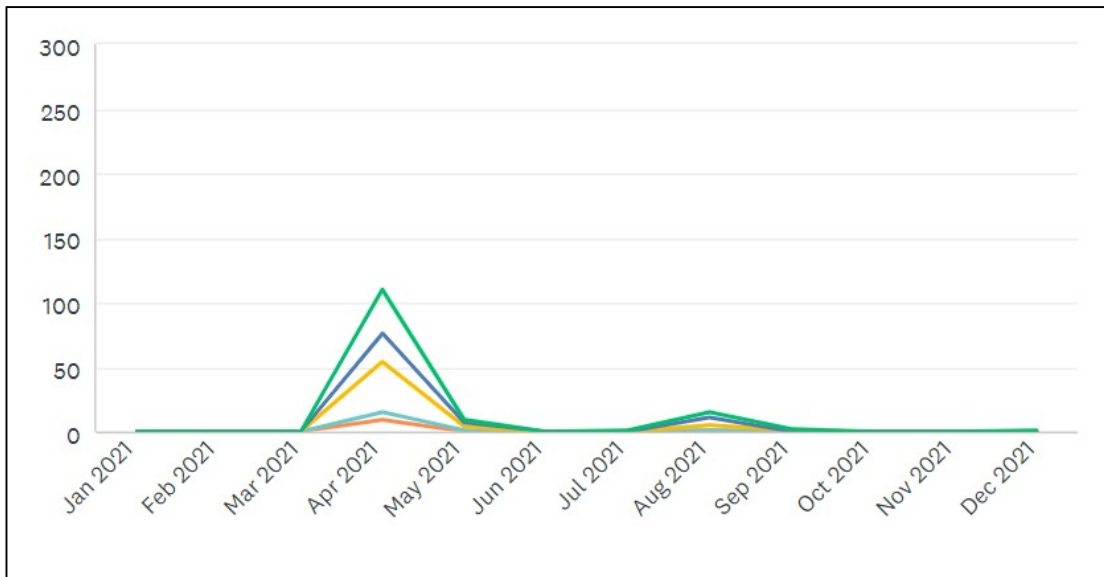


Figure 11. Log of Survey Responses by Date

Procedure

Survey

The online survey consisted of four sections. The first section included the consent form (see Appendix C) in which respondents were apprised of the risks and benefits of completing the survey, the voluntary nature of participating in the survey, as well as the confidentiality measures in place and contact information for questions. Before participating further in the survey, respondents were required to explicitly acknowledge their consent and the fact that they were 18 years of age or more. There were 389 respondents who answered “yes” to the consent question and they were advanced to the next section of the survey.

In the second section of the survey, respondents were presented with 12 questions asking them to describe the frequency at which they had observed common types of uncivil behavior towards co-workers (see Figure 12). This survey was a modified version of Cortina et al.'s (2013) updated 12-Question Workplace Incivility Scale. Unlike Cortina et al.'s (2013) survey, which was aimed at a victim's experience of workplace incivility, this research's survey was modified to address the observer of workplace incivility, using a process which has been described as "flipping" the incivility questions (Schilpzand, Pater, et al., 2016). For each question in Figure 12, survey participants were given a choice of the responses never, rarely, sometimes, often, and many times to describe the frequency at which they had observed these 12 types of uncivil behavior toward coworkers.

- During the PAST TWO YEARS, did you ever observe a situation in which someone directed any of the following behaviors towards your co-workers...**
1. Paid little attention to their statements or showed little interest in their opinions.
 2. Doubted their judgment on a matter over which they had responsibility.
 3. Gave them hostile looks, stares, or sneers.
 4. Addressed them in unprofessional terms, either publicly or privately.
 5. Interrupted or "spoke over" them.
 6. Rated them lower than they deserved on an evaluation.
 7. Yelled, shouted, or swore at them.
 8. Made insulting or disrespectful remarks about them.
 9. Ignored them or failed to speak to them (e.g., gave them "the silent treatment").
 10. Accused them of incompetence.
 11. Targeted them with anger outbursts or "temper tantrums."
 12. Made jokes at their expense.

Figure 12. Survey Questions—Observers of Incivility

Of the 389 respondents who consented to the survey, 322 respondents answered all 12 of the incivility questions. Upon completion of this section, respondents were informed that all 12 behaviors were examples of workplace incivility. This appeared to be a natural breakpoint, as a further 13 people dropped out of the survey and did not proceed to section 3. In Section 3 (not part of this dissertation), respondents were asked three additional questions about changes in the frequency of incivility that they had observed during COVID-19 as well as any changes in the frequency of their face-to-face contact with colleagues and coworkers.

The fourth section contained a set of demographic questions, gathering information on a participant's age, gender, education level, identification as an ethnic minority, country of residence, country of birth, and whether or not the language spoken at work was that of their mother tongue, or first language (see Table 3 for results). Demographic questions were constructed to be understandable to participants from multiple countries. A total of 302 survey participants, roughly equal in gender, completed all 12 incivility questions as well as all demographic questions. Survey participants were noticeable in both their age and their education level, with the greatest number of participants in the 55–64 age category and with a majority holding a master's level of education or above. Though only 17% identified as an ethnic minority, a significant percentage of survey respondents either lived outside of the U.S. (41%) or were born outside of the U.S. (48%) and 14% of respondents worked in a language other than their first language.

Table 3. Sociodemographic Breakdown of Participants

Survey Participants			Interview Participants		
	<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%
Age			Age		
18-24	21	7%	18-24	1	3%
25-34	41	14%	25-34	5	6%
35-44	40	13%	35-44	2	16%
45-54	72	24%	45-54	8	26%
55-64	110	36%	55-64	13	42%
65+	18	6%	65+	2	6%
Gender			Gender		
Female	173	57%	Female	15	48%
Male	128	42%	Male	16	52%
Did not identify	1	<1%	Did not identify	0	0%
Education Level			Education Level		
No formal education	9	3%	No formal education	0	0%
Upper secondary	42	14%	Upper secondary	2	10%
Professional/Trade certification or Bachelor's degree	90	30%	Professional/Trade certification or Bachelor's degree	11	35%
Master's level or above	161	53%	Master's level or above	18	55%
Identify as Ethnic Minority			Identify as Ethnic Minority		
No	251	83%	No	26	84%
Yes	51	17%	Yes	5	16%
Location of Residence			Location of Residence		
USA	177	59%	USA	21	68%
Canada	43	14%	Canada	3	10%
Europe	65	22%	Europe	4	13%
Asia	13	4%	Asia	2	6%
Latin America	2	1%	Latin America	1	3%
Africa	2	1%	Africa	0	0%
Location of Birth			Location of Birth		
USA	156	52%	USA	17	55%
Canada	38	13%	Canada	3	10%
Europe	77	25%	Europe	5	16%
Asia	19	6%	Asia	3	10%
Latin America	8	3%	Latin America	3	10%
Africa	4	1%	Africa	0	0%
Mother tongue spoken at work			Mother tongue spoken at work		
Yes	260	86%	Yes	26	84%
No	42	14%	No	5	16%

In the final section of the survey, participants were asked whether or not they would be willing to participate in a follow-up 45-minute interview. A total of 95 survey respondents who had answered all incivility and demographic questions expressed their willingness to participate in the survey process, with 93 of those entering valid email addresses.

Interview participants

Interview invitations were sent out in waves in an attempt to smooth the interview and coding workload and to balance participant demographics. Interviews were ultimately conducted with 31 volunteers during the period of May 2021 to September 2021. Interview participants were equally split between genders, with 16 identifying as male and 15 identifying as female (see Table 3). Participants were highly educated, with over half holding master's level or higher degrees and 48% aged 55 or older. Though 17 of the interview participants were born in the United States, 14 were born elsewhere (Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Pakistan, Spain, the U.K., and Venezuela). When it came to their country of residence, a larger number currently resided in the U.S., with only 10 interview participants residing elsewhere (Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, Italy, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland). Interestingly, though five of the interview participants self-identified as an ethnic minority, an additional four interview participants who did not self-identify as an ethnic minority were born outside of the country in which they resided and did not belong to the ethnic majority of that country. Of these last four participants, none were born in the U.S., potentially signaling the ambiguity or cultural specificity of the idea of self-

identification as an ethnic minority. It should be noted that although most interview participants (86%) worked in their mother tongue, 10 interview participants did not have English as a first language, adding additional complexity to interview transcription and coding.

Data collection

Due to COVID-19 restrictions and participant location, interviews, using the interview protocol in Appendix D, were conducted either via videoconferencing (30 interviews) or in person (1 interview). The interviews were conducted using the Critical Incident Interview method (Flanagan, 1954) which allowed for in-depth comparisons of voice versus silence behaviors. Interviewees were asked to share their stories of observed workplace incivility. They were asked to recollect the circumstances leading up to the event, the behavior they witnessed, and their thoughts and feelings as the event unfolded. They were also asked to describe their actions in response to the event. Did they speak up or remain silent? What were they feeling at the time? What pushed them to speak up or to remain silent? Interviewees were asked to describe both events during which they remained silent as well as events during which they used their voices in response to incivility.

Data analysis

As per the principles of an inductive, grounded theory approach, data collection and data analysis did not happen in a linear fashion; data analysis was conducted in parallel with the data collection phase, with each process informing and refining the other. Using the principles of the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013), data

analysis consisted of defined phases. The initial coding phase identified first-order informant-centric codes. As first-order coding progressed, first-order codes were progressively grouped into second-order themes, abstractions that used more researcher-focused terminology. These themes were then further abstracted into aggregate dimensions as theoretical concepts and the foundations of a data structure emerged.

Role of the Researcher and Worldview

In approaching this research topic, I used a constructivist/interpretivist worldview. As such, I worked with the research participants to explore the meanings that they had attributed to both the uncivil events that they observed as well as to their reactions to those events. That being said, I recognize and acknowledge that my own background and experiences helped shape the meaning-making that I attributed to their narratives. As a white, female professional with 30-plus years of experience working in the high-technology sector, I have navigated an environment that might be considered more tolerant of incivility than most. Though I have lived and worked in six countries (Canada, France, U.K., USA, Japan, China) and managed professionals across many more, I have little recent experience working with those from a less privileged socioeconomic background.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given my own background and the snowball methodology used to solicit participants, all interviewees held, or had held, white collar positions and enjoyed a privileged socioeconomic status and working conditions similar to my

own. I can only expect that experiences and observations of incivility vary significantly in the younger and less powerful segments of the population that do not access and perhaps have never heard of the LinkedIn professional network. The next chapter reports the findings based on the coding and analysis of this, admittedly narrow, segment of the population.

Chapter 4: Findings

Overview

This study seeks to address the question “How do observers choose voice during a workplace incivility event?” using an inductive, grounded theory approach. Using the principles of the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013), a structure emerged from the interview data and is shown in Figure 14. Initially, 1,852 in-vivo first-order codes were assigned to describe the data using terms that matched as closely as possible how respondents described their uncivil encounters. These first-order codes were then abstracted into 18 second-order themes that described the essence of the first-order codes. Finally, these second-order themes were further distilled into four aggregate dimensions: the observer’s recognition of an uncivil act, the observer’s assessment of responsibility, the voice choices an observer considered, and the factors that influenced that choice.

Using a grounded theory approach, a process model (Figure 15) of the dynamic interrelationships between the themes and aggregate dimensions was constructed. This model reveals a three-step observer voice decision process. In the first decision step, the observer does (or does not) recognize an uncivil event. If, and only if, the behavior is recognized, the observer must decide on their responsibility to voice. If the behavior is determined to be uncivil and the observer experiences feelings of responsibility, the observer is faced with the decision of how directly they should

address the perpetrator's behavior, choosing whether to address the perpetrator directly, to address the perpetrator or the situation indirectly, or to remain silent.

This chapter will first briefly summarize the results of the LinkedIn survey. It will then summarize the iterative coding journey as participant interviews were qualitatively analyzed for insights into the voice decision process. Lastly, it will delve deeper into the most relevant findings uncovered during the analysis process.

Summary of Survey Results

The online survey, used to educate and solicit interview volunteers, demonstrated the regular occurrence of 12 uncivil workplace behaviors, from the lower intensity but more commonly occurring interruptive and inattentive behaviors to the less common but still present severe behaviors of yelling, shouting, and displays of temper. The survey measured the frequency at which the 322 respondents had seen a range of uncivil workplace behaviors, from shouting and swearing to paying little interest in another's opinion. The graph in Figure 13 visually represents the observed frequency of each of the 12 uncivil workplace behaviors established by Cortina et al. (2013). Each bar represents one of the uncivil behaviors and has been placed in rank order according to how "regularly" survey respondents observed each of the uncivil behaviors—from least-observed at the top, to most-observed at the bottom. The number used to approximate the observed regularity of each behavior was calculated by summing the responses "Many Times," "Often," and "Sometimes" for each question. One can see at the top of the graph that the two perhaps most egregious

behaviors (yelling/shouting and angry outbursts) have the lowest regularity of occurrence. However, it is still disturbing to note that roughly 20% of those surveyed had observed these behaviors many times, often, or sometimes, and only 27% of respondents could not recall observing those behaviors at all in the last two years. At the other end of the frequency spectrum, the most regularly observed uncivil behaviors included paying little attention to someone’s opinions (75% observed regularly), interrupting/speaking over someone (75% observed regularly), and doubting someone’s judgment (69% observed regularly). Though these behaviors might be perceived as lower in intensity than yelling and shouting, a high frequency of lower intensity behavior has still been found to cause significant damage to an individual (Cortina, 2008).

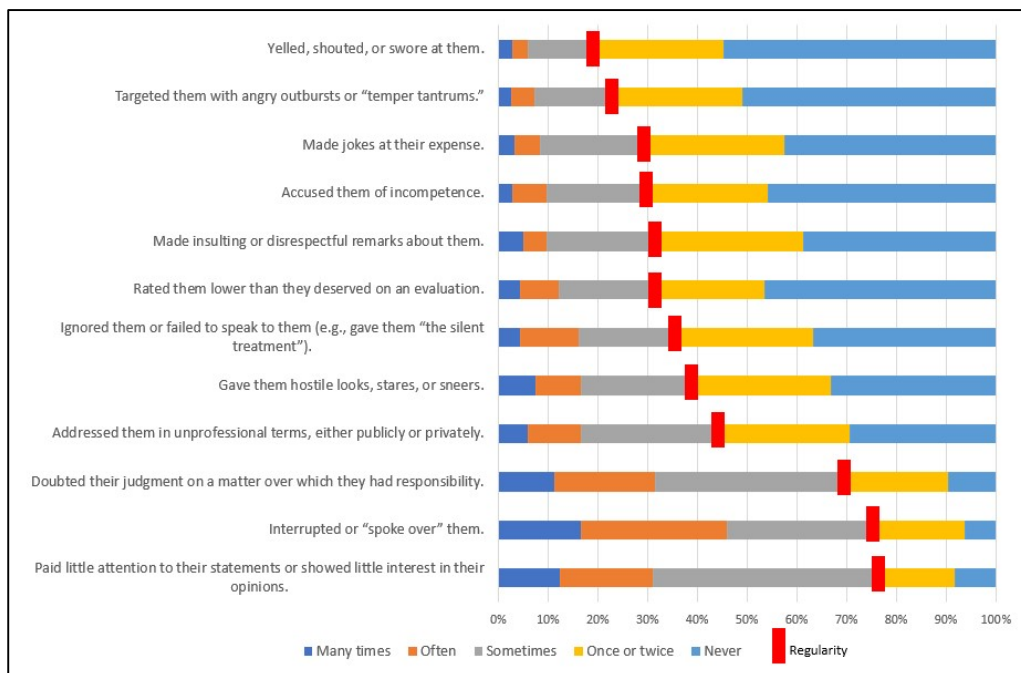


Figure 13. Frequency of Observation of 12 Uncivil Behaviors

These survey results, though not forming an integral part of the dissertation analysis, do illustrate several points. Firstly, they establish that uncivil behaviors are alive and well in the professional workplace—yelling and shouting are not restricted to the factory floor. Secondly, the data supports the fact that employees notice uncivil behavior towards others—not just uncivil behavior directed towards themselves. The following sections, using the data gathered from in-depth interviews, will delve deeper into of how the 31 interview volunteers recognize and respond to uncivil behavior.

The Coding Journey

Using the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013), the interview coding phase reflected participant terminology as closely as possible and identified, as expected, a large number of first-order codes (1,852). According to Saldaña (2015), a code is “most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of a language-based or visual data” (p. 3). Some of the first-order codes identified, such as “losing his mind” and “took off his watch and dangled it in front of her face” painted a vivid picture of an uncivil act, while the codes “she was crying” and “she was upset” and “staring straight ahead and trembling vividly” described a victims’ response to an uncivil act.

As the cycle of interviewing and coding proceeded, a great number of codes (over 500) that did not pertain directly to the study were put to one side. For example, most interview participants were keen to recount anecdotes of incivility that were inflicted

upon them, or that they had heard of, in addition to incivility they had directly witnessed. Codes were also put to the side if they did not refer to the timeframe identified in the research question (during or immediately after an uncivil event); some interview anecdotes pertained to actions, emotions, and experiences that had happened days, months, or sometimes years after the actual uncivil event.

In the second-order analysis, first-order codes were grouped into the themes that had the most explanatory value in describing and explaining how an observer might choose voice during or immediately after an uncivil event (see Figure 14). The second-order theme “types of uncivil behavior” contained the greatest number of first-order codes at just under 400. The great majority of codes in this theme described acts that were consistent with either behaviors on Cortina et al.’s (2013) Workplace Incivility Scale or Martin and Hine’s (2005) Uncivil Workplace Behaviors, though some behaviors did not fall neatly into either of the scholars’ lists (such as taking credit for another’s work or assigning too much work). Other new types of uncivil behaviors recounted by interview participants included turning off one’s camera during online discussions and meetings, a phenomenon exacerbated by the increase in online work driven by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through progressive writing and analysis of the existing and newly created codes, additional themes emerged. Closely related to the theme “types of uncivil behavior,” the themes “severity and blatancy of the act,” “harm caused by the behavior,”

“intentionality of the act,” and “violation of norms or expectations” included the first-order codes that gave texture to the magnitude of the uncivil behavior a participant had observed. The inspiration for the aggregate dimension that would house these second-order themes came from the participants who noted that they were among the few to recognize certain types of behavior. These second-order themes became part of the broader aggregate dimension triggers of incivility recognition which represented the many ways that participants determined whether or not the act they had witnessed was uncivil, or perhaps more accurately, uncivil enough.

The second-order themes included in the aggregate dimension *observer voice choices* evolved over time. Initially, only the second-order themes that described the traditional voice behaviors of remaining silent or directly addressing the perpetrator were included. However, as new second-order themes emerged that housed the many other ways observers used their voices during an uncivil event, the aggregate dimension *observer voice choices* was expanded to include these new voice behaviors, behaviors that were intended to distract or deflect the perpetrator, delay the uncivil event, or either subtly or overtly support the position of the target. This broader aggregate dimension painted a much richer and more inclusive picture of how observers had reacted to the incivility they had observed.

Two aggregate dimensions, triggers of incivility recognition and observer voice choices, formed the initial skeleton of a participant’s incivility story. At the simplest

of levels, participants described to me “this is what happened” and “this is what I did in response.” As an interview progressed, participants were then prompted to describe the more complex reasoning behind “and this is why I did it.” During analysis, first-order codes expressing this reasoning were consolidated into the second-order themes that described the many factors that led an observer to speak up (in many different ways) or to remain silent. Initially, these themes formed a single aggregate dimension *factors influencing voice*. Participants recalled a variety of reasons to explain their voice behavior. For example, some participants cited a relationship with the victim or a position of structural authority as justification for them to speak, while others described a fear of negative consequences as a reason to stay silent.

The inspiration behind the de-aggregation of factors influencing voice, came from participant narratives describing seemingly illogical behavior. Though some participants had recognized incivility and expressed feelings of responsibility to do or say something about it, they still remained silent. There appeared to be an exit point in their voice decision process between the decision as to whether or not they should say something about it and the decision of what to say. This insight led to the separation of the aggregate dimension factors influencing voice into two separate aggregate dimensions: measures of responsibility and factors influencing choice of voice. The first aggregate dimension would house the themes related to an observer’s feelings of responsibility to say something—the factors they considered as they deliberated the question “should I say something,” such as structural or situational

authority, relationship with the victim, relationship with the perpetrator, or their sphere of responsibility, while the second aggregate dimension would house the themes more closely related to their decision of which form of voice they should choose, themes such as differences in power, fear of consequences, and whether or not it was the right time and place.

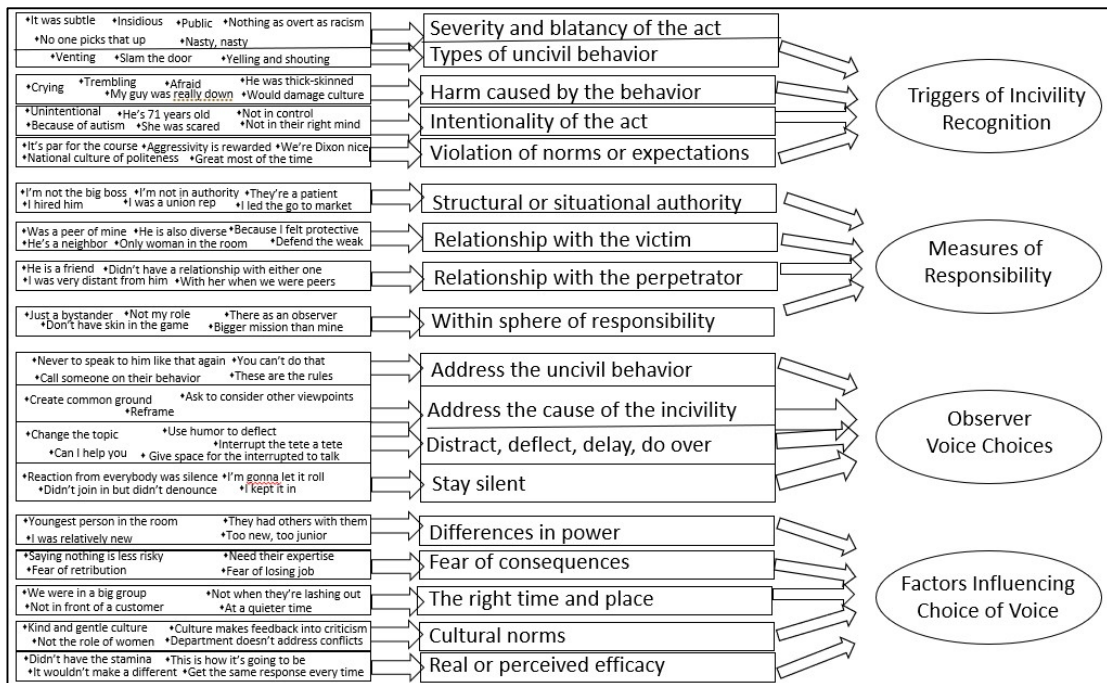


Figure 14. Visual Representation of the Data Structure

With the full data structure in place, themes and dimensions could then be examined and re-examined to help determine a potential process model that would describe an observer's sometimes seemingly illogical voice decision. In this study's proposed process model (seen in Figure 15) a three-step voice decision process emerged from

the data: the recognition of incivility, the assessment of responsibility, and the choice of voice.

Similar to Pinder and Harlos's (2001) "primary appraisal" step assessing whether or not the act was unjust, the first step in the model, answers the question "Is the behavior uncivil?" If an observer did not recognize an event as uncivil or did not feel that the behavior was "uncivil enough" they would skip the following decision steps and proceed automatically to the option of silence.

The aggregate dimension *measures of responsibility* is critical to the second decision step and helps answer an observer's question "Is it my responsibility to act?" If an observer did not feel responsibility to act, perhaps due to a lack of authority or a lack of relationship with the victim, they would again proceed automatically to the option of silence. However, if an observer did feel responsible, they would then be faced with the ultimate question, "What should I say?" or "What form of voice shall I choose?" By separating the assessment of responsibility from the decision of how to voice, the decision process of an observer who felt deeply responsible for a victim but might still choose silence in the face of a powerful and potentially harmful perpetrator became logical.

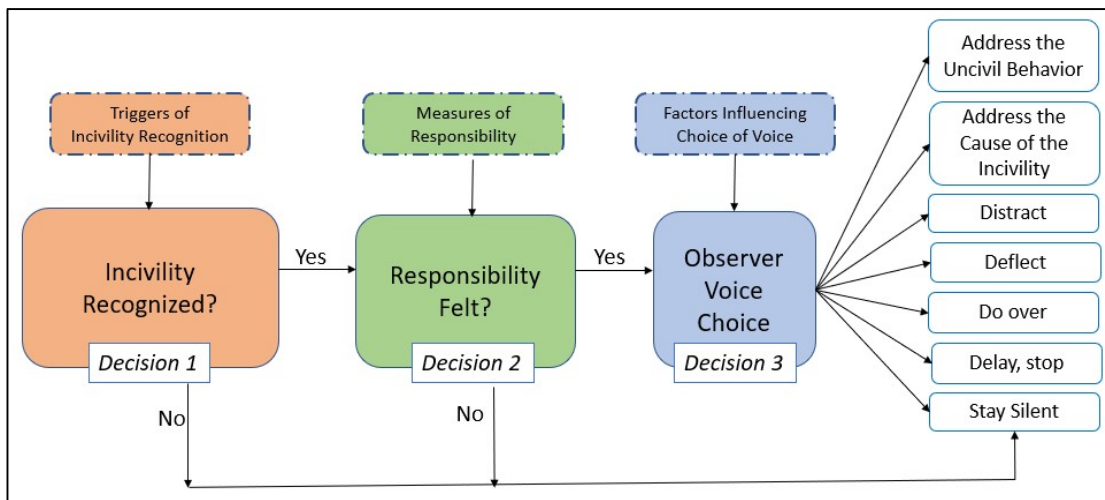


Figure 15. Observer Voice Decision Process in Response to Incivility

In the following sections, I will use participant quotes to vividly illustrate each of the three steps in the proposed observer voice decision model: the recognition of incivility, the assessment of responsibility, and the choice of voice.

Step 1: Incivility Recognized?

Participants used many yardsticks against which they measured the incivility of the event that they had observed. In some instances, the assessment was quick and the conclusion obvious. In others, participants struggled to reach a yes or no conclusion. During interviews, several participants gave a brief description of an uncivil event and then paused to ask whether or not the behavior they had observed was indeed uncivil.

Throughout their stories, participants assessed whether or not an event was uncivil in several major ways. In the first way, they took stock of the severity, blatancy, or widespread nature of a specific act, or the inherent seriousness of certain types of acts (e.g., yelling, screaming, temper tantrums). Some participants looked beyond the characteristics of the act to the well-being of the victim: was the victim impacted or harmed by the behavior? Some participants, even if they acknowledged an event had caused harm, placed more weight on the intentionality of the perpetrator. Lastly, and for some participants, regardless of intended or caused harm, the uncivil act was assessed on whether or not it had been a violation of their own, organizational, or cultural norms.

Reason 1: The act, its severity, blatancy, or breadth of impact

In this first category, participants described some of the ways in which they judged the severity of an act. In some cases, the inherent seriousness of a specific uncivil act speaks for itself (yelling, shouting, temper tantrums). To some, the magnitude of the incivility was influenced by the number of people who were impacted by the incivility. Others measured severity by volume or in physical gestures. Others described the severity of the act in descriptive terms such as dangerous or egregious. Still others referred to an act's visibility or blatancy as a measure of its incivility. Several participants noted that they, versus others in the room, were able to recognize incivility because of personal experience with similar treatment or because they had been "primed" through either education or requests to watch out for the behavior.

Some participants also spoke of the ways that some forms of incivility were difficult to recognize due to their insidious or subtle nature.

Table 4. Incivility Recognized? (Severity)

Proof Quotes: Is the behavior severe, blatant, or widely felt?

Act is severe, blatant, or widely felt (YES)

It sounded dangerous, much more so than just like, bumping into, two people bumping into each other and having words. So, I was very concerned about it.

There's always a line. There is a line thou shalt not cross. It doesn't matter who you are.

If I saw some something that was really egregious.

If it's offensive to a bunch of people, which calling people a bunch of idiots and slamming out the room is. If it's that disruptive to the, the organization to the team to the people in the room.

But I, I waited, because I wasn't sure how much was her overreacting. And I hadn't necessarily seen it. So, the overreacting, she's a very sensitive person. So I had to weigh that out, like, is this the reality? And then I saw it happen. And then, then I could say, you know what, I saw this, and it's wrong.

Act is severe, blatant, or widely felt (NO)

Why didn't I do that for my colleagues? I didn't see it happening directly. It was more insidious. I guess this was more like, directly nasty behavior that could get like immediately addressed and not acceptable.

But it's a very insidious kind of thing.

But what was interesting to me that this gentleman's approach was more subtle than the big blow up.

And no one will pick that up. And that happens quite a bit. You know, I mean, and, and this is someone that's on my team, actually. So, but I feel like, that's something that it does bother me, like, you know, people are still oblivious to that.

Reason 2: Harm caused by the behavior

In considering the harm caused by an uncivil act, participants included harm directed toward the victim as well as harm that could be felt by the organization at large. In

some cases, harm to an individual victim was clearly visible and demonstrated in tears, trembling, and shaking. In other cases, the observer assumed that harm had been done to the victim. When describing concerns about harm to the organization, participants explicitly called out the damage to corporate culture that would occur by others witnessing the uncivil act as well as how damage to the corporate culture could impact business results.

Table 5. Incivility Recognized? (Harm)

Proof Quotes: Is the Behavior Causing Harm?

Harm is caused (YES)
And the engineer was standing there at rigid attention, staring straight ahead and trembling.
I have to believe that these interactions, no matter what, are impacting that individual, in some way, shape, or form. Maybe, maybe some people, it doesn't bother them, but I have to believe that it, it does bother them a little bit. Maybe they don't realize it at the time
I felt that it was very important that that level of that type of discussion shouldn't go on because it encourages fear. And you can't run a start-up based on fear. Because it's totally dependent on people feeling safe and secure. To take risk. Nobody takes risk in a fear-filled environment
Harm is caused (NO)
I thought about it. I did consider it. Corey handled it very well.
It's not respectful of the person, but I'm the only person in the conversation.
If I'm out there with another person on my, you know, that's more my level of experience and time in, and just general thick skinnedness.

Intriguingly, several participants distinguished between harm towards another, versus harm to themselves, and how harm to another would “count for more” than harm they had previously experienced themselves.

Reason 3: Intentionality of the harm

Some participants measured the incivility of an act based on whether or not harm was intended by the perpetrator. Even if an act were perceived to be uncivil, if the perpetrator did not intentionally cause harm, the observer felt the act was somehow less harmful. Excuses made for the perpetrator included age, upbringing, and neurodivergence. Observers also minimized uncivil behavior if it was recognized as a deliberate part of a negotiating strategy, a sort of dance between participants.

Table 6. Incivility Recognized? (Intentionality of Harm)

Proof Quotes: The harm is intentional.

Harm is intentional (YES)

I do think he, he intended to do it. He has and has had, that kind of reputation. And I do think that that was his intention.

He was missing the big picture, trying to get you, right. Get you so that you didn't have the answer. Put you ill at ease. And he did that, not just with me. But around the table.

Harm is intentional (NO)

And, and it was well known people didn't like to work with him. Now, some people said, it's because of autism, and I don't know, whatever else, but you know, okay, fine

You know, whether it's an old person who sort of doesn't, isn't quite with the program anymore, and doesn't get what is no longer, you know, acceptable

And it's hard because a lot of the time, most of the time, these people are not in their right mind, and they're not experiencing the same reality is, I guess the kindest way to say it.

And it seems it's I think it's a political game as well. I didn't know if he wanted to play good cop, bad cop. So, I didn't say anything.

Reason 4: The act is a violation of individual, organizational, or cultural norms or expectations

In the fourth cluster of ways participants judged the incivility of an act, a victim may or may not even be physically present. These participants judged an act’s incivility against a particular set of norms or a particular value system. Participants used terms such as justice, right and wrong, belief, and accountability in their stories. Participants considered the acceptability of an uncivil act in two ways. The first spoke to a broader cultural acceptability of incivility, either at the organizational or macro level. The second was more focused at an individual’s own civility norms or value system.

Table 7. Incivility Recognized? (Norms)

Proof Quotes: Is the Act a Violation of Individual, Organizational, or Cultural Norms?

Act is a violation of norms (YES)
It’s like when people say something that’s not right, it’s wrong, they need to be, they need to be held accountable to those words at that time.
If you see injustice then you feel like you have to act. That you want to act. How do you react to injustice? It’s a very important value.
When there is injustice, I get a huge. I have a huge problem with people picking on people when they shouldn’t.
I truly believe in the value of inclusion.
Act is a violation of norms (NO)
it was totally acceptable, by everybody for this woman to storm out and slam the door. And I turned around to one of my colleagues and said, what happened to Patricia? Anyone? Oh, she’d had enough she went home.
And even in that woman’s case, everyone goes “oh but she’s French” which is wholly inappropriate stereotyping.
I think we’ve gotten to the point where we have accepted that kind of behavior, and kind of a more hostile interaction.

Step 2: Responsibility Felt?

The second step in the voice decision process can best be illustrated by imagining the internal dialogue of an observer. If the answer to the observer's first question, "Is the behavior uncivil," were "Yes, this is bad," the next question an observer would ask themselves would be "Should I do something about it?" This reflection is illustrated in the following interview segment:

Interviewer:

And then the third scenario, which is, other people are getting attacked in some way. And you feel... what do you feel then that leads to you acting?

Participant 1:

I'm responsible. So, and that I can do something. Right. And that's, like, yeah, that's, that's kind of it. I am responsible to fix something here. And that's my role in this conflict is to stop it.

Participants' assessments of their responsibility to voice (the aggregated dimension measures of responsibility) could be clustered into four second-order themes. The first and most cited measure of responsibility was whether or not the observer had structural or situational authority. In the second, participants looked to the strength of their relationship with the victim as a measure of their responsibility to voice. Interestingly, comments about the strength of their relationship with the perpetrator also formed the third theme of felt responsibility. The last theme was harder to define but comprised the ways in which participants considered how close they were to the uncivil event or the participants and how that closeness influenced their feelings of responsibility, sometimes using physical distance as a measure, while at other times using organizational distance as a measure of proximity.

Reason 1: Structural and/or situational authority

In a work situation, when multiple parties are present, there is an inherent formal or informal chain of command or power structure (Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Morrison et al., 2015). This could be a reporting structure, a project team role, a level of experience, or a grade level. In describing the circumstances under which they would feel a responsibility to act on observed uncivil behavior, participants often used terms related to structural authority. Multiple participants felt that if another person of greater authority were to be present, they would not need to, or should not act, while if they themselves were the most senior person present it was their responsibility to act.

Table 8. Responsibility Felt? (Authority)

Proof Quotes: Do I Have Structural or Situational Authority?

I have authority (YES)
I felt that I had to defend the one that she was making the comment to. That was at the same level as her. [Author note: Participant is senior to the two others]
But when I see it in a group setting, then I will either correct them if I'm in a positional authority. Then I'll just try to correct it.
Why it's that whole hierarchy thing, I think it's knowing that I have a voice, but wanting to make sure that my voice is coming from a perspective that people will listen to. Not that they wouldn't otherwise.
And well, and that's why, that's why I felt empowered because I'm leading this meeting, but I felt as well empowered to do this because I felt okay, if I allow this one, that situation, what's going on in the next meetings?
I have authority (NO)
And I feel for people who don't have either power or authority or some place or someone to go to that does have that influence to defuse it. Because otherwise you're left with it, and it's extremely unpleasant.
No, and I think it was it was partly a rank issue. This person, they weren't really

high ranked, but they ranked higher than some of the others.

Other people in equivalent positions but with more seniority could have done that, but I don't think I was in the position to do that.

and you're like, that's not really appropriate to say in the meeting, but, you know, I was new to the organization. So I kind of just sat back and I'm like, I don't know who all these individuals are. So I'm just gonna, I'm gonna let it roll.

it's almost impossible from a customer service standpoint to address their bad behavior and call them out for being uncivil.

But I just felt like A, it was not my place and B, there were too many louder voices in the room who really didn't care. And senior people in the room who should have stepped in? And didn't. And I didn't, either.

Reason 2: Relationship with the victim

Interviewees cited both formal structural authority over the victim as well as informal relationships with the victim as reasons that made them feel a connectedness with, and a responsibility toward, the victim. These feelings might be expressed as a social connectedness with the victim, general empathy with the victim's experience, or feelings of responsibility due to the relational standing with the victim such as age or experience. Interestingly, several participants described a stronger social connectedness between the perpetrator and the victim as a factor in their decision not to voice.

Table 9. Responsibility Felt? (Victim Relationship)

Proof Quotes: Do I Feel a Relationship with the Victim?

I feel related to the victim (YES)

So I, I took that initial stance of, you know, XX reports too me, this is my responsibility. You and I can work this out YY.

As a woman in the workplace, if you let one... if you let someone get away with that, they'll perpetrate it everywhere. And I also. He had women working in his

team. He could conceivably be thinking in that way of the people that worked in his team was just not acceptable.

And I don't know if it got back to my peer that I stood up for him. But he actually, he's my neighbor, he doesn't live too far from me. He's, he's a diverse leader.

I think that once, once in your life you've been in the position to do the type of thing that the cleaning lady does. You really respect what they do.

And this person, by the way, English is not her, her first language. So there's a sense of empathy that I have, because I can relate, you know, having lived overseas, you know, I notice like not being able to roll off certain words, off your tongue.

I feel related to the victim (NO)

Maybe because that's the way I was raised? It's like, if it doesn't affect you, or your, you know, immediate family. Like, don't, you know, it's like, you don't get involved? You don't? You don't put yourself out there.

I don't want to invest my energy, because I didn't have any inclination, I didn't have a relationship with that person.

And again, what was actually going through my head was, there's something else here that I don't even understand and that I don't want to understand. And let me double click on that. I was like, were they lovers?

Reason 3: Relationship with the perpetrator

A participant's ingroup relationship with the perpetrator also played a part in their feelings of responsibility to act. Though scholars have found that a close relationship with the perpetrator can also cause silence behaviors because of the risk of damaging the relationship with a perpetrator (Harvey et al., 2009), no such examples were recounted by participants.

Table 10. Responsibility Felt? (Perpetrator Relationship)

Proof Quotes: Do I Have a Relationship with the Perpetrator?

I feel related to the perpetrator (YES)

Um, I also feel like, it's partly my duty to respond to her just because I'm the only

one who has any kind of long-term relationship with her.

So I felt very comfortable approaching xx because I knew he did not mean any harm. And also, I'm close enough for xx that I can do that.

I have a relationship there. So, it's, it's comfortable territory, and I'm like, No, this is not right.

I feel related to the perpetrator (NO)

No examples

Reason 4: Sphere of responsibility

In the first three themes, participants, when discussing reasons why they should or should not voice, spoke of both the formal and informal relationships they held with individuals present at the event, be they the victim or the perpetrator. In the fourth category, participants measured their distance from the event (and thus their responsibility to act) in either metaphorical or literal terms. Participants sometimes spoke of acting only on repeated reports of incivility by a specific perpetrator once they were physically present at such an event. Others used distance as a reason for their silence or inaction.

Table 11. Responsibility Felt? (Distance)

Proof Quotes: Is the Event within my Sphere?

I am close to the event

So, when I see that, I call someone on their behavior right away. And if I saw someone doing that to a staff member, and I was there, I would call that right away

But I, I waited, because I wasn't sure how much was her overreacting. And I hadn't necessarily seen it. So, the overreacting, she's a very sensitive person. So, I had to weigh that out, like, is this the reality? And then I saw it happen. And then then I could say, you know what? I saw this and it's wrong.

I am distant from the event

it wasn't directed at me, it had nothing to do with me. I was, I, I was a fly on the

wall, no one really could truly care less if I was there or not

Ah, at that time, I didn't make anything specific, any comment, I didn't want to get at because I was just passing by. I was just going to the cafeteria.

We're not working together. We're not in the same group. We are, we are in the same company. But we do, we do totally different jobs.

I was in a meeting a while ago, where it was a large meeting, and just one of the contractors just made some kind of bad choices about addressing how he was addressing women, just was very old school. And I do know but he was like at the other end of a very large table.

it broke my heart to hear that because that's not how, not how I am and how I expect my staff to be, but this isn't the time. I'm not there. And to be fair, my doors open, I should have shut it down I guess

Step 3: Choice of Voice

The third cluster in the three-step voice decision model is “What voice should I use?” or “How shall I voice?” At this point in the model, a participant has decided that yes, the decision was uncivil. And yes, they had a responsibility to act. The observer must now select the type of voice that they would use. Rather than a binary choice of voice or silence, participant stories revealed a much more nuanced set of voice options along the voice continuum. At the top of the voice continuum, an observer might choose to call out or address a perpetrator's uncivil behavior directly. Less directly, a participant might choose to step into an uncivil event, perhaps mediating an argument between two parties or supporting the victim's perspective. Less directly again, some participants spoke up in an attempt to short circuit, redirect, or halt the uncivil event. Lastly, at the bottom of the voice continuum, a participant, despite acknowledging the incivility of the event and their feelings of responsibility (in steps one and two), might still choose the option of silence.

Choice 1: Address the uncivil behavior

This was the most difficult as well as the least common path for an observer to take.

In this category, observers, either by inference or directly, called out the uncivil behavior, typically with a request that the perpetrator cease behaving in a specific way or by giving a reminder of the rules of civility that had been broken.

Table 12. Choice of Voice (Address the Uncivil Behavior)

Address the Uncivil Behavior
And at that point, I'm like, sorry, what did you say? And he repeats himself. And I say, do you think that your mom would have appreciated that comment? He laughed. And then he left.
Sometimes for my work and sometimes for my personality, and that if I see a kind of injustice, I think sometimes, then I can defend. I can say, "what what you're saying, it's, it's not fair. It's the, you know, it's not possible to do that."
Usually, for these kinds of things, I stand up if I'm talking on the phone, because I need more composure. I guess to try to tell people I hear you, I understand you're frustrated. Berating my staff is not the way to get what you want. Which is really hard to say, in a, just Don't be a jerk way.
I simply called him on it. I said to him, it's highly inappropriate that you should say that about somebody without explaining your rationale.
it's not allowed to interrupt someone if he started his sentence, and this is the rules we have defined here. So please respect those rules

Choice 2: Options between "voice" and "silence"

Participants used multiple voice techniques to combat uncivil behavior without directly addressing the uncivil behavior itself; they might insert themselves into a contentious conversation, attempt to distract the perpetrator, or try and delay or stop the conversation.

Address the cause of the incivility

Though all but a few observers avoided directly addressing the uncivil behavior, many participants described incidents during which they supported the victim's viewpoint on, or stance towards, a topic that was being addressed in an uncivil manner in attempted solidarity with the victim.

Table 13. Choice of Voice (Address the Cause of the Incivility)

Proof Quotes: Address the cause of the Incivility.

I was trying to mellow their protestation and make them like, have a ground that they both could stand on and talk to each other.

We would try to interject and say, Well, I think that he may have a point or this may be something we may want to take a look at, or let's try to take a step back. And so it was kind of that neutral language of taking and valuing both positions, but wanting to not call them out per se

So, if someone is yelling, and you yell back, that just keeps it escalating? If someone is yelling, and I say, well, Nicole, actually, what do I think? I think you have a point here. But let's look at what Ted said. Ted actually said x, y, z, which I think has merit. I understand your concerns, Nicole, but Ted, you know, has something here that I think is worth listening to.

Voice that distracts or deflects

This theme includes voice actions that attempted to redirect the uncivil behavior away from the victim. In the case of distraction, the observer attempted to move the perpetrator along to a new topic. This could be achieved either by changing the subject or redirecting the conversation. In what I call deflection, the observer would offer up themselves as a focal point in the conversation. Unlike the previous themes, the observer does not address the topic of uncivil behavior or the uncivil behavior itself, they attempt to move the conversation elsewhere.

Table 14. Choice of Voice (Distract / Deflect)

Proof Quotes: Voice that distracts or deflects

I've seen people step in, myself included, in more of a deflecting or an indirect way, like, not in the sense of, "Hey, you got to sit down and calm down and stop doing it." (Participant 17, Pos. 34)

So, it depends on how aggressive they are. If not, I just change the topic. (Participant 25, Pos. 72)

the best trick is to turn a very tough situation into a funny situation. make people laugh about that what they said and how they said and trying to turn it into a joke

Well, hey, you know, that individual did that type of analysis based on my recommendation. Here's why I believe that to be correct, and kind of deflect the thing.

Do-over voice

In this cluster of indirect voice, particularly cited in examples of a perpetrator talking over or ignoring a victim, the observer attempts to make the victim's voice heard.

This "do-over" voice might be subtly used in conversation using a polite request to return to a victim who had been interrupted or with a request to hear from the quieter meeting participants in the room.

Table 15. Choice of Voice (Do-Over)

Proof Quotes: Do-over voice

Hey, guys, let's go back to Kathy. Kathy had a question. Kathy, what is your question?

when I see it, when people you know, speaking over somebody else, or, you know, ignoring somebody's input just completely and talking on, Like, okay, no. Let me circle back to what she said, or he said. And let's talk about that for a minute

Voice that delays, stops, or allows escape

Another form of indirect voice described a victim's attempts to pause or take a break from the uncivil behavior. This could be a request for a refreshment break, a request to table the topic for future consideration, or the physical removal of the victim from the situation.

Table 16. Choice of Voice (Delay/Stop)

Proof Quotes: Delay, Stop, or allow Escape

And I said, "Okay, I think we all need to take a break," as opposed to, you know, so they could just, and they, everybody, you know, walked out.

My point is to get it to stop. Because there's that nurse or that there's that CNA that is just getting hammered. And they don't need that. So that's the first thought is always remove them from the situation.

That's oftentimes the point where I'll step in and I will say, "Okay, I'm an ODFW manager, we are ending this conversation. Thank you for your time." And I'll take the other, you know, I'll make it clear that I am taking the other individual out of it.

So, both of you stay away, go to grab a cup of tea, some water, whatever you want, and come back in 15 minutes, and everything will be okay.

Choice 3: Stay silent

Though many participants did not recollect an example of addressing either the cause of the uncivil behavior or the uncivil behavior directly, all participants had one or more examples of staying silent (withholding voice) during an uncivil event.

Table 17. Choice of Voice (Stay Silent)

Proof Quotes: Stay Silent

And I just was silent, which is basically an enabler. And so, you know, I, you know, intellectually, you recognize that, but sometimes what you do with what you

know, you should do, and what actually happens are two different things.

So it's almost like you just have to endure it, which doesn't sound like the most civil option, but I think that's what a lot of teams do.

I left as soon as things had been like, were starting to resolve. Um, yeah. So I didn't escape in the moment.

First of all, I don't believe in what they're saying. So I'm not going to join in on it. But I'm also not going to take it the next step is denounce it or call them out on it.

Sometimes the best thing you can do honestly, is just let the people punch themselves out. Just let it ride. like think about something else. And mentally like every 30 seconds. Oh, nope. Still cussing.

The first reaction from everybody was silence. And looking at the faces of everybody there was a lot of people that was embarrassed by, by this behavior.

Factors Influencing the Choice of Voice

Describing the kinds of voice that an observer might choose, while important, does not describe why and how an observer made that choice. Participants' descriptions of how they chose their method of voice could be grouped into four secondary themes. The first and second themes, cited in examples brought forward by all participants were those of relative power and fear of consequences. The third theme participants brought up were voice norms for or against voice in their particular organizations. The fourth theme spoke to their perceived efficacy in speaking up; some participants felt that voice in general would not be effective because of previous negative experiences with voice in their organizations, while others spoke of their personal voice efficacy and the reasons that they felt they could be effective, or not, in using voice. Lastly, participants spoke of the appropriateness of using voice in the moment under situational circumstances, be they the size of the group also present at the event, the location of the event, or the emotionality of the moment. It should be noted

that these participants might choose voice in the future, when circumstances were more conducive, but they felt that using voice during the event would not be appropriate

Influence: Differences in power and fear of consequences

Differences in power and fear of consequences were most often cited by observers of incivility as the reason for their choice of voice behavior. Often, the observer spoke out generically about how they chose silence due to a position of lower relative power versus other observers in the room.

In other cases, they spoke of the need to stay silent in order to maintain a business relationship with a more valued other. Participants also called out their fear of the consequences they would experience if they spoke out against the behavior of a more powerful perpetrator. The consequences they spoke of included both personal consequences as well as situational consequences such as prolonging or escalating an already uncomfortable situation.

Table 18. Factors Influencing Choice of Voice (Power and Fear)

Proof Quotes: Differences in Power and Fear of Consequences

Differences in power and fear of consequences that support voice

And you know, these people weren't my boss. They weren't in charge of my job or my paycheck.

I was a wrestler all through high school and college. It's somewhat of an aggressive sport. And it teaches you to use that aggression.

But I expect myself to speak and well, in that round I'm one of the oldest elders and one of the leading members. So I think that have the right to speak.

Differences in power and fear of consequences that do *not* support voice

Okay, you know, um, but yeah, when you get into those, there's a hierarchy at work, particularly in government. And there's power in that. And these people are my references, right? So, there's, I'm only five years well, five years more. I'm sure in the last two I will get more vocal.

the reaction can be from getting fired or being insulted yourself so that's why you think this is the situation you don't you see, if you don't know what the reaction will be, you, you won't probably then, you, it's, you probably keep your mouth shut and you don't say anything because you expect you don't know what the reaction will be.

Did anyone open the door and say anything? No. And I think part of that was because that person had other individuals in there with them.

because it is a high risk you're probably you you're inciting someone could have done something wrong. And then he would say now, and, and, then you could, it could escalate

Influence: The right time and place

Participants spoke of not wanting to speak up because it was neither the right time nor the right place to do so. In some cases, there was a reluctance to speak up in front of other observers to avoid loss of face by the perpetrator. This was especially true from participants working in Asia.

In other cases, observers felt that the perpetrator and situation were too emotional and that waiting for a less fraught time would yield better results. One participant, though they weren't personally capable of speaking out in the moment, regretted the fact that they couldn't speak out then, perceiving that a braver person would have.

Table 19. Factors Influencing Choice of Voice (The Right Time and Place)

Proof Quotes: The Right Time and Place

It is (or should be) the right time and place
I did say something. Yes. after the fact. But to me, that's kind of a coward way to do things. It is not very, like leadership or, or strong, a strong person. I did, I actually almost always say something, but I don't say it at the time when it should be said. It's always after and behind.
Not the right time or place
I didn't speak against incivility and the fact that we're shouting at each other. I didn't say anything, like regarding that, because I thought that it was not the time and place to discuss this.
And in front of, again, that many people I wasn't going to say anything.
There were things I pushed back with her on, but it wasn't when she was lashing out.
There was like, there was too much going on to me. You know, all the emotions and stuff going on during a game that would have made a coach, not, I know this, not receptive at all to anything.
and in a culture, such as the Korean context and in general in Asia, you're a lot better to take it offline, take it up afterwards, because you're causing someone to lose face in public does just as much damage

Influence: Voice norms

The culture of voice, or voice norms, varies significantly by organization and by national culture (Lee & Jablin, 1992; Morrison et al., 2011). Multiple participants referred to negative voice norms within their organization, while several people who worked cross-culturally, or with cross-cultural backgrounds described how voice norms were a reflection of national culture.

Table 20. Factors Influencing Choice of Voice (Voice Norms)

Proof Quotes: Voice Norms

Norms that support voice

And in an American organization you would absolutely say something. Okay, maybe not, maybe not. I would certainly feel a lot freer to say something. But then I think in a business environment, in American culture, people are pretty good at being able to take that more ... less personal perspective on things.

Norms that *do not* support voice

You know, when, when some, when you give feedback, and people process it through the lens of a criticism, even if the words aren't critical? Yeah, um, it's, it's, it has never been a good thing in this culture.

It's it's like, you know, it's, unfortunately, in this culture is like, a, it's not a supportive culture, where like, if you say, things that are meant to be, you know, positive or constructive, it's not taken that way.

But that's one of the interesting things I guess I would say about our department really is that we don't address conflicts.

even from the people who would have expected that somebody would stand up, that it's not the role of a woman to do so

And if I saw in other meetings, where there were some of the other more senior people who would stand up for, you know, when they saw something like that, and really stood up for it. I think I would or more people would feel okay, about challenging.

Influence: Efficacy

Some participants indicated that their decision of whether or not to voice was influenced by their beliefs as to their voice efficacy. Participants' described voice efficacy beliefs due to one of two things. A participant's beliefs as to how well they were personally equipped to voice as well as how well voice efforts had worked in their organization in the past.

Table 21. Factors Influencing Choice of Voice (Voice Efficacy)

Proof Quotes: Voice Efficacy

Belief in voice efficacy
And in that, in that particular case, maybe if I had never answered him before, I would not have felt confident to answer to him. But since I had already I was like, anyway, one more one less.
Lack of belief in voice efficacy
nor did I have the subject matter expertise to kind of infuse logic into any kind of thing
So there was a technical level of expertise there, that I felt made it difficult for me to intervene, because I wasn't as confident on the subject matter. And I think that's interesting because incivility is incivility, regardless of technical expertise.
But there were many instances where you just didn't, it just almost felt like, is easier and better for everybody to just drop it as opposed to saying anything? Because there was nothing gonna change at all.

This study began by posing the question, “How do observers choose voice during a workplace incivility event?” An online survey, used to educate and solicit interview volunteers, demonstrated the regular occurrence of 12 uncivil workplace behaviors, from the lower intensity but more commonly occurring interruptive and inattentive behaviors to the less common but still present severe behaviors of yelling, shouting and displays of temper.

Four aggregate dimensions emerged from the coding and analysis of 31 participant interviews, dimensions that illustrate how an observer of workplace incivility chooses voice. In the first aggregate dimension, triggers of responsibility, five themes illustrate the various ways that participants recognized the incivility of an event. In the second aggregate dimension, measures of responsibility, four themes represent the

different ways that an observer assesses their responsibility to voice. In the third aggregate dimension, observer voice choices, the themes representing the traditional choices of voice and silence are augmented with new forms of voice. Lastly, the aggregate dimension titled factors influencing the choice of voice includes the themes of power, fear, suitability of location, perceived efficacy, and cultural norms. The interrelationships between these four aggregate dimensions were illustrated in a proposed three-step observer voice decision process in Figure 15.

These findings uncover a new way of looking at an observer's choice of voice during an uncivil encounter. By separating the voice decision process into three discrete decision steps (the severity assessment, the responsibility assessment, and the choice of voice), the research question, "How do observers choose voice during an uncivil event?" is revealed as three separate questions an observer might ask themselves, each with its own set of decision-making influences. By separating the responsibility assessment from the choice of voice, two major outcomes emerge. Firstly, it becomes clear that a feeling of responsibility is necessary but not sufficient to trigger voice against a perpetrator. Secondly, a much broader choice of voice actions against incivility is revealed. In Chapter 5, we will proceed from a description of the "what" and "how" of an observed uncivil event to a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings that might explain the "why."

Chapter 5: Discussion

This research addresses the question, “How do observers choose voice during a workplace incivility event?” The findings in Chapter 4 support a three-step decision process: the incivility recognition, the assessment of responsibility, and the choice of voice. This chapter examines this study’s findings in the light of work by previous scholars, at times noting where findings are well supported by existing research and at others suggesting how this study will augment the works of previous incivility and voice scholars. The chapter will first briefly discuss how an observer’s first decision step (the recognition step) is generally supported by incivility and ethics scholars. It then proceeds to discuss in more detail how, by breaking apart the responsibility assessment and the choice of voice into two discrete steps, we can gain new insight into observer voice behaviors, and in particular how a feeling of responsibility is necessary, but not sufficient, to predict observer voice. Lastly, and in more detail, it analyzes how politeness and directness theories can at least partially explain the observer’s last decision—how they will voice.

Incivility Recognition

The first decision step in the proposed model, *the recognition of incivility*, synthesizes and largely supports the work of existing scholars. As in many ethical decision-making models, the first step is the recognition that a moral issue has occurred (Cottone & Claus, 2000; Jones, 1991; O’Reilly & Aquino, 2011). If an issue is not recognized, subsequent deliberation and action steps will not take place. Determining

the incivility of an event is a subjective process (Cortina & Magley, 2009) and can vary significantly by individual observer. Many uncivil behaviors, by definition, are subtle and ambiguous (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Additionally, norms of civility vary from organization to organization, industry to industry, and culture to culture (Miner et al., 2018).

Participant coding identified four major ways in which participants assessed the incivility of an event: the relatively obvious indicators of an event's severity (such as a perpetrator's tone, choice of language, or type of behavior), the evidence of any harm inflicted upon the victim, the subjective evaluation of a perpetrator's intent to harm the victim, and whether or not any personal or organizational norms had been violated. In the following section I will briefly discuss the scholarly works that support the factors participants used to assess incivility.

Severity

The types of uncivil events that were generally recognized by participants as signaling incivility included shouting, name-calling, swearing, disparaging comments, aggressive posturing, and physical acts. Though the judged severity of the above acts varied by individual workplace norms, it has been found that the "moral imperative" of an event is linked with its judged severity (Harvey et al., 2009) and that severe behaviors cause instantaneous and relatively non-conscious severity assessments by observers (O'Reilly & Aquino, 2011), with subtler forms of incivility requiring a more deliberate moral judgment.

Harm to the victim

In the most obvious of participant cases, harm to the victim was visible and blatant such as a victim trembling or crying. However, some observers, absent any visible victim harm, assumed harm had been done to the victim in light of their own previous experiences. Scholars believe that those who have experienced similar harm would be more able to recognize it while those who had no previous experience of a specific treatment might not even see it (Miner et al., 2018). Accordingly, participants who had experienced being spoken over and dismissed were more easily able to imagine how the victim felt by putting themselves in the victim's shoes. This form of empathy, a form that projects a victim's reaction based on how oneself would react, was distinguished by Leiter (2013) from a more deliberate form of "true" empathy which attempts to understand how the victim (versus the self) would react. In an interesting example of attempted "true" empathy, one participant consulted with a victim of incivility to understand whether or not he had been offended by a pejorative term. When the victim rather unconvincingly denied that any harm had been caused, the participant remained silent.

Intentionality

Though it might be the most ambiguous characteristic of an uncivil event, attribution of why incivility occurred can be central to its appraisal (Marchiondo et al., 2018) with perpetrator intent potentially exacerbating the perceived incivility of an act and its outcomes (Hershcovis et al., 2017). Because an observer's assessment of the intention behind a perpetrator's action depends upon the unique characteristics and personal experiences of each observer as well as an observer's previous experiences

with the perpetrator (Miner et al., 2018), each observer assessment would be different. An observer's previous experience as the target of incivility by a specific perpetrator, or repeated observation of uncivil behavior by the same perpetrator, might therefore make them more likely to attribute negative intent to a perpetrator's actions.

In part due to the ambiguous nature of incivility, "He didn't mean it" or similar denials of obvious intent were used by some supervisors as participants unsuccessfully used their voices to report incivility. Observers also gave allowance to perpetrators of incivility based on age and respect, reinforcing the idea that absence of intentionality in an uncivil act can elicit empathy (Marchiondo et al., 2018).

Norms

Though some observers felt a behavior to be uncivil only if harm was given or intended, others judged civility based on their own or an organization's norms. By violating an observer's justice perceptions, an observer is more likely to react to the offence despite any resultant personal cost (Zhang et al., 2020). Unlike the preconscious experiential system, the rational system is more logical and weighs up an uncivil action against norms of right and wrong (Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010). One participant spoke of incivility being against their own value system; another spoke of incivility as measured against the meeting norms that the group had put in place. Interestingly, only one participant mentioned any norms of civility that had been established by their organization, reinforcing the gap in a critical tool that could

increase civility in organizations (Walsh et al., 2012). One participant made an interesting distinction between norms of behavior that applied during normal work hours versus norms of behavior that could be applied to after-hours activities with colleagues and customers. At the macro level, multiple participants understood that what was considered to be appropriate behavior in one culture was considerably differently in another. As an unexpected bonus to this research, several participants stated that their understanding of what was considered to be acceptable behavior had changed based on our conversations and the survey that they had completed, reinforcing the positive benefit of civility norms education.

This first decision step in the proposed process model—the ways that observers might recognize incivility—has been well-researched by previous incivility scholars. In the next section, I will examine some of the existing theory behind the responsibility assessment.

Responsibility Assessment

Incivility, when recognized, “triggers a sense of responsibility to act” (Hershcovis et al., 2017, p. 48). In the proposed model, if an individual has determined that an uncivil act has occurred, a second question is posed, “Should I say something?” This secondary appraisal process assesses an individual’s felt responsibility to voice, the results of which vary according to individual and situational characteristics (Liang et al., 2012; Madrid et al., 2015).

In addition to their formal power and situational authority, participants discussed how their relationship with the target, the perpetrator, and other observers came into play in their feelings of responsibility. Participants also cited situational factors such as their physical distance from the event itself as an influence on their feelings of accountability.

Observer power

In most corporate situations, the players in the room are acutely aware of their position in the corporate hierarchy structure (Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Morrison et al., 2015). This could be by dint of a formal knowledge of their position in an organizational chart, their role in a project team, a job role, or a title. Participants described how their feelings of relative power impacted their feelings of responsibility to act in two ways. Aligning with the responsibility construal of power (Sassenberg et al., 2012), an observer who was the most powerful observer at an uncivil event experiences heightened feelings of responsibility for others at the event. In the opposite vein, and more reflective of the general feedback from participants, a feeling of relative powerlessness vis-à-vis a more powerful co-observer, could reduce any feelings of responsibility to act in a courageous manner (Schilpzand et al., 2015).

Relationship with others present

Participants often described their relationship with the perpetrator, the victim, and others at an event as they reflected upon their feelings of responsibility to voice. Their feelings of responsibility changed according to who was present at the event,

consistent with the belief that an individual's social identity changes as others enter or leave the social context (Levine et al., 2005).

Relationship with the victim

Participants, most often while recounting episodes of voice action, described how their relationship with the victim impacted their propensity to voice. For some, a felt obligation to show "moral concern" for a victim might only be experienced by those "close in socio-psychological space (e.g., family and friends)" (Skarlicki & Turner, 2014, p 40). Consistent with Miner and Cortina (2016), the responsibility by women towards other women could be explained by their increased level of connectedness with other female coworkers. For others, a felt obligation was experienced with the shared identities of race, organizational affiliation, or common experiences.

Though a perceived relationship with the victim was cited multiple times as a reason for felt responsibility, it at times created a reason for the observer not to act. A victim that was part of the outgroup, either due to a difficult personality or a lack of competence, elicited only a limited sense of responsibility from the observer and a more likely choice of observer silence. If an observer could causally link the perpetrator's incivility to the victim's behavior, the victim, rather than the perpetrator could be blamed, thus justifying any non-action by the observer in a process known as victim derogation (Skarlicki & Turner, 2014).

Relationship with the perpetrator

Similar to the relationship with the victim, an observer's relationship with the perpetrator could result in lesser or greater feelings of responsibility to voice (Harvey et al., 2009). Participants in this study did not describe reluctance to voice against incivilities based on a close personal relationship with a perpetrator; however, they did cite several occasions when their relationship with a perpetrator made them comfortable enough to voice. In these instances voice was used after the fact, thus preserving perpetrator face in the moment.

Relationship with other observers

Oftentimes, research participants assessed their responsibility, not by the relationship with either the target or the perpetrator, but in relation to other observers. According to Hussain et al. (2019), observers will scan the environment, looking for others who “seem relationally capable of taking on the burden of action” (p. 829). Participants described decreased feelings of responsibility to voice using descriptors such as newness, seniority, or position in the hierarchy relative to other observers. Similar to the bystander effect, the mere presence of other observers, regardless of perceived relative status, might also result in lower feelings of responsibility based on the diffusion of responsibility experienced in larger groups (Darley & Latane, 1968).

Sphere of responsibility

In Jones' (1991) original ethical decision-making model, proximity was included as a measure of moral intensity and defined as the personal and situational similarity between the perpetrator and the subject. In interviews, participants used both physical

and organizational distancing terms to define their sphere of responsibility, using distance as a reason for their diminished feelings of responsibility. Similarly, Antonakis and Atwater (2002) measured the distance between two employees (in their case, between a leader and a follower) in three ways: perceived social distance, perceived task interaction frequency, and physical distance. Though Antonakis and Atwater (2002) originally conceived of these types of distance as independent, subsequent scholars have found them to be interrelated, with physical distance strongly correlated with physical distance (Torres & Bligh, 2012).

The Choice of Voice

Thus far in Chapter 5, the first two steps in the proposed three-step model have been discussed: the thought processes of the observer as they recognize an uncivil event and as they assess their responsibility to take voice action. The theoretical basis for the first decision step, the recognition of an unjust event, is well established in the ethical decision-making, voice, and bystander literatures (Darley & Latane, 1968; Jones, 1991; Pinder & Harlos, 2001).

This study diverges from the preponderance of voice literature which variously describes felt responsibility as a “motivator to voice” (Chamberlin et al., 2017), a “critical psychological state” (Fuller et al., 2006), an “individual disposition” (Eibl et al., 2020) and an “internal motivational state” (Morrison, 2014). Rather than proposing responsibility as an individual characteristic positively related to voice, this study, supported by participant accounts and following the lead of whistleblowing

and bystander scholars, considers an observer's assessment of personal responsibility to be its own discrete decision process (Darley & Latane, 1968; Miceli et al., 1991).

Identifying a theoretical basis for the third decision step proved to be the most challenging but perhaps the most rewarding discovery of the research process. How could an observer who had both recognized an act of incivility and felt responsible to say something respond in so many ways? In the existing literature, voice is often portrayed as a dichotomous choice (Morrison, 2011), however, participants described a range of voice responses to incivility that went far beyond the simple choice of voice or silence: some tackled the perpetrator directly, some entered the conversation but skirted around the uncivil behavior itself, while many others remained silent.

It was the term *direct* that would ultimately provide a new theoretical lens through which observer voice responses could be viewed. A search on the terms *direct*, *directness*, and *voice* revealed research by Lam et al. (2019), who had recently coined the term voice directness to refer to the “explicitness that employees use to express their voice” (p. 643). According to the authors, to voice directly, an employee must clearly state what needs to change and how it should be done. Using hints, or indirect methods of implying that an issue exists “does not mean that the voice is not expressed, it is simply expressed less directly” (Lam et al., 2019, p. 643). This article, which investigated the relationship between voice directness and managerial

endorsement, uncovered a theory that would show promising explanatory value to an observer's choice of voice expression: Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory.

The theory of politeness, sometimes thought of as the theory of politeness and directness, links together power, distance, and face threatening acts with individual speech acts (Holtgraves & Joong-nam, 1990). By viewing an observer's choice of voice (a potentially face threatening speech act) through the lens of politeness and directness, multiple insights emerged. In the section below I will attempt to describe the theory of politeness, proposing that the sometimes-inexplicable voice behavior of participants could (at least partially) be explained using politeness theory.

Politeness theory

Politeness is more than etiquette, socially acceptable conduct, or pleasantries (Morand, 2000). It is a quality of voice used to regulate social behavior, convey position in a hierarchy, express positive or negative intentions, and to manage and disarm aggression (Brown et al., 1987; Lam et al., 2019; Morand, 2000). At the heart of this dissertation is the exploration of observer voice as a means of responding to and mitigating the negative outcomes of workplace incivility, a construct closely linked with aggression.

In perhaps the most influential work on politeness, Brown et al. (1987) posited a new theory to explain what they believed to be the universal phenomenon of politeness. As their politeness theory built upon Goffman's (1978) belief that all individuals are

concerned with face, it is important to give a brief overview of Goffman's work. Goffman (1978) thought of face as the positive self-image that an individual holds about themselves and attempts to maintain in relations with others (Goffman, 1978; Holtgraves & Joong-nam, 1990). Face could be reinforced in everyday social interaction and could be increased through the experience of acts of esteem, positive regard, respect, and honor. Face could also be lost through the experience of impoliteness and disrespect and required effort to regain it when lost (Persson, 2016). Goffman (1978) portrayed face as existing in both positive and negative forms, with positive face being associated with "solidarity with others" and negative face with the "need for autonomy from others" (Rees-Miller, 2000).

According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, any speech act presents the speaker with the risk of a potential face threatening act (FTA) towards the hearer, the magnitude, or "weightiness" of which is determined by three factors: the social distance between the speaker and the hearer, the relative power the hearer has over the speaker, and the absolute ranking of the imposition of the speaker's request in a specific cultural environment (Lee & Pinker, 2010; Longcope, 1995).

Brown and Levinson maintained that the speaker (in our case the observer), mindful of the risk of any speech act towards the hearer (in our case the perpetrator), could use different strategies to reduce that threat. As originally conceived in politeness theory, a speaker could use five risk management strategies, each of which exists

along a continuum of increasing politeness (Figure 16). At the first, or lowest, level of politeness, a speaker could make their statement or request bluntly, without any softening language and without redressive speech or actions. In the second strategy and increasing in politeness, a speaker could use what the authors termed “positive politeness” to soften their statement. Positive politeness attempts to reduce the threat of a speech act by attending to the hearer’s desire for positive face using tactics such as compliments, code-switching language, an implied solidarity and relationship with the hearer, or terms of endearment (Holtgraves & Joong-nam, 1990). At the third level, and in increasing order of politeness, Brown and Levinson (1987) introduced the less intuitive term “negative politeness” to refer to statements that incorporate the possibility that the hearer would not be receptive to the statement. Negative politeness could be conveyed by giving deference, using honorifics, or making a request that presupposes a negative response. As the “most elaborate and most conventionalized set of linguistic strategies,” (Brown et al., 1987, p. 130) negative politeness strategies are often described in traditional etiquette books. These three politeness strategies belong to a category of what the authors call “on record” speech whereby an expression has “one unambiguously attributable intention with which witnesses would concur” (Brown et al., 1987, p. 69).

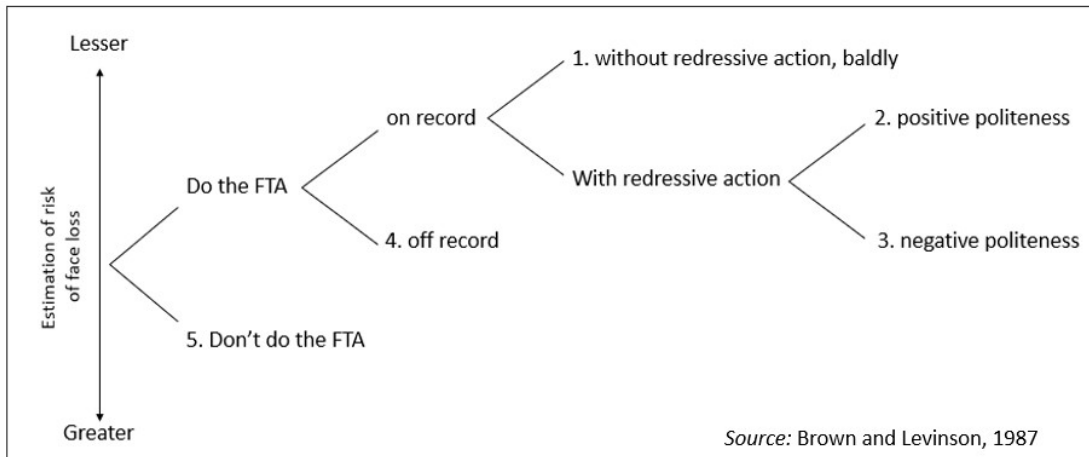


Figure 16. Possible Strategies for doing FTAs (Brown and Levinson)

The fourth of Brown and Levinson’s (1987) strategies uses indirectness to increase the level of politeness of a statement or a request. Indirect, or “off record” requests, are statements that are ambiguous, use hints, or could be construed in multiple ways, thus saving the face of the hearer (Holtgraves & Joong-nam, 1990). In the last strategy, a speaker could avoid any face threatening action altogether by choosing silence rather than voice (Longcope, n.d.).

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the speaker must weigh up each of the five strategies against the risk of any speech act. In their model, the risk, or “weightiness,” of a speech act [W] is composed of three primary components: the social distance between the speaker and the hearer [D], the power the hearer has over the speaker [P], and [R], where R is a value that measures the imposition of a speech act in the particular culture being examined. The equation can be represented accordingly:

$$W_x = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + R_x$$

This equation could easily be adapted for an incivility event. In a corporate environment, the power [P] of a perpetrator is either explicitly understood or can be gleaned by observing the micro-signals of dress, speech, or non-speech behaviors (Cafaro et al., 2016; Carney et al., 2010; Oostrom et al., 2021). In some cultures, social distance [D] drives a set of highly ritualized speech and physical behaviors including forms of address, honorifics, pronoun usage, and length and depth of bowing. In our model, we can liken Brown and Levinson's (1987) social distance to the strength of the relationship between the observer and the perpetrator discussed in Chapter 4.

As regards the last variable, R, we look to the cultural variation in the particular speech act that we are concerned with—observer voice against workplace incivility. Politeness and voice behaviors vary by culture in strikingly similar ways. Observer voice against incivility, a form of prohibitive voice, has an inherently high R-value (particularly relative to promotive voice) because of the implied criticism of the party or organization to which the voice is addressed (Liang et al., 2012). The risk of voice against power is even riskier in cultures that stress loyalty, such as those in South East Asia (Kish-Gephart et al., 2009; Verhezen, 2010). In a similar fashion, scholars note that politeness strategies are used differently by different cultures. For example, a positive politeness culture such as the U.S. accords a relatively low risk to a face

threatening act as compared to negative politeness cultures, such as Japan (Blum-Kulka, 1987; Longcope, 1995).

For simplicity, in this discussion, politeness and directness are considered be part of a single continuum. However, it should be noted that some scholars challenge indirectness as the strategy conveying the most politeness (Blum-Kulka, 1987; Lee & Pinker, 2010), finding that indirectness did not necessarily lead to perceived politeness in all instances and that different cultures held different views on the acceptability of indirect speech. These scholars posit that indirectness might exist on a separate complementary scale to politeness. To add to the complexity, Blum-Kulka (1987) further distinguished between what she termed conventional and non-conventional indirectness. In what she called “conventional indirectness,” the wording of a request used a form of indirectness that would be well understood by the hearer, but still considered polite. For example, “Would you mind turning down the music?” would be clearly understood by the hearer as a polite request to turn down the music. However, the statement “No one is able to sleep with all this racket” would contain a strong indirect hint but might be considered as censure and less polite by the hearer.

Regardless of whether directness exists along a continuum of politeness as posited by Brown and Levinson, or it constitutes its own complementary axis, politeness and

directness theory demonstrate explanatory value in mapping out the voice actions used by observers of workplace incivility.

Observer voice responses by politeness

In the following sections, I compare the categories of observer voice actions found in Chapter 4 of the dissertation against Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model, noting where similarities exist but also pointing out the differences and where potential extensions to the politeness model might be helpful in understanding observer voice strategies.

Silence

In the proposed three-step model, observers default to silence if they do not recognize an event as uncivil, or if when they do, they do not feel any sense of responsibility to respond to it (Figure 15). However, some participants who did recognize an event as uncivil and did experience feelings of responsibility still chose silence. This was reflected in one participant's comment:

And I just was silent, which is basically an enabler. And so, you know, I, you know, intellectually, you recognize that, but sometimes what you do with what you know, you should do, and what actually happens are two different things.

All participants described examples of choosing silence in the face of incivility, with most citing a form of perpetrator power, or in the case of Brown and Levinson (1987), hearer power [P] as a reason for their silence. In describing their justification for silence, participants sometimes used comparative power terms to describe

themselves versus the perpetrator, while in other cases they described the risk of what would happen should they confront a more powerful other.

One participant talked about the damage to their career should they speak out:

First of all, my peers would have been surprised. And I do believe that because of his style, and because I've seen people exit the organization, it would be perceived as a clash, and he will find a reason to either help me graciously exit the organization or could impact my next year's performance rating.

One participant spoke of the risk of getting fired:

[S]o if you don't know how the reaction is, normally you're prudent and you say, well let's see, better to say nothing because I don't know how this person will react, from end to end the bandwidth of the reaction can be from getting fired or being insulted yourself.

In a counter-example, one participant described their freedom to speak because the perpetrator did *not* have power over their salary: "And you know, these people weren't my boss. They weren't in charge of my job or my paycheck."

Though not explicitly using the word power, all participants described examples of silence responses using relative power terms such as too new, too junior, too young, or as holding a structurally subservient position.

The second variable in Brown and Levinson's (1987) risk equation is [D], or the social distance between the speaker and the hearer. Borrowing from the social networking perspective, organizations consist of social units that can be partially

described by their clusters, or work groups within them, with the link between any two players at least partially determined by “the degree to which individuals honor obligations or forego personal costs to carry out obligations” (Tichy et al., 1979, p. 509). Absent other social distance cues, I submit that employees in unrelated workgroups in the same organization would be more organizationally and thus more socially distant. Using organizational distance as a proxy for D (social distance), multiple participants referred to this distance as a justification for silence.

We’re not working together. We’re not in the same group. We are we are in the same company. But we do, we do, totally different jobs.

[T]he reason I didn’t want to jump in, in principle, but not because of the whole thing. But because Cory owns the DGP.

I think it’s harder when it’s not your group per se, not your project, you are a participant.

It might be argued that social distance, as defined above, played an equally strong role in an observer’s feelings of responsibility to act (Step 2), though I argue that it is also a key factor in the final voice decision stage.

Indirect voice

Brown and Levinson (1987) noted that when making an expression that the speaker perhaps should not make at all, such as criticisms, offers, and complaints, speakers tended to use “indirect expressions (implicatures).” Observer voice against incivility is just such a risky expression. In Chapter 4, a broad category of observer voice strategies fell between the strategy of silence and the strategy of directly addressing a perpetrator’s uncivil behavior. In these strategies, the observers used a variety of

subtle and not-so-subtle indirect techniques to support the victim without directly calling out a perpetrator's behavior.

Distract and delay

Several participants described how they had used humor in response to perpetrator incivility. Though joking has been cited as a source of potential incivility in the workplace (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Miner et al., 2018) humor has also been found to be a potential strategy to minimize the psychological stress experienced by victims of workplace aggression (Cheng et al., 2019). Consistent with this second usage, Brown and Levinson called out humor as a basic positive politeness strategy that a speaker could use either to put the hearer at ease after they had committed a faux pas or to minimize the stress of a speaker's face-threatening act. Brown and Levinson (1987) also noted that cross-culturally, humor or "buffoonery" could be used as a form of negative politeness, or a way to express deference towards a more powerful other.

In our research, participants appeared to use humor both as a positive politeness as well as a stress reduction strategy:

So trying to get it into a funnier situation as it is even if it's very tough. You try to make people laugh, when they start laughing they lose probably the anger.

I can do this kind of 'Cheers!' Okay, sing happy birthday, or whatever. So, that kind of, I do that so people make fun of me and then make the situation more harmony.

Other participants described a variety of ways to distract a perpetrator. They might just “change the topic,” “use diversionary tactics to calm things down,” “do the redirect thing,” “kind of deflect the thing,” or “defuse it in different ways.”

The tactic of distraction was perhaps best described by Participant 17:

I’ve seen people step in, myself included, in more of a deflecting or an indirect way, like, not in the sense of, “Hey, you got to sit down and calm down and stop doing it.” It’s more like, “Well, hey, look, you know, let let’s you know,” it’s people sort of trying to interrupt the tete a tete and sort of insert themselves in between it and divert the situation. Maybe sort of like distract, “hey, over here.”

Participants also described a variety of indirect tactics they used in an attempt to delay or stop the perpetrator behavior. Participant 11 suggested that both the perpetrator and the victim “go to grab a cup of tea, some water, whatever you want, and come back in 15 minutes, and everything will be okay.” More directly, Participant 20 “intervened on the person’s defense” and suggested that “the conversation should be taken outside the room” Participant 15 attempted to maintain the face of the perpetrator “not embarrassing somebody, not putting them on the spot, um, you know, kind of taking it off to the side, making sure that it’s a safe place to say, what’s going on?”

Address the cause of the incivility

Riskier than the distract and delay tactic, some participants, without directly addressing the perpetrator’s behavior, chose to enter the fray, potentially turning the ire of the perpetrator on themselves. Tactics included attempting to broker agreement

or understanding between the perpetrator and the victim, defending the victim, or, riskiest, redirecting the perpetrator's incivility towards themselves.

And at the same time, I was trying to explain to the, to the CFO what the auditors were saying. Like, trying to see both sides' view? Like their points because they were not talking. At that point. It was basically tools. Like Yelling at each other.

And so it was kind of that neutral language of taking and valuing both positions, but wanting to not call them out per se.

I think you have a point here. But let's look at what [] said. [] actually said x, y, z, which I think has merit. I understand your concerns, [], but [], you know, has something here that I think is worth listening to. I know I wouldn't go, '[], you're yelling at [], you just stop yelling at []. What are you yelling at [] for?' Right? It's a matter of trying to, you know, turn it away.

One participant, whose work hours were at the heart of a resource allocation argument, went so far as to offer to do the work of both departments:

Because they were essentially trying to determine, like, what piece of work should be done. So, I was trying to stop and be like, it's okay, guys. I'll do both of the pieces. And they just, like, didn't want to hear it.

At times observers took the victim's side in the topic that was being discussed in an uncivil fashion:

So I'm summarizing, I'm not putting my own ideas out there. But I'm basically saying, in a diplomatic intervention, Harry, you weren't listening, you were paying more attention to your own ideas than to those that they're that were also at the table. And by the way, the other ideas at the table were really good ones. But it's not point-blank criticism of him, you see what I mean. It's bringing it around.

At other times, the observer took on responsibility for the position or performance of the victim (often a subordinate). One participant's approach, though ultimately unsuccessful, was to say, "This is my problem, not his, I own this." Another was very clear on the ramifications of taking on responsibility for the victim:

And if it was directed at one of my subordinates, somebody who reported to me, it was a little bit more like, Okay, I'm gonna draw fire over here, like you don't, you don't get paid enough to deal with this nonsense. I don't either. But it's my job.

Request a do-over

The last indirect tactic, which I have called the "do-over," was mentioned less often.

In this tactic, the observer appeared to attend to the face of the victim at the potential risk of loss of face by the perpetrator. Two participants spoke of their tactics to manage the members of their teams that repeatedly interrupted their more introverted staff members:

And then, you know, Tom will come and interject. "Hey, I have another question." And then, you know, Todd will answer that question, and I'll say, "Hey, guys, let's go back to Kathy, Kathy had a question. Kathy, what is your question?" And no one will pick that up. And that happens quite a bit.

So today when I see it, when people you know, speaking over somebody else, or, you know, ignoring somebody's input just completely and talking on, Like, okay, no. Let me circle back to what she said, or he said. And let's talk about that for a minute. Even if I, I don't agree with that guy's opinion personally, we're not gonna, we're gonna encourage everybody to speak and then go from there.

Participants also brought up examples of a more personal nature where they paid special attention to a victim by showing them great interest or cleaning up the mess left behind by a perpetrator.

Baldly, on record (Address the incivility)

At the highest end of the risk spectrum, only a few participants could recollect instances in which they directly addressed the behavior of the perpetrator and in each instance, consistent with Brown and Levinson's theory, the observer's relative power and/or social distance came into play.

In one example, a participant went on-record, clearly asking a meeting participant to stop interrupting other attendees: "It's not allowed to interrupt someone if they've started a sentence, and this is the rules we have defined here. So please respect those rules we have here inside and don't interrupt."

When asked what made one participant feel able to speak up, they mentioned two factors: their seniority within the group and their ownership of the meeting, both indicators of their relative power.

But I expect myself to speak and well, in that round I'm one of the oldest elders, and one of the leading members. So, I think that I have the right to speak, and that's why, that's why I felt empowered because I'm leading this meeting

Another reason to speak baldly, per Brown and Levinson, is in cases of great urgency or desperation. In one participant example, the observer, a nurse, directly confronted a

physician that was berating one of his nursing staff members. Disturbingly, this nursing staff member was requesting urgent assistance with a distressed schizophrenic who had experienced a brain injury.

And so, if you paged for something, sometimes the doctor would call you back and be yelling, and I would. One time I did have to step in, because I heard it over the phone. And I actually took the phone from a new nurse and said, don't talk to my nurse like this, if you. And it was about some issue. I said, you need to come down here right now.

A third participant described a perpetrator's particularly ill-timed COVID-19 joke exhorting the victim, who was of Chinese ethnicity, not to blow out her birthday candles because "somebody might get COVID." Immediately following the event, the observer explained that the victim's parents lived in China and that the victim had been visibly upset by his remark:

So, I felt very comfortable approaching him because I knew he did not mean any harm. And also, I'm close enough to him that I can do that. And I think she also knew there was no harm intended, but there *was* harm, so he walked back and fixed it.

In the above example, the participant believed that reduced social distance (or a stronger relationship) with the perpetrator made them feel comfortable enough to risk using their voice.

Brown and Levinson's model adapted for observers of incivility

In the original model, a speaker must compute the risk of any speech act addressed towards the hearer as a function of social distance between the speaker and the hearer, the power the speaker holds over the hearer, and the imposition of the request or speech act. Changing the names of terms to better reflect the players in an observed

incivility event I have used Observer (Obs) for the Speaker, and Perpetrator (Perp) for the Hearer, giving the functionally equivalent equation below. An equation which could explain how, in Step 3 of the proposed observer voice decision model, an observer chooses voice during an uncivil event.

$$W_x = D(\text{Obs,Perp}) + P(\text{Perp,Obs}) + R_x$$

Using Brown and Levinson's (1987) equation in this way, four of the secondary themes underlying the proposed aggregate dimension factors influencing choice of voice are lent theoretical support. The secondary themes fear of consequences and the right time and place could logically be combined with differences in power to represent Brown and Levinson's (1987) concepts of relative power and social distance. The secondary theme of cultural norms could also be mapped to Brown and Levinson's (1987) "R," to represent the imposition of a speech act in a particular culture. Mapping the remaining secondary theme, real or perceived efficacy, to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory (most likely as a contributor to an observer's feelings of power) is a potential area of future study and discussed in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5 has synthesized the theory that supports the three decisions steps in the proposed voice decision model: the recognition of incivility, the assessment of responsibility, and the choice of voice, (Figure 15). The first step is well supported by the works of leading incivility scholars. In support of the responsibility step, this

study has called upon theory by ethical decision-making and bystander scholars. In support of the third step, this study has ventured outside of the works of incivility and voice scholars and proposed that Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness theory provides great explanatory value in completing the answer to the research question, "How do observers choose voice during a workplace incivility event?"

Chapter 6 will discuss the limitations of the existing research and suggest future research avenues that might build upon these findings. It will also review the practical implications of the proposed observer voice decision model and the opportunities that it creates for scholars and practitioners to improve uncivil conditions in the workplace.

Chapter 6

An observer's choice of voice during an uncivil event is a complex and multi-step process. This research identifies three steps to the observer voice decision process: the recognition of the uncivil event, the assessment of responsibility to voice, and the choice of voice, each step of which might lead an observer to silence. This study demonstrates that by considering the second and third decision steps separately—the assessment of responsibility and the choice of voice—we gain a more nuanced understanding of the observer decision process, and in particular, how an observer's feeling of responsibility is necessary, but not sufficient, to predict observer voice. Lastly, this study identifies a number of factors that influence an observer's choice of voice directness, a choice of direct and indirect voice options that go well beyond the simple choice of voice or silence.

This chapter will note some of the limitations of this study and how future research might address some of those limitations. Finally, it will close with a discussion of some of the ways this research could be used by practitioners and scholars to address the significant problem of workplace incivility.

Research Limitations and Implications

This research cannot claim to perfectly model a phenomenon as socially complex as that of incivility. As in any qualitative research endeavor, this study reflects the life experiences, personal biases, and world outlook of the researcher. Though this study

explored the experiences of observed incivility from a seemingly diverse range of individuals, the sociodemographic makeup of the participants was still limited. This narrow makeup of the interview population limits any generalizability of these results to other segments of the population, particularly given that incivility is experienced differently and at different rates by different segments of the population (Cortina et al., 2013). In order to address this limitation, future researchers should gather observations of incivility from participants who are younger, more diverse, and from less economically advantaged backgrounds, populations that were underrepresented in this study. Conducting a comparative study of observer voice decision-making across two diverse cultures might also uncover new cultural variations in the voice decision process not fully uncovered in this study.

Asking participants to recall examples of observed incivility in the previous two years creates at least two potential issues. The first issue is a research participant's ability to accurately recall an episode many months in the past. The second issue is the inherent error introduced during an individual's retrospective sensemaking of the uncivil event. For example, during the recollection process, participants might be prone to rewriting history in their favor. Interestingly, rather than a preponderance of stories describing participants courageously using their voices against incivility, most informants could more easily recall events during which they chose silence and few informants could recall a workplace event during which they directly addressed a perpetrator's incivility. Future research that concentrated on recent experiences of

using direct and indirect forms of voice, perhaps using a process of daily journaling might reduce these inaccuracies and create a more accurate sequencing of the voice decision process.

Future researchers might also want to pursue a deeper understanding of self-efficacy's role in influencing an observer's choice of voice, given that self-efficacy did not fit as neatly into Brown and Levinson's model as did the three other themes. This research might investigate whether or not a participant's beliefs in their voice efficacy functioned to decrease the perceived power gap between themselves and the perpetrator (thus matching Brown and Levinson's [1987] theory) or if an observer's efficacy beliefs drove the choice of voice in a different way, such as serving to reduce the perceived risk of any action undertaken by the observer (including voice).

This qualitative study has hypothesized a simplistic three-step voice decision process but has stopped short of proposing any causal inferences. It also has not explored any potential loops or backward arrows in the process flow. Future research might refine the factors influencing an observer's voice decision process using process tracing methodologies, methodologies used by scholars to establish causality and confirm a proposed sequence of events (Mahoney, 2012). Future research might also focus on quantitatively validating the relative importance of each factor in the voice decision process.

This research focused on the voice behaviors of an observer during an uncivil event, however, many observers might still have the ability to voice after the fact. Research to define the circumstances under which observers would choose voice after the fact could provide important insight and additional ways to combat workplace incivility.

Though there exists a wide range of future research possibilities suggested by this study to better understand incivility, I propose that the efforts of both practitioners and scholars would be better applied to using this research to develop and implement practical solutions to incivility.

Practical Implications

The recognition of an observer's three-step voice decision process provides us a framework from which we can begin to develop solutions. Establishing and training employees on recognizing workplace incivility is a critical first step, especially given that, with the notable exception of the healthcare industry, organizations largely left participants to their own devices to determine whether or not workplace behavior was to be considered uncivil and many acts of incivility are unintentional. Well-established incivility questionnaires could be modified and used as tools to assess the current state of civility in an organization and to educate the workplace on uncivil behaviors. Executive teams could establish and train their staffs on organizational civility norms. Given the strong role that power plays in incivility, it would behoove practitioners to begin assessment and education in the executive ranks before rolling out education to the general population. Once incivility norms were established and

effectively communicated across the workforce, observers, perpetrators, and victims would be able to recognize acceptable and unacceptable workplace behaviors.

With employees able to recognize incivility, the next hurdle is to establish responsibility to do something about it. An executive edict on the collective organizational responsibility to address incivility might begin that process. However, establishing responsibility without a clear idea of *how* employees should act on that responsibility might trigger unexpected results, such as the well-recognized incivility spiral. It follows, therefore, that researchers and interested practitioners should first focus on the third decision step, and in particular, how employees can most easily and effectively voice against incivility once it is recognized.

How might this be possible? According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) voice weightiness equation, the risk of observer speech against an uncivil other is unique to each situation and to each observer-perpetrator dyad, while the breadth of voice options available to the observer is vast. To reduce this complexity, empirical researchers might use quantitative methods to assess the judged effectiveness of voice responses to typical workplace incivility situations under a defined (yet feasible) number of risk scenarios. For example, one might vary the relative power of the perpetrator (superior, peer, subordinate), the social distance with the perpetrator (friend, acquaintance, stranger), and three common workplace environments (small meeting, large meeting, and after work activity). It would be naive to assume that an

employee would voice against incivility by a supervisor in the same way as incivility by a peer or subordinate. By researching voice accessibility (from the perspective of the observer) and voice acceptability (from the perspective of the perpetrator), a menu of practical voice options might be revealed.

Though there is academic and practical value in researching the most effective forms of voice against incivility, a better approach might be to follow the sentiment expressed in a cautionary tale from Voltaire (de Voltaire, 1841): Do not let the perfect be the enemy of the good enough. Rather than working with employees to identify the voice strategy that would be the most effective to use, researchers and practitioners could work with employees to determine the voice that an employee would be most likely to use. The medical profession has produced positive results encouraging employee voice against incivility using cognitive rehearsal, simulation, scripting and practice (Clark, 2019; Griffin & Clark, 2014). The Giving Voice to Values program also provides an example of a program that has been widely adopted and encourages employees to develop “the skills, the scripts, the confidence, and the competence” (Gentile, 2011, p. 305) to react to a hypothetical ethical challenge before it occurs. A joint researcher and practitioner-led strategy that combines the communication of organizational civility norms, the establishment of joint responsibility to meet those norms, and the facilitated development of individual voice scripts might be the quickest way to produce the nearest-term improvements to the damage caused by workplace incivility.

Conclusion

Workplace incivility is a phenomenon that encompasses a breadth of commonly observed behaviors, from behaviors that are difficult to detect, to behaviors that are severe and blatant. It is a pervasive phenomenon that has significant, harmful impact on both individuals and their organizations. The goal of this study was to understand how an observer chose voice during a workplace incivility event. Using participant interviews, coding, and analysis, this study uncovered a three-step observer voice decision process: the recognition of the uncivil event, the assessment of responsibility to voice, and the choice of voice. Informed by this research, scholars and practitioners can work side by side to identify ways that observers can use their voices to reduce the pernicious effects of workplace incivility.

Appendix A: Original Workplace Incivility Scale

Questions

“During the PAST FIVE YEAR, have you been in a situation where any of your supervisors or co-workers”

Put you down or was condescending to you?

Paid little attention to your statement or showed little interest in your opinion?

Made demeaning or derogatory remarks about you?

Addressed you in unprofessional terms, either publicly or privately?

Ignored or excluded you from professional camaraderie?

Doubted your judgment on a matter over which you have responsibility?

Made unwanted attempts to draw you into a conversation about personal matters?

Note: Participants respond to each item on a 5-point scale: never, once or twice, sometimes, often, and many times.

Source: Adapted from Cortina et al. (2013)

Appendix B: LinkedIn Post on Workplace Incivility



Figure 17. LinkedIn Post

Appendix C: Survey Consent Form

<p>Observations of Incivility</p> <p>Before You Begin...</p> <p>Consent Form for Survey Research</p> <p>The purpose of this study is to understand the factors that influence the actions of observers of workplace incivility.</p> <p>Procedures: Upon your agreement to participate in this study, you will complete a brief survey that will take less than 5 minutes to complete. In the survey you will be asked if you are willing to participate in a follow-on interview phase. You are under no obligation to participate in the interview phase. If, and only if, you express willingness to participate in the interview phase you may be contacted via email to participate.</p> <p>Risks and Benefits Associated with the Study: This study does not have any known risks. By participating in this study, you may experience the benefit of a greater personal understanding of incivility in the workplace.</p> <p>Confidentiality: These surveys are anonymous. The records of this study will be kept on the researcher's password protected computer and eventually stored in anonymous form in a locked office at the university, preventing any breach of confidentiality. Should the study ever become published material, your name and the name of your company will in no way be linked to the study, nor will it mention your involvement or that of your company.</p> <p>Voluntary Nature of the Study: Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with this BU student researcher or with Benedictine University faculty. You are free to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with the researchers or Benedictine University.</p>	<p>Contacts and Questions: The researcher(s) conducting this study is Danielle Galbraith with Dr. James Ludema, Director, Center for Values-Driven Leadership, Daniel L. Goodwin College of Business, Benedictine University. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please ask the student researcher at this time. If questions or concerns arise at a later time, you may direct them to Danielle Galbraith (danielle_galbraith@ben.edu) or to Dr. James Ludema at j ludema@ben.edu or 630-829-6229. Questions and concerns may also be addressed to Alandra Devall, Ph.D., Chair, Institutional Review Board, Benedictine University, 5700 College Road, Lisle, IL 60532, 630-829-6295 or adevall@ben.edu.</p> <p>CONTINUE</p> <p>* 1. By answering "Yes" to the following question, you have agreed to the above consent form in its entirety. Signing also indicates that you are 18 years of age or more and that you have agreed to participate.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p> <p style="text-align: right;"> </p>
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Figure 18. Survey Consent Form

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

- Think about an uncivil event that you observed.
 - Briefly describe the circumstances leading up to the event.
 - What uncivil behavior did you observe?
 - As you witnessed this behavior, what thoughts and feelings did you experience? Walk me through it moment-by-moment.
 - What action(s) did you take in the moment and why?
 - Did you speak up or remain silent?
 - If you spoke up...
 - What led you to speak up?
 - What were you thinking and feeling at the time?
 - Do you think you used your voice successfully?
 - Why / or why not?
 - If you remained silent...
 - What led you to remain silent?
 - What were you thinking and feeling at the time?
 - What would make it easier to speak up?
 - What subsequent action(s) did you take in the minutes, hours, or days after the event was over, and why did you take them? What were you feeling and thinking at the time? Walk me through it moment-by-moment.

- Think of another uncivil event that you observed after which you (*substitute the opposite voice/silence behavior*)
 - *Ask the same questions as previously, with the addition of*
 - *What was different about this event that led you to choose voice over silence (or silence over voice)?*

Figure 19. Interview Protocol

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