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## Empowering Employees to Reduce Perceptions of Workplace Incivility

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science degree in Psychology

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## Abstract

Incivility is a low intensity deviant behaviour of ambiguous intent that is pervasive in many organizations. Given the cost of incivility to the employee and the organization, it is important to understand how individuals perceive this behaviour. We believe that employees who have access to opportunity, information, resources and support in their organization (i.e., structural empowerment) will be more psychologically empowered, and thus better equipped to cope with workplace stressors, leading to a reduction in the perception of uncivil behaviour. We tested our hypotheses using a survey approach with an online sample of 364 working participants. Regression analyses, mediation analyses and serial mediation analyses were conducted, and revealed some support for our hypotheses. These results suggest important future avenues for understanding the subtleties of workplace incivility.

*Keywords:* Incivility, Structural Empowerment, Psychological Empowerment, Coping, Workplace.

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## Introduction

In today's fast-paced work environments, courteousness and kindness seem to be a rarity; instead, interpersonal mistreatment is common (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001). While a considerable amount of literature has focused on overt forms of workplace mistreatment (Barling, Dupré, & Kelloway, 2009), there is a growing need to understand more covert, mild forms of mistreatment such as rude behaviours (Cortina, 2008; Cortina et al., 2001). These mild forms of workplace mistreatment have been commonly referred to as acts of *incivility* (Anderson & Pearson, 1999).

Workplace incivility is a distinct form of workplace mistreatment; unlike more obvious forms of mistreatment, uncivil behaviours are less intense and the perpetrator's intent to harm the target is ambiguous (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). As a result, incivility is more open to interpretation, such that targets may differ in their perception of a given behaviour. While it is important for research to understand why individuals behave in an uncivil manner, it is equally important to understand how individuals experience incivility.

The purpose of this thesis is to gain a better understanding of the antecedents and mechanisms that affect an individual's perception of incivility. To do this, we examined the effects of structural empowerment (where employees have the opportunity to grow, and have access to information, resources, and support in the workplace; Kanter, 1977), and psychological empowerment (an employee's experience of empowerment that motivates through feelings of competence, impact, meaning and self-determination; Spreitzer, 1995) on an individual's ability to cope with workplace stressors.

Coping is an important component of managing workplace stress. Therefore, understanding how individuals cope with workplace stress might provide important insight into

how they perceive uncivil situations. While individuals may cope in a variety of ways when faced with stressors, we propose individuals in an empowered environment are more likely to cope effectively with workplace stressors (i.e., using more positive and less negative strategies) than individuals whose environment is not empowering. As a result, we expect that when faced with subtle stressors such as incivility, empowered individuals will actually perceive fewer instances.

Although incivility is a subtle form of mistreatment, its effects are rather serious. Therefore, understanding what might contribute to individual differences in the perception of workplace incivility is an important step in lessening its effect.

### **Perceptions of Workplace Incivility**

Andersson and Pearson (1999) define incivility as a “... low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent-to-harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect. Uncivil behaviors are characteristically rude and discourteous, and display a lack of regard for others” (p. 457). In the workplace, these behaviours may include giving the silent treatment, interrupting another, engaging in a side conversation during a meeting, giving “dirty looks”, or texting at inappropriate times.

Over 98% of the workforce has experienced uncivil behaviour (Porath & Pearson, 2013). This statistic is concerning as incivility has negative implications for employees and organizations alike (Porath & Pearson, 2012; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008). Incivility can instill feelings of anger, fear, and sadness (Porath & Pearson, 2012), has negative consequences for the target’s mental and physical health (Lim et al., 2008), and can reduce well-being outside of work (Nicholson & Griffin, 2015). These effects also extend beyond the individual to the organization, as incivility can lead to increased employee absenteeism, and reduced

organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and job productivity (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Leskinen, Huerta, & Magley, 2013).

The two defining components of incivility are that the behaviours are low intensity, with ambiguous intent to harm the target. First, incivility is a subtle form of mistreatment, such that victims might not be as cognizant that this uncivil behaviour is indeed workplace mistreatment (Lim et al., 2008). Second, while more obvious forms of workplace mistreatment such as physical aggression, demonstrate a clear goal of harming the target, the intent behind an uncivil behaviour is uncertain. Since incivility is a vague form of mistreatment, this makes it difficult for the victim to identify whether the mistreatment is intentional.

The low intensity and ambiguous intent underlying uncivil behaviours make these behaviours open to interpretation. For instance, in response to a co-worker raising his or her voice in a meeting, some employees might perceive this act as uncivil, assuming there was intent to upset or offend, while other employees might not perceive this behaviour as uncivil, assuming that the co-worker simply needed to get his or her point across clearly. Therefore, it might not be that one individual is subjected to incivility more than another individual, but rather two individuals might be subjected to the same amount of incivility and one might perceive the behaviour as occurring more frequently than another.

While there has been considerable research examining individual differences in the enactment of incivility (e.g., Parkins, Fishbein, & Ritchey, 2006), much less research has examined individual differences of the targets (Sliter, Withrow, & Jex, 2015). Though some research has looked at different characteristics (i.e., gender and race) that might make an individual more or less likely to be victimized (Selective Incivility Theory; Cortina, 2008), few studies have attempted to understand how a target perceives this behaviour (Sliter et al., 2015).

The difference here is important. Selective Incivility Theory, proposed by Cortina (2008), contends that individuals are more likely to fall victim to incivility based on personal characteristics, particularly being a woman or a racial minority. Rather, we are interested in understanding individual perceptions of uncivil behavior. Thus, rather than individuals being targeted based on various characteristics, we argue that the experience of incivility can be based on whether or not an individual perceives a behaviour to be rude.

It is important to mention that incivility can be instigated by various sources in the workplace; for instance, incivility can be instigated by a co-worker or by a supervisor. Of the studies examining incivility, many of them measure incivility by grouping co-worker-instigated incivility and supervisor-instigated incivility together (Schilpzand, De Pater, & Erez, 2016). Grouping these two sources together conceals potentially important information regarding an employee's experience of incivility. Considering the difference in power held by a supervisor compared to a co-worker, it is possible that employees will have different perceptions of incivility depending on whether the incivility is instigated by one source over the other.

The bottom line is that incivility is widespread in organizations. Thus, it is often unavoidable. We believe that individuals who experience less incivility, experience less because they perceive less. This reduced perception comes from a certain skill set that differentiates these individuals from individuals who experience it more frequently. As such, we propose that the perception of incivility starts with empowerment. Particularly, we are interested in determining whether individuals who are empowered will have the skills necessary to perceive incivility less frequently than individuals who are less empowered.

## **Structural and Psychological Empowerment**

A structurally empowered work environment is one where employees have opportunity, and have access to information, resources and support (Kanter, 1977). Opportunity refers to an employee's chance to learn, grow and feel challenged in the workplace; information refers to an employee's access to the knowledge and expertise needed to carry out his or her responsibilities; resources refer to an employee's access to means such as money, material or equipment required for his or her job; and support refers to receiving feedback and encouragement in the workplace. Kanter also explains that there are two types of power that enable the access to each empowerment structure; formal power and informal power. Formal power comes from an employee's actual job, whereas informal power results from an employee's network of personal support.

On the other hand, psychological empowerment is an employee's personal outlook regarding his or her job, relative to the organization (Spreitzer, 2008). Psychological empowerment is thus a motivational construct that includes four cognitions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer, 1995). Meaning is the extent to which an individual intrinsically cares about a task, where the individual's values are compared to the importance of a certain goal. Competence is the level at which an individual believes they encompass the skills required for a particular task. Self-determination is when an individual's behaviours are driven by a sense of autonomy and choice. Finally, impact is the degree to which an individual's behaviour makes a difference. Psychological empowerment is a continuous variable that allows employees to feel more or less empowered.

Although employers can create structures in the organization to promote more empowered environments, employees must actually feel psychologically empowered for the

interventions to be effective (Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian, & Wilk, 2001). Several studies have examined the relationship between structural empowerment and psychological empowerment and found the two to be positively related. Specifically, Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian, and Wilk (2003) examined 600 nurses working in urban tertiary-care hospitals, and showed that nurses' perceptions of structural empowerment had a statistically significant, direct effect on their psychological empowerment.

Though this relationship has been largely explored in the nursing community (See Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian, & Casier, 2000; Laschinger & Finegan, 2005; Manojlovich, 2007), few studies have examined this phenomenon outside of a nursing population. Wagner et al. (2010) have suggested that studying the relationship between structural empowerment and psychological empowerment in a different realm will provide more generalizability. Since there is no reason to expect that the process would operate differently with a general working population, we begin with our first hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1.** Structural empowerment will be positively related to psychological empowerment.

### **Coping Style**

Coping is defined as "...ongoing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (Lazarus, 1993, p. 237). There are three important aspects of this definition. First, coping is a process, such that an individual's thoughts and actions towards a stressful encounter may change throughout the interaction (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986). Second, coping is contextual as it depends on an individual's appraisal of the situation

and the resources they have to handle it. Third, coping is an effort to manage stressors, and may not always be successful.

There are many ways an individual may cope with stressful situations. In particular, research finds that the way an individual chooses to deal with stress can affect the magnitude of the stressful situation (i.e., make the encounter more or less stressful) (Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003). As such, it can impact both short-term functioning and the development of long-term physical and mental health issues.

Lazarus (1999) contends that “An appraisal is an evaluation of the significance of what is happening for our well-being and the well-being of those about whom we care” (p. 658). As has been argued earlier in the thesis, incivility can act as a major stressor (Porath & Pearson, 2012). Perhaps the strategies that individuals use to cope affect an individual’s appraisal of a stressful situation. Specifically, an individual who uses more positive, proactive coping mechanisms may be more equipped to manage stress than those who use more negative, or passive coping mechanisms. Conceivably, those who are more equipped to manage workplace stress may not even perceive low intensity rude behaviour, or may perceive it much less than someone who does not cope effectively.

For this study, we used the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997) to measure individual coping tendencies towards general workplace stress. Compared to other scales (i.e., Ways of Coping Scale; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980) the Brief COPE measures a broader range of coping strategies. The Brief COPE allowed us to measure coping to general workplace stress, examining 14 distinct coping responses.

Carver’s original scale (1997) has been found to be composed of three factors, though different researchers label the factors differently. Snell, Siegert, Hay-Smith, and Surgenor

(2011), for example, called them approach, avoidant and social/help-seeking coping, whereas Welbourne, Eggerth, Hartley, Andrew, and Sanchez (2007) labeled them problem solving/cognitive restructuring, avoidant, and support-seeking coping. Cooper, Katona, and Livingston, (2008) referred to them as problem-focused, dysfunctional, and emotion-focused coping. The first factor represented in these studies encompasses a coping style that is more positive or active, such that an individual does something about the situation they are facing, denoted by titles such as “approach” or “problem solving” coping. An item common to this factor includes, “I’ve been trying to come up with a strategy about what to do.” The second factor represented in these studies encompasses a coping style that is more negative or passive, such that an individual will turn to a negative outlet such as substance abuse, or will avoid the situation completely, denoted by titles such as “avoidant” or “dysfunctional” coping. An item common to this factor includes, “I’ve been giving up the attempt to cope.” Finally, the third factor represented in these studies encompasses a coping style that is emotion based, such that an individual will seek emotional help from other individuals, denoted by titles such as “emotion-focused” or “social support seeking.” An item common to this factor is, “I’ve been trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do.” This third factor was not used in the current study as our concentration is to understand the use of positive and negative coping styles in relation to perceived incivility, and social support coping is not distinctly positive or negative. As such, we have formulated our hypotheses based on these previous studies and tailored our hypotheses, using the first two factors, which we have labeled *approach coping* and *dysfunctional coping*.



## **The Relationship Between Empowerment and Coping**

Empowerment involves increasing personal power and control that is necessary to take action or improve personal situations (Gutierrez, 1994). This sense of power is said to help individuals influence others, and help individuals work with others. Furthermore, an empowered individual is one who is enabled; one who has an increased belief in their own success (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). Such enablement will affect an individual's initiation and persistence, as explained by Bandura (1977):

“The strength of peoples' conviction in their own effectiveness is likely to affect whether they would even try to cope with given situations. ... They get involved in activities and behave assuredly when they judge themselves capable of handling situations that would otherwise be intimidating. ... Efficacy expectations determine how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences” (p. 193-194).

Mishra and Spreitzer (1998) assert that feeling empowered affects the way individuals respond to stressful issues in the organization (such as downsizing) and is positively related to problem-solving coping. Specifically, empowered individuals are better able to act due to having an increased appraisal of their ability to handle organizational stressors.

Thus, when an individual is structurally empowered (i.e., has access to opportunity, information, resources and support in their organization), they will feel more psychologically empowered, increasing their own belief in themselves. We would expect this increase in psychological empowerment from the structures in their work environment to initiate more use of ‘positive’ rather than ‘negative’ coping strategies. Therefore, we propose the following:

**Hypothesis 2a.** Structural empowerment will be positively related to the use of approach coping strategies via psychological empowerment such that individuals who are more empowered will use a higher degree of approach coping strategies.

**Hypothesis 2b.** Structural empowerment will be negatively related to the use of dysfunctional coping strategies via psychological empowerment such that individuals who are more empowered will use a lesser degree of dysfunctional coping strategies.

### **The Relationship Between Coping and Experienced Incivility**

Stressful life events are personal experiences that challenge an individual's ability to respond successfully (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In the workplace, employees often face many stressors. These might include infrequent but drastic stressors such as being demoted, or consistent, mild stressors such as working in uncivil conditions.

When faced with general workplace stress, individuals might resort to mechanisms that are proactive, dealing with the stressor in a positive manner (i.e., approach coping), or mechanisms that are passive, and avoid dealing with the stressor, or deal with it in an ineffective way (i.e., dysfunctional coping). As such, we propose that the way individuals cope when faced with workplace stressors will influence their perceptions of the frequency of uncivil behaviour.

Sliter et al. (2015) found that emotional stability is negatively related to perceptions of incivility. Emotional stability refers to individuals who are level headed and respond with appropriate emotional reactions. In a similar vein, individuals who use more positive coping strategies such as approach coping strategies, are using coping methods that are proactive, planned, and controlled. Similar to someone who is high on emotional stability, we propose the following:

**Hypothesis 3a.** The use of approach coping strategies will lead to a decrease in perceived incivility.

Coping is an important tool for managing workplace stress. However, not all strategies are effective in managing stress, and may incur even more stress. As mentioned, individuals who use more dysfunctional coping strategies tend to deal with adverse situations passively. Griffith, Steptoe, and Cropley (1999) note that some forms of coping, such as behavioural and mental disengagement, have been associated with increased perceived stress. As such, if individuals who tend to disengage and do not deal with adverse situations experience more stress, we would expect that they would also perceive more incivility. This leads to the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3b.** The use of dysfunctional coping strategies will lead to an increase in perceived incivility.

### **The Relationship Between Empowerment, Coping and Experienced Incivility**

It is important to understand how each variable influences the other; specifically, how the effect of structural empowerment affects the outcome variables. Consistent with Hypothesis 2a and 3a, we would expect the combination of structural and psychological empowerment to increase the use of approach coping strategies towards general workplace stress. In turn, we would expect this higher tendency to use approach coping strategies to reduce the frequency an individual perceives incivility. Specifically, we propose the following:

**Hypothesis 4a.** Psychological empowerment and the use of approach coping strategies will serially mediate the relationship between structural empowerment and perceived workplace incivility, such that structural empowerment will increase psychological empowerment, which in turn will increase the use of approach coping strategies, and in turn, will reduce perceptions of

workplace incivility. We expect this to happen regardless of whether the incivility has been instigated by the co-worker (Figure 1) or by the supervisor (Figure 2).

As in Hypothesis 2b, we speculate that the combination of structural and psychological empowerment will act to decrease the use of dysfunctional coping strategies. Compared to Hypothesis 3b, which proposes that the use of dysfunctional coping strategies will lead to an increase in perceived incivility, we would expect that someone who is empowered will be less likely to use dysfunctional coping mechanisms, and in turn, this reduction of dysfunctional coping strategies will lead to a decrease in perceptions of incivility regardless of whether the incivility has been initiated by a co-worker (Figure 3) or their supervisor (Figure 4). As such, we propose the following:

**Hypothesis 4b.** The negative relationship between psychological empowerment and dysfunctional coping strategies will serially mediate the relationship between structural empowerment and perceived workplace incivility, such that structural empowerment will increase psychological empowerment, which will lead to a decrease in the use of dysfunctional coping strategies, and in turn, will reduce perceptions of workplace incivility.

## Methods

### Sample

A total of 364 participants were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (Mturk). This service connects researchers in need of samples with individuals willing to complete surveys for compensation. Of the 364 participants, 174 (47.8%) were male and 186 (51.1%) were female. (Four participants did not report an identified gender). Participants were on average 37 years old. They reported working at their present job for an average of 5.8 years, and in their present organization for an average of 6.4 years. Participants were collected from a broad range

of industries including those in health care, customer service, administration, information technology, finance, sales, law, and hospitality.

## **Procedures**

Participants were administered a number of validated scales through Mturk. To be in the study, participants had to be at least 21 years old, be a resident of Canada or the United States, be employed in a full-time job (outside of Mturk), and report to a supervisor/manager. Participants gained access to the study by logging into their Mturk account. They read a short description of the study (See Appendix A), and if interested, could self-select into the study by clicking on the study link.

First, participants were presented with a letter of information (See Appendix B), and if consent was given, participants would then proceed to the survey where they completed the structural empowerment scale, the psychological empowerment scale, the general coping scale, and the workplace incivility scale, (See Appendices C-F). Next, participants were asked to complete a demographics form (See Appendix G), a purposeful responding measure, including an optional comment box to provide any outstanding feedback or comments about their responses or about the study (See Appendix H), and finally, participants were directed to a debriefing page (See Appendix I). To compensate participants for their time, they each received \$1.00 USD upon study completion. Ethics approval for this study was obtained through the Research Ethics Board at the University of Western Ontario (REB; See Appendix J).

## **Measures**

**Structural Empowerment.** Structural empowerment was measured using Laschinger et al.'s (2001) 21-item Conditions of Work Effectiveness Questionnaire – II (See Appendix C). Respondents were asked to rate their access to opportunity, resources, and support on a five-

point Likert-type scale from 1 (None) to 5 (A Lot), access to information on a five-point Likert-type scale from 1 (No Knowledge) to 5 (Know A Lot), and opportunity for formal power and informal power on a five-point Likert-type scale from 1 (None) to 5 (A Lot).

Access to opportunity was measured by asking participants “How much of each kind of opportunity do you have in your present job?” and a sample item is, “The chance to gain new skills and knowledge on the job.” Access to resources was measured by asking participants “How much access to resources do you have in your current job?” and a sample item is, “Time available to accomplish job requirements.” Access to support was measured by asking participants “How much support do you have in your present job?” and a sample item is, “Specific comments about things you could improve.” Access to information was measured by asking participants “How much access to information do you have in your present job?” and a sample item is, “The values of top management.” Formal power was measured by asking participants “In my work setting/job:” and a sample item is, “The amount of flexibility in my job is...” Informal power was measured by asking participants “How much opportunity do you have for these activities in your present job?” and a sample item is, “Being sought out by peers for help with problems.”

This scale was originally created to measure nurses' perceptions of their access to the four work empowerment structures. Since our sample was not nurses, this scale was slightly modified to accommodate general employee perceptions. For example, the item “The current state of the hospital” has been changed to “The current state of the workplace.” The revised scale had a Cronbach alpha value of  $\alpha = .95$ .

**Psychological Empowerment.** Psychological empowerment was measured using Spreitzer's (1995) 12-item Psychological Empowerment Scale (See Appendix D). This scale

measures competence, meaning, impact, and self-determination on a seven-point Likert-type scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). A sample item measuring competence is, “I am confident about my ability to do my job.” A sample item measuring meaning is, “The work I do is very important to me.” A sample item measuring impact is, “My impact on what happens in my department is large.” Finally, a sample item measuring self-determination is, “I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job.” We found a Cronbach alpha value of  $\alpha = .92$  for this scale.

**Coping.** Coping style was measured using Carver’s (1997) Brief COPE scale (See Appendix E), which is a shortened version of the COPE inventory (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). Carver’s 28-item scale is intended to foster a wider examination of coping in naturally occurring settings. In the current study, participants were asked to rate on a four-point Likert-type scale 1 (I haven’t been doing this at all) to 4 (I’ve been doing this a lot), the degree to which they generally use each coping strategy to deal with workplace stress. A sample item from this scale is, “I concentrate my efforts on doing something about the situation I’m in”. We found a Cronbach alpha value of  $\alpha = .92$  for the full scale, a Cronbach alpha value of  $\alpha = .90$  for the six-item approach coping subscale, and a Cronbach alpha value of  $\alpha = .88$  for the 10-item dysfunctional coping subscale.

**Perceptions of Incivility.** Perceived incivility was measured using Cortina et al.’s (2013) 12-item Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS) (See Appendix F). This scale is an adapted version of the Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS; Cortina et al., 2001) that includes new items to evaluate the construct more completely. The original scale asked people to think about their experiences in the past five years. In the revised version, the time frame is one year. Reducing the time frame allows for more accuracy when recalling instances of incivility. This scale asks respondents

“During the past year, were you ever in a situation which any of your supervisors/ co-workers...”

A sample item is, “made insulting or disrespecting remarks about you.” The participants were asked to rate these items on a five-point Likert-type scale from 0 (Never) to 4 (Many times).

As mentioned, it is possible that employees might experience incivility from a co-worker differently than they would from a supervisor. Therefore, the questionnaire was completed twice; the first time using ‘co-worker’ as the point of reference and the second time using ‘supervisor’ as the point of reference. We found a Cronbach alpha value of  $\alpha = .96$  for both co-worker-instigated incivility as well as supervisor-instigated incivility.

**Demographics.** Demographic information was collected (See Appendix G). This form included a section on employment information (i.e., job title, years at the organization, and time in current position), and a section on biographical information (i.e., age, sex, and level of education).

**Purposeful Responding Measure.** Participants were asked to respond on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree) to the statement “I took this survey seriously and believe my responses should be included in the data analysis” (See Appendix H). Participants were made aware that they would be compensated regardless of how they answered.

**Instructional Manipulation Check.** To ensure respondents were reading the items carefully, three instructional manipulation checks were included. This technique was developed by Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko (2009). While these questions resemble the length and style of the actual survey questions, they ask participants to give a particular answer. For example, “For data analysis purposes, answer strongly agree for this item.” Participants who answered this incorrectly presumably were not paying close attention to the questions. If



respondents answered at least two of these statements incorrectly, they were eliminated from the data analysis.

### **Data Cleaning Information**

The original sample consisted of 447 participants, 84 of which were removed, resulting in a final sample of 364 participants. Of the 84 participants removed, 30 participants were removed for failing to complete at least 60% of the survey, nine indicated they did not have co-workers, two indicated they had no supervisor, nine did not believe their data should be used in the study, 25 answered at least two of the instructional manipulation checks incorrectly and eight resided in a country other than Canada or the United States.

### **Data Analysis**

All data was analyzed using IBM's Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS), version 25 (SPSS, Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). To test Hypothesis 1, we conducted a regression analysis regressing psychological empowerment onto structural empowerment. To test Hypotheses 2a and 2b, we conducted mediation analyses using Model 4 in SPSS's PROCESS (Hayes, 2016). To test Hypotheses 3a and 3b, we conducted regression analyses where both perceived supervisor incivility and perceived co-worker incivility were independently regressed onto approach coping and dysfunctional coping. Finally, to test Hypotheses 4a and 4b, we conducted multiple serial mediations using Model 6 in SPSS's PROCESS (Hayes, 2016).

## **Results**

Means, standard deviations, correlations and internal consistency reliability coefficients ( $\alpha$ ) for the study variables can be found in Table 1. As seen on the diagonal, each internal consistency is above .80, which is regarded as within an acceptable range (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Additionally, for structural empowerment, psychological empowerment,

general coping, and approach coping, participants scored above the respective scale midpoints, whereas for dysfunctional coping, perceived co-worker incivility and perceived supervisor incivility, participants scored below the respective scale midpoints.

For exploratory purposes, we conducted a one-way ANOVA to examine any differences in the perception of incivility dependent on whether the incivility was instigated by co-workers versus supervisors. We found that employees perceived significantly more incivility when it was instigated by a co-worker ( $M = 1.72, SD = .87$ ), than when it was instigated by a supervisor ( $M = 1.58, SD = .83$ ),  $F(64, 299) = 23.28, p < .001$ .

Further, we conducted an independent samples t-test to examine any gender differences in the perception of incivility instigated by either co-workers or supervisors. As such we compared the means for perceived co-worker incivility between males ( $M = 1.80, SD = .91$ ) and females ( $M = 1.62, SD = .80$ ), and found no significant difference,  $t(356) = 1.91, p = .06$ . However, when comparing the means for perceived supervisor incivility, between males ( $M = 1.67, SD = .89$ ) and females ( $M = 1.45, SD = .76$ ), we did find a significant difference,  $t(356) = 2.19, p < .05$ , such that men perceived significantly more incivility from their supervisors than did women.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations and Scale Reliabilities

			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>								
1. Gender	1.520	.511	-							
2. Struct Emp.	3.676	.717	-.097	.944						
3. Psyc Emp.	5.287	1.178	-.043	.793**	.922					
4. Coping	2.343	.541	-.057	.251**	.172**	.916				
5. App Coping	2.835	.770	-.091	.357**	.362**	.667**	.902			
6. Dys Coping	1.848	.718	-.119*	.029	-.076	.754**	.164**	.881		
7. Incivility (C)	1.717	.867	.060	-.152**	-.232**	.455**	.071	.595**	.957	

8. Incivility (S)    1.578   .832    -.159\*\*   -.184\*\*   -.258\*\*   .393\*\*   .046    .539\*\*   .837\*\*   .956

*Note.* Numbers on diagonals represent internal consistency estimates (i.e., Cronbach’s alpha) for each scale.

*Note.*  $N = 364$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$

### **Factor Analysis of Coping**

The Brief COPE encompasses 14 coping subscales; active, planning, acceptance, reframing, emotional support, instrumental support, behavioural disengagement, denial, self-blame, venting, humour, religion and substance abuse. We examined the factor structure of the Brief COPE using principle components factor analysis with varimax rotation (See Table 2).

Previous studies examining various populations have extracted both two- and three-factor solutions from the Brief COPE scale (i.e., Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005; Cooper et al., 2008; Snell et al., 2011; Welbourne et al., 2007). Our factor analysis revealed three meaningful factors; dysfunctional coping, approach coping and social support coping. As previously mentioned, we used only the first two factors; dysfunctional coping and approach coping, as these two factors were most applicable to our desired hypotheses. Factor one encompasses “Dysfunctional Coping” strategies and includes items from denial, venting, behavioural disengagement, substance abuse, and self-blame subscales. This factor includes strategies that are passive in the sense that they do not actively participate in any behaviours aimed at resolving or helping to better the adverse situation. Rather, these types of coping behaviours avoid the situation completely, or deal with it in an inappropriate manner. Factor two encompasses “Approach Coping” strategies and includes items from active, planning, and positive reframing subscales. These strategies are proactive and attempt to either take action to do something about the situation, or attempt to turn a negative situation into something more positive or more

manageable. The acceptance, humour, self-distraction, and religion scales were not used to create the scales for the current study, as they had factor loadings less than .40.

Table 2. *Factor Structure for the Brief Cope for the Current Sample.*

Brief Cope Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Cronbach $\alpha$	.881	.887	.902
Initial eigenvalue	8.697	4.514	1.721
% variance explained	31.062	16.122	6.148
<i>Active</i>			
I've been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I'm in.	.136	<b>.808</b>	.177
I've been taking action to try to make the situation better.	.011	<b>.809</b>	.116
<i>Planning</i>			
I've been trying to come up with a strategy about what to do.	.105	<b>.808</b>	.196
I've been thinking hard about what steps to take.	.072	<b>.795</b>	.178
<i>Positive Reframing</i>			
I've been trying to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive.	-.045	<b>.729</b>	.193
I've been looking for something good in what is happening.	-.031	<b>.731</b>	.171
<i>Emotional Support</i>			
I've been getting emotional support from others.	.145	.204	<b>.721</b>
I've been getting comfort and understanding from someone.	.066	.231	<b>.737</b>
<i>Instrumental Support</i>			
I've been trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do.	.149	.399	<b>.777</b>
I've been getting help and advice from other people.	.168	.388	<b>.762</b>
<i>Denial</i>			
I've been saying to myself "this isn't real."	<b>.718</b>	.086	.109
I've been refusing to believe that it has happened.	<b>.734</b>	.056	.168
<i>Venting</i>			

I've been saying things to let my unpleasant feelings escape.	<b>.566</b>	.040	.341
I've been expressing my negative feelings.	<b>.470</b>	-.029	.283
<i>Substance Abuse</i>			
I've been using alcohol or other drugs to make myself feel better	<b>.809</b>	.052	-.013
I've been using alcohol or other drugs to help me get through it	<b>.803</b>	.040	.000
<i>Behavioural Disengagement</i>			
I've been giving up trying to deal with it.	<b>.742</b>	.004	.114
I've been giving up the attempt to cope.	<b>.762</b>	.030	.186
<i>Self-Blame</i>			
I've been criticizing myself.	<b>.749</b>	-.005	-.017
I've been blaming myself for things that happened.	<b>.783</b>	.057	-.002

### Test of Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 proposed that structural empowerment will be positively related to psychological empowerment. To test this hypothesis, we conducted a regression analysis where psychological empowerment was regressed on structural empowerment. The regression analysis showed that structural empowerment is a significant predictor of psychological empowerment,  $\text{Adjusted } R^2 = .63, F(1, 362) = 316.54, b = 1.30, p = < .001$ . Hypothesis 1 was therefore supported.

### Test of Hypothesis 2a and 2b

Hypothesis 2a stated that structural empowerment will be positively related to the use of approach coping strategies via psychological empowerment, such that individuals who are more empowered will use approach coping strategies more often. To test this hypothesis, we used Model 4 in SPSS's PROCESS (Hayes, 2016). This mediated effect was evaluated using bootstrap-based confidence intervals (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) using 5000 resamples of the data.

We found a total effect of structural empowerment on approach coping,  $b = .38$ ,  $t(362) = 7.27$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $CI = [.2797, .4871]$ . This relationship became attenuated after accounting for psychological empowerment,  $b = .20$ ,  $t(361) = 2.37$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $95\% CI = [.0343, .3719]$ . The indirect effect of structural empowerment on the use of approach coping strategies through psychological empowerment was .18 and was significant,  $95\% CI = [.0451, .3212]$ . Being structurally empowered is therefore associated with a .18-unit increase in the use of approach coping strategies, through the mediation of psychological empowerment, providing support for Hypothesis 2a.

Hypothesis 2b stated that structural empowerment will be negatively related to the use of dysfunctional coping strategies via psychological empowerment such that individuals who are more empowered will use dysfunctional coping strategies less often. To test this hypothesis, we used Model 4 in SPSS's PROCESS (Hayes, 2016). This mediated effect was also evaluated using bootstrap-based confidence intervals (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) using 5000 resamples of the data. We found no significant relationship between structural empowerment and dysfunctional coping (i.e., the c-path)  $b = .02$ ,  $t(362) = .56$ ,  $p = .58$ ,  $CI = [-.0740, .1330]$ . However, as per Hayes (2009), we moved on to examine the indirect effects. The indirect effect of structural empowerment on the use of dysfunctional coping strategies, through psychological empowerment was  $-.20$ , and significant,  $95\% CI [-.3108, -.0916]$ . Being structurally empowered is therefore associated with a .20-unit decrease in the use of dysfunctional coping strategies, through the mediation of psychological empowerment, providing support for Hypothesis 2b.

### **Test of Hypothesis 3a and 3b**

As previously mentioned, the WIS was measured in reference to both supervisor incivility and co-worker incivility. Hypothesis 3a stated that the use of approach coping

strategies will lead to a decrease in perceived incivility. To test this hypothesis, we conducted two separate regression analyses where perceived supervisor incivility and perceived co-worker incivility were independently regressed onto approach coping. The regression analyses showed that approach coping is not a significant predictor of perceived co-worker incivility, Adjusted  $R^2 = .00$ ,  $F(1, 362) = 1.83$ ,  $b = .06$ ,  $p = .18$ ; nor is it a significant predictor of perceived supervisor incivility Adjusted  $R^2 = -.00$ ,  $F(1, 362) = .770$ ,  $b = .04$ ,  $p = .38$ .

Hypothesis 3b stated that the use of dysfunctional coping strategies will lead to an increase in perceived incivility. To test this hypothesis, we conducted another regression analysis where both perceived supervisor incivility and perceived co-worker incivility were independently regressed onto dysfunctional coping. The regression analysis showed that dysfunctional coping is a significant predictor of perceived co-worker incivility, Adjusted  $R^2 = .38$ ,  $F(1, 362) = 222.06$ ,  $b = .51$ ,  $p < .001$ ; as well as a significant predictor of perceived supervisor incivility Adjusted  $R^2 = .29$ ,  $F(1, 362) = 151.97$ ,  $b = .47$ ,  $p < .001$ .

#### **Test of Hypothesis 4a**

The focus of this paper has been to determine the mechanisms that act to influence perceptions of incivility. Thus far, we have examined the various links that play a role in our final model. These next hypotheses tested the serial mediation of psychological empowerment and approach coping strategies and psychological empowerment and dysfunctional coping strategies as serial mediators between structural empowerment and perceived co-worker and perceived supervisor-instigated incivility.

Hypothesis 4a stated that psychological empowerment and the use of approach coping strategies will play a serial mediating role in the relationship between structural empowerment and perceived workplace incivility, such that structural empowerment will increase

psychological empowerment, which in turn will increase the use of approach coping strategies, and in turn, will reduce perceptions of workplace incivility. To test this multiple serial mediation hypothesis, we used Model 6 in SPSS's PROCESS (Hayes, 2016). This mediated effect was evaluated using bootstrap-based confidence intervals (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) using 5000 resamples of the data.

**Co-worker- instigated incivility.** We found a total effect of structural empowerment on perceived co-worker incivility,  $b = -.18, p < .01, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.3068, -.0597]$ . When including psychological empowerment and approach coping into the model as mediators, the total effect of structural empowerment on perceived co-worker incivility became non-significant,  $b = .07, p = .519, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.1334, .2637]$ . The indirect effect of structural empowerment on perceived co-worker incivility, mediated through psychological empowerment and approach coping was significant with an effect of  $.04, \text{ CI } [.0075, .0716]$ . Structural empowerment lead to an increase in psychological empowerment which in turn lead to an increased use of approach coping strategies. However, contrary to our predictions, the increased use of approach coping strategies lead to an increase in perceived co-worker incivility (though a small effect), rather than a decrease. Results can be found in Figure 1 and Table 3.

**Supervisor-instigated incivility.** We also found a total effect of structural empowerment on perceived supervisor incivility,  $b = -.21, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.3313, -.0956]$ . When including psychological empowerment and approach coping into the model as mediators, the total effect of structural empowerment on perceived supervisor incivility became non-significant,  $b = .03, p = .765, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.1610, .2187]$ . The indirect effect of structural empowerment on perceived supervisor incivility, mediated through psychological empowerment and approach coping was significant with an effect of  $.03, \text{ CI } [.0055, .0666]$ . Results can be found in Figure 2 and Table 4.



As with co-worker-instigated incivility, we found that the increased use of approach coping strategies lead to an increase in perceived supervisor incivility, which was contrary to our predictions.

### **Test of Hypothesis 4b**

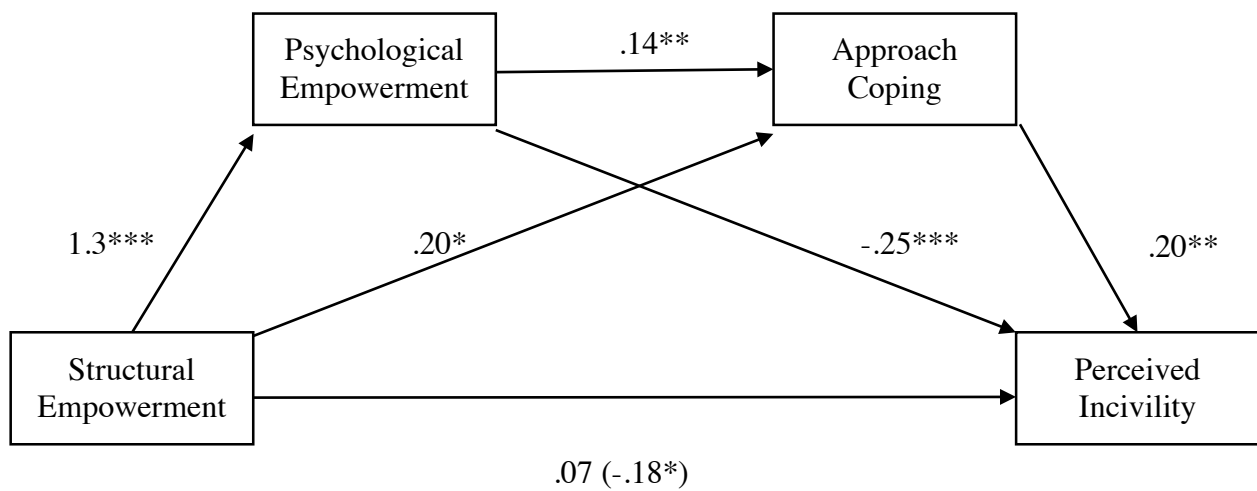
Hypothesis 4b stated that psychological empowerment and the reduction of dysfunctional coping strategies will play a serial mediating role in the relationship between structural empowerment and perceived workplace incivility, such that structural empowerment will increase psychological empowerment, which will decrease the use of dysfunctional coping strategies, and in turn, will reduce perceptions of workplace incivility. We used Model 6 in SPSS's PROCESS (Hayes, 2016). This mediated effect was also evaluated using bootstrap-based confidence intervals (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) using 5000 resamples of the data.

**Co-worker-instigated incivility.** We found a total effect of structural empowerment on perceived co-worker incivility,  $b = -.18, p < .01, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.3068, -.0597]$ . When including psychological empowerment and dysfunctional coping into the model as mediators, the total effect of structural empowerment on perceived co-worker incivility became non-significant,  $b = -.06, p = .455, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.2190, .0982]$ . The indirect effect of structural empowerment on perceived co-worker incivility, mediated through psychological empowerment and dysfunctional coping was significant with an effect of  $-.15, \text{ CI } [-.2370, -.0623]$ . As such, these results are in line with Hypothesis 4b. Results can be found in Figure 3 and Table 5.

**Supervisor-instigated incivility.** We also found a total effect of structural empowerment on perceived supervisor incivility,  $b = -.21, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.3313, -.0956]$ . When including psychological empowerment and dysfunctional coping into the model as mediators, the total effect of structural empowerment on perceived supervisor incivility became non-significant,  $b =$

-.08,  $p = .357$ , 95% CI [-.2369, .0856]. The indirect effect of structural empowerment on perceived supervisor incivility, mediated through psychological empowerment and dysfunctional coping was significant with an effect of -.12, CI [-.2014, -.0518]. These results are also in line with Hypothesis 4b. Results can be found in Figure 4 and Table 6.

Figure 1. Hypothesized model, using psychological empowerment and approach coping in a serial mediation between structural empowerment and perceived co-worker incivility.

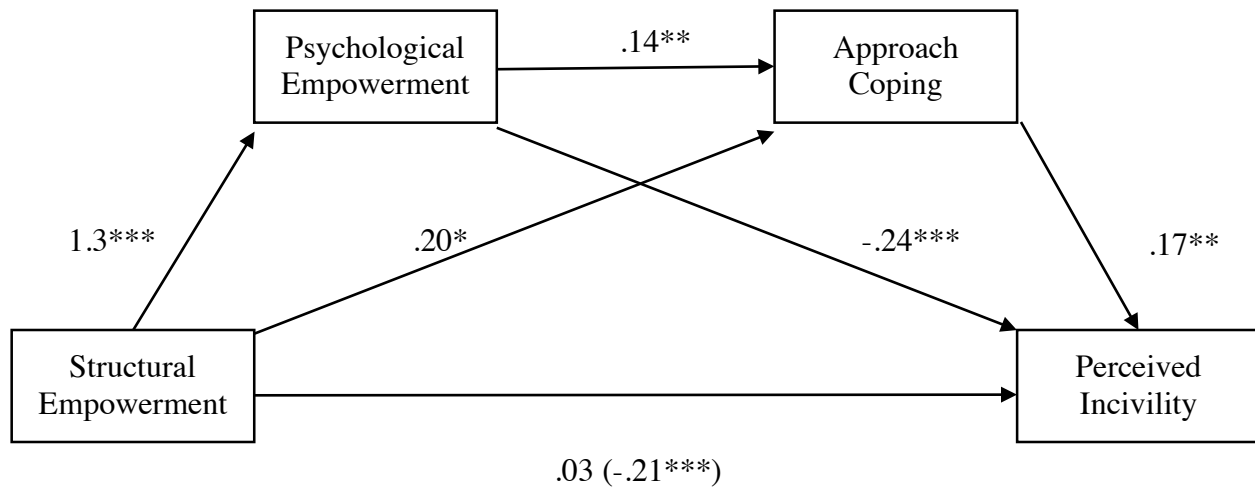


Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 3. Comparison of the Indirect Effects of Structural Empowerment on Perceived Co-worker Incivility Through Psychological Empowerment and Approach Coping

Effects	Estimate	SE	Bootstrapping 95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower	Upper
Total Indirect Effects	-.2484	.0864	-.4271	-.0877
SE → PE → Incivility (Co-W)	-.3233	.0887	-.5026	-.1575
SE → Approach → Incivility (Co-W)	.0397	.0197	.0053	.0836
<b>SE → PE → Approach → Incivility</b>	<b>.0352</b>	<b>.0166</b>	<b>.0075</b>	<b>.0716</b>

Figure 2. Hypothesized model, using psychological empowerment and approach coping in a serial mediation between structural empowerment and perceived supervisor incivility.

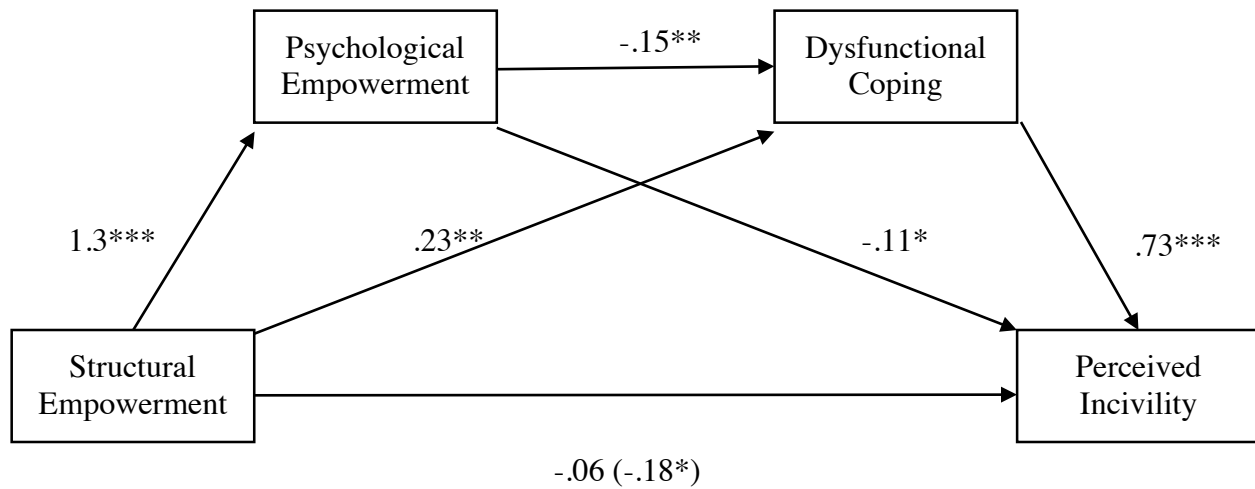


Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 4. Comparison of the Indirect Effects of Structural Empowerment on Perceived Supervisor Incivility Through Psychological Empowerment and Approach Coping

Effects	Estimate	SE	Bootstrapping 95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower	Upper
Total Indirect Effects	-.2423	.0824	-.4098	-.0883
SE → PE → Incivility (Supervisor)	-.3078	.0866	-.4844	-.1473
SE → Approach → Incivility (Supervisor)	.0347	.0183	.0037	.0747
<b>SE → PE → Approach → Incivility</b>	<b>.0308</b>	<b>.0159</b>	<b>.0055</b>	<b>.0666</b>

Figure 3. Hypothesized model, using psychological empowerment and dysfunctional coping in a serial mediation between structural empowerment and perceived co-worker incivility.

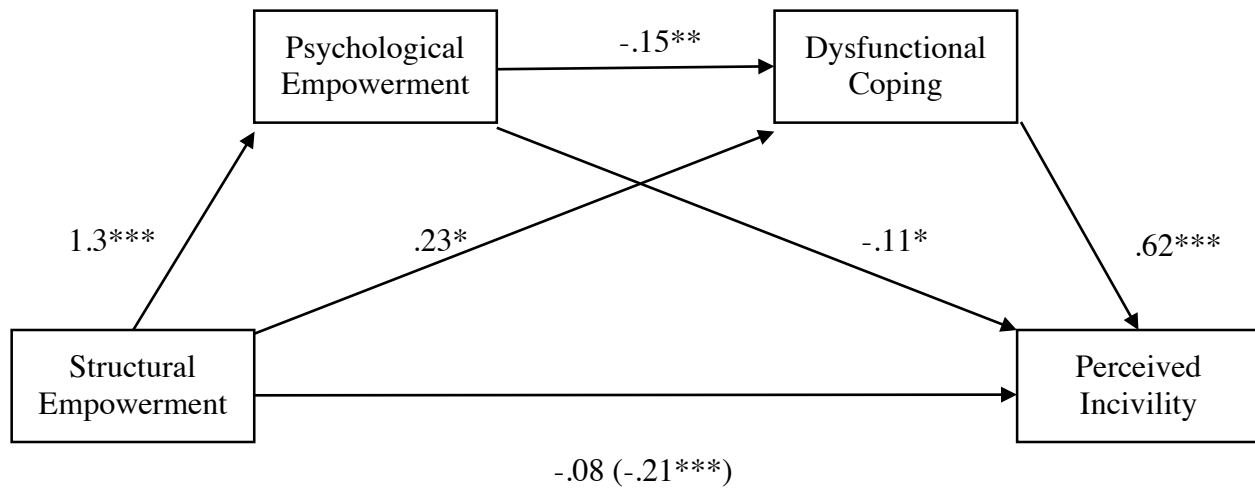


Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 5. Comparison of the Indirect Effects of Structural Empowerment on Perceived Co-worker Incivility Through Psychological Empowerment and Dysfunctional Coping

Effects	Estimate	SE	Bootstrapping 95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower	Upper
Total Indirect Effects	-.1229	.0863	-.3016	.0382
SE → PE → Incivility (Co-W)	-.1419	.0827	-.3161	.0095
SE → Dysfunctional → Incivility (Co-W)	.1652	.0583	.0512	.2838
<b>SE → PE → Dysfunctional → Incivility</b>	<b>-.1462</b>	<b>.0442</b>	<b>-.2370</b>	<b>-.0623</b>

Figure 4. Hypothesized model, using psychological empowerment and dysfunctional coping in a serial mediation between structural empowerment and perceived supervisor incivility.



Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 6. Comparison of the Indirect Effects of Structural Empowerment on Perceived Supervisor Incivility Through Psychological Empowerment and Dysfunctional Coping

Effects	Estimate	SE	Bootstrapping 95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower	Upper
Total Indirect Effects	-.1378	.0869	-.3186	.0240
SE → PE → Incivility (Supervisor)	-.1538	.0846	-.3304	.0023
SE → Dysfunctional → Incivility (Supervisor)	.1392	.0493	.0453	.2384
<b>SE → PE → Dysfunctional → Incivility</b>	<b>-.1232</b>	<b>.0379</b>	<b>-.2014</b>	<b>.0518</b>

## Discussion

The goal of this study was to better understand individual perceptions of incivility. Specifically, since incivility is a low intensity behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm, this type of behaviour can be perceived more or less frequently in the workplace. While incivility is

experienced frequently in many organizations, and has negative implications for both employees and organizations, we sought to understand how to reduce employee perceptions of this behaviour. To do so we examined the effects of structural empowerment on employees' feeling of psychological empowerment, and how this feeling affected employees' ability to cope with workplace stress (i.e., coping in a productive manner, or in a dysfunctional manner). We thought that understanding how an individual tends to cope with workplace stressors might provide important insight into how much incivility they perceive.

We proposed that structural empowerment would be positively related to psychological empowerment (Hypothesis 1), and that psychological empowerment would positively mediate the relationship between structural empowerment and approach coping (Hypothesis 2a) and would negatively mediate the relationship between structural empowerment and dysfunctional coping (Hypothesis 2b). Further, we proposed that approach coping would have a negative relationship with perceived incivility (Hypothesis 3a), while dysfunctional coping would have a positive relationship with perceived incivility (Hypothesis 3b). (Incivility was measured either with respect to incivility initiated by a supervisor or a co-worker.) Finally, we hypothesized two serial mediation models. First, we hypothesized a serial mediation model whereby structural empowerment would increase psychological empowerment, which in turn would increase the use of approach coping strategies, and in turn, reduce perceptions of workplace incivility, for both co-worker- and supervisor-instigated incivility (Hypothesis 4a); and a second serial mediation model whereby structural empowerment would increase psychological empowerment, which in turn would decrease the use of dysfunctional coping strategies, and in turn, reduce perceptions of workplace incivility, for both co-worker- and supervisor-instigated incivility (Hypothesis 4b).

## **Summary of Findings**

The analyses showed that employees who perceived their work environment to be structurally empowered, had higher feelings of psychological empowerment. These findings fully support for Hypothesis 1. Specifically, those who believed they had more access to opportunities, resources, information, and support in the workplace felt more competence, impact, meaning and self-determination in their job. This finding is consistent with previous literature in the nursing community (Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian, & Casier, 2000; Laschinger & Finegan, 2005; Manojlovich, 2007), and provides some evidence for generalizability to a broader range of jobs.

Further, the analyses showed that structural empowerment increases psychological empowerment, and that this relationship increases the use of approach coping strategies and reduces the use of dysfunctional coping strategies. These findings support both Hypothesis 2a and 2b. Therefore, when an employee believes their organization has provided the necessary empowerment structures, they will feel more psychologically empowered, and therefore use more effective (i.e., approach) strategies rather than dysfunctional coping strategies when faced with workplace stressors.

Next, when analyzing the relationship between coping strategies and perceived incivility, we found mixed support for our hypotheses. Contrary to our hypothesis, the relationship between the use of approach coping strategies and perceived incivility was non-significant. However, the use of dysfunctional coping strategies was associated with an increase in the perception of incivility as expected. In other words, we did not find support for Hypothesis 3a, but we did find support for Hypothesis 3b.

In the next stage, we included the use of coping strategies and perceptions of incivility in our model. As expected, the serial mediation revealed that structural empowerment lead to an increase in psychological empowerment, which in turn increased the use of approach coping strategies. Unexpectedly, the use of approach coping strategies lead to an increase in the perception of incivility. We had originally predicted that the use of approach coping strategies would reduce the perception of incivility, since someone who copes effectively would be better equipped when faced with incivility. However, the results suggested the opposite.

Although contrary to what was proposed, there may be some explanation for this finding. Specifically, Sliter et al. (2015) found that conscientiousness was positively related to the perception of incivility (although it was a small effect). Someone who is conscientious is typically persistent, planful, careful, responsible and hardworking (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Therefore, similar to conscientiousness, someone who uses approach coping strategies is being active, such that they are “taking action to try to make the situation better”; and they are planful, such that they are “thinking hard about what steps to take”. Therefore, these more ‘active’ or ‘planful’ coping mechanisms, although positive, might actually make an individual more aware or conscious of their surroundings, increasing their perception of incivility.

The analyses also showed that structural empowerment lead to an increase in psychological empowerment, which in turn reduced the use of dysfunctional coping strategies, and thus reduced perceptions of incivility. We therefore found support for Hypothesis 4b. So, while the use of dysfunctional coping leads to more perceived incivility (Hypothesis 3b), when an individual is structurally and psychological empowered they use less dysfunctional coping strategies which leads to less perceived incivility. This hypothesis reveals the importance of



empowerment in the workplace as it has the capacity to reduce the use of negative coping strategies to manage general workplace stress, and in turn reduces perceptions of incivility.

### **Additional Analyses**

Since incivility can be instigated from different sources, we investigated the difference between co-worker- and supervisor- instigated incivility. There is reason to believe that employees might perceive more incivility when instigated by a supervisor, as a supervisor holds more power than a co-worker. As such, employees might pay more attention to their supervisor's behaviours, as their supervisor dictates critical organizational decisions such as promotions and pay (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010).

Nevertheless, when comparing supervisor- and co-worker- instigated incivility, we found a significant difference, such that employees perceived more incivility when it was instigated by a fellow co-worker than when it was instigated by their supervisor. This finding is in-line with other research examining both co-worker- and supervisor-instigated incivility (Smith, Andrusyszyn, & Spence Laschinger, 2010; Spence Laschinger, Leiter, Day, & Gilin, 2009).

One possible explanation for this finding is that perhaps, there is more opportunity for individuals to perceive co-worker incivility than supervisor incivility, as co-worker-co-worker interaction is likely more frequent than co-worker-supervisor interaction. Another explanation for why employees might perceive more incivility from co-workers is because co-workers hold more social power than supervisors. Although supervisors have the power to make organizational decisions, social power may be ranked as more important to an employee, as individuals fear social exclusion (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010). Therefore, employees may be more sensitive to co-worker incivility, because they care about where they rank in the social group. In general, it appears that the source of incivility does matter. However, it is unclear

whether the higher frequency of perceived co-worker incivility is due to having more interaction with fellow co-workers than supervisors, or because it is of greater significance to an employee.

Much research on gender differences has found that women report experiencing more incivility than men (Cortina et al., 2013; Cortina et al., 2002; Settles & O'Connor, 2014; Zurbrugg & Miner, 2016). We found that when the incivility is instigated by a co-worker, there was no significant difference between men and women. However, when the incivility was instigated by a supervisor, we found that men perceived incivility significantly more than women. As such, our findings contradict what other research has found. A possible explanation for this is that the other studies did not separate co-worker-instigated incivility from supervisor-instigated incivility, and were therefore unable to distinguish this difference.

It is possible that men perceive more incivility from their supervisor because they are more intimidated by the power distance. As such, they might be more sensitive to rude behaviours when coming from a source of power than are women. As we did not collect data on the gender of the instigator, we do not know whether this finding changes depending on the gender of the supervisor. Perhaps this finding is stronger when the superior is also male, as this combination might foster feelings of competition; or maybe it is stronger when the supervisor is female, as the male employee may feel inferior to a woman power figure. As such, future studies should explore more gender combinations including collecting data on the gender of the instigator, be it a co-worker or a supervisor.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Our study is not without limitations. The first limitation is the reference period for the Workplace Incivility Scale (Cortina et al., 2013). The scale that we used asked participants to recall instances of incivility during the past year. While there have been different opinions about

the appropriate length of time that is needed to best remember instances of incivility (immediately after the interaction to up to five years later) (Schilpzand et al., 2016), there is reason to believe that one year might be too long to accurately recall instances of incivility. Schaeffer and Presser (2003) suggest that the reference period for frequent behaviours should be shorter than infrequent behaviours so that participants can accurately recall instances. Since incivility is a rather frequent behavior, their work suggests a shorter time frame. Although a specific reference period may not be agreed upon, future studies should consider the use of a shorter reference period such as three to six months. An even more effective technique might be to measure incivility through a diary study so that participants are referencing actual cases of incivility in giving their responses.

Another limitation is that the study design was cross-sectional. With cross-sectional data, we cannot conclude causation. Specifically, we cannot infer that structural empowerment *causes* psychological empowerment, nor can we infer that psychological empowerment causes a particular coping style. Future studies should consider looking at the variables across time. For example, measuring the independent variables at time 1 and the dependent variables sometime later at time 2. One main advantage to conducting a longitudinal study is that a longitudinal study would help demonstrate the order of the relationship (the sequence of events) (Rindfleisch, Malter, Ganesan, & Moorman, 2008).

Common method variance is also an issue in our study. Since all the measures were taken from the same subject at the same point in time, this threatens the validity of our conclusions (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). There are a few ways to help avoid this issue. Future studies should consider collecting data from multiple raters (i.e. supervisor ratings, or co-worker ratings in addition to self-ratings), gathering different types of data such as the inclusion

of a qualitative component, or using a longitudinal design where data is collected at various time points (Rindfleisch et al., 2008). Unfortunately, we were not able to use any of these methods in this thesis due to certain limitations such as time and resources.

While we did find that perceptions of incivility were reduced through the reduced use of dysfunctional coping strategies, stemming from structural and psychological empowerment, we were unable to provide support for the increased use of approach coping mechanisms in reducing perceptions of incivility. In fact, the findings from this study are a bit of a double-edged sword; specifically, structural and psychological empowerment have the capacity to both increase (via approach coping) and decrease (via a reduction in dysfunctional coping) perceptions of incivility. However, for individuals who tend to use dysfunctional coping mechanisms, empowerment acts as an intervention to reduce these behaviours. What we do know is that the way in which individuals cope with stressors does affect how they perceive incivility. As such, future research should examine other styles and combinations of coping that will lead to a reduced perception of incivility. One way to do this might be to include a qualitative component, where participants can explain the specific strategies that they use to cope with workplace stressors. This might reveal a theme of coping styles that we have not measured in this study, that are specific to coping with workplace stress. Further, research may want to consider the role of different personality traits and how they might moderate the proposed hypotheses.

With today's globally diverse workforce and the growth of multi-national companies, an important avenue for future studies is to explore these findings cross-culturally. Since different cultures have different social norms, behaviour that is considered as uncivil in North America may be interpreted differently by members of other cultures around the world. Similarly, behaviour that we deem as normative in North America may be seen as rude in other cultures.

Applying this line of research cross-culturally will provide us with a deeper understanding of incivility; particularly, how different cultures perceive acts of incivility, and how this affects the workforce.

### **Study Implications**

Findings from this study suggest that structurally empowered work environments have the capacity to reduce perceptions of incivility through psychological empowerment and the reduced use of dysfunctional coping techniques. We now know that structural and psychological empowerment as well as coping strategies generally have an effect on how an individual perceives incivility (be it an increase or decrease in perception). As such this information leaves us one step closer towards understanding how and why individuals perceive incivility differently. Still it would be important to gain further insight into our unexpected finding that positive coping strategies actually increased perceptions of incivility.

As we know, incivility has serious consequences for both employees and organizations (Porath & Pearson, 2012; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008). While reducing the actual act of incivility is one avenue for creating more civil organizations, reducing perceptions is another important way to mitigate the negative effects of incivility. To our knowledge, this is one of the only studies examining employee perceptions of uncivil behaviour. As such, this study contributes important information on how employees perceive incivility, and opens the door for more studies to be conducted from this perspective.

### **Conclusions**

The aim of this study was to better understand how employees perceive workplace incivility. Given the unique characteristics of this type of workplace mistreatment, incivility is open to interpretation, whereby individuals may perceive more or less of the behaviour. As such,

we sought to examine the impact of structural and psychological empowerment on employees' coping mechanisms. In sum, this study provided us with important insight into individual differences in the perception of incivility. Results from this study indicate that structural empowerment is important for employees to be psychologically empowered. Further we found that individuals who are more empowered use more approach coping strategies and fewer dysfunctional coping strategies. While the use of dysfunctional coping has the capacity to increase perceptions of incivility, individuals who are psychologically empowered through the structures in their work environment, use less dysfunctional coping strategies, and in turn, perceive fewer instances of incivility.

It is hoped that the results from this study will help researchers and employers understand the importance of perception. Though subtle, incivility has the capacity to diminish employees, and in turn has negative outcomes for organizations. Therefore, if we can help organizations affirm empowerment in their employees, it is hoped that individuals will perceive fewer instances of incivility in the workplace, making for happier, healthier employees.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Amazon Mechanical Turk Recruitment Information

In this study, you will be asked to consider your experiences at your current job. Specifically, you will be asked to answer a series of questions regarding your perception of different workplace experiences. In addition to this, you will be asked to provide some demographic information for the purposes of describing the research sample.

Please note, this study should take approximately 30 minutes, and you will be compensated with \$1 USD for completing the full study.

We invite you to participate in this study if you are:

1. over the age of 21
2. live in the United States or Canada
3. currently employed in a full-time job (i.e., work a minimum of 35 hours/week) \*outside of Amazon Mechanical Turk\*
4. supervised by someone

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Chloe Cragg (graduate student),

[REDACTED].

Please note: Your participation in this study is voluntary, and your responses are completely confidential and anonymous.

## Appendix B: Letter of Information and Consent



### LETTER OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT

Title: Taking a Closer Look at Behaviour in the Workplace

**Faculty Researcher:**

Dr. Joan Finegan

University of Western Ontario

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

**Student Researcher:**

Chloe Cragg

Email: [REDACTED]

Hello Amazon Mechanical Turk Participant:

My name is Chloe Cragg and I am a Master's Student studying Industrial Organizational Psychology at the University of Western Ontario, in London Ontario, Canada. My advisor (Professor Joan Finegan) and I would like to invite you to participate in a study that explores employees' experiences at work. We have all had to deal with fellow employees or supervisors who have behaved rudely. We would like to know more about your experiences with these sorts of people and how you reacted to the situation.

We invite you to participate in this study if you are:

1. over the age of 21
2. live in the United States or Canada
3. currently employed in a full-time job (i.e., work a minimum of 35 hours/week) outside of Amazon Mechanical Turk
4. supervised by someone

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to respond to a series of questions regarding your experiences with workplace incivility and how you cope with difficulties. You will also be asked a few questions about yourself and the place you work. The survey should take approximately thirty minutes to complete, and as a token of our appreciation, Amazon Mechanical Turk will give you \$1.00 CAD.

There are no known risks of participating in this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. Your responses are completely confidential and anonymous. Even if you consent to participate you have the right to not answer individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time it will have no effect

on your employment status. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that was collected prior to you leaving the study will still be used. No new information will be collected without your permission. As this study is an anonymous online survey, once you have submitted your responses, they cannot be withdrawn.

While you may not directly benefit from participating in this study, our results could help improve workplace functioning, and increase employee well-being. Ultimately, your participation will provide a valuable contribution to scientific research and will assist in providing organizations with information that can be used to make work less stressful. If you would like the results of the study, please email me (Chloe Cragg) about three months from now.

Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.) As you know, the web site of Amazon Mechanical Turk is programmed to collect responses only on the survey questions. In other words, the site will not collect any information that could potentially identify you (such as machine identifiers).

The data obtained from this study may be submitted for publication in an appropriate scientific journal or to a conference. Given the importance of sharing data with the scientific community, your data may be shared in an open access repository but because the data is completely anonymous, it will not be possible to identify your individual responses.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us by phone or by e-mail (see contact information above). If you would like to participate in this study, please indicate your informed consent by checking the box below.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics [REDACTED], [REDACTED], email: [REDACTED]. The REB is a group of people who oversee the ethical conduct of research studies. The NMREB is not part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential.

Thank you for your assistance.

**By clicking on “agree”, you have agreed to participate in the study and you will be automatically re-directed to the survey. You do not waive any legal right by signing this consent form**

\* “Having read and understood the above information, I agree to participate in this study, and to have my data used for research purposes and publication.”

(Check box to agree)

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

## Appendix C: Structural Empowerment

Conditions of Work Effectiveness Questionnaire – II (Laschinger et al., 2000)

**Please answer the following:**

A. How much of each kind of opportunity do you have in your current job?

1	2	3	4	5
None		Some		A Lot

1. Challenging work
2. The chance to gain new skills and knowledge on the job.
3. Tasks that use all of your own skills and knowledge.

B. How much access to information do you have in your present job?

1	2	3	4	5
No Knowledge		Some Knowledge		Know A Lot

1. The current state of the workplace.
2. The values of top management.
3. The goals of top management.

C. How much access to support do you have in your present job?

1	2	3	4	5
None		Some		A Lot

1. Specific information about things you do well.
2. Specific comments about things you could improve.
3. Helpful hints or problem-solving advice.

D. How much access to resources do you have in your present job?

1	2	3	4	5
None		Some		A Lot

1. Time available to do necessary paperwork.
2. Time available to accomplish job requirements.
3. Acquiring temporary help when needed.

E. In my work setting/job:



1	2	3	4	5
None		Some		A Lot

1. the rewards for innovation on the job are
2. the amount of flexibility in my job is
3. the amount of visibility of my work-related activities within the institution is

F. How much opportunity do you have for these activities in your present job:

1	2	3	4	5
None		Some		A Lot

1. Collaborating with others.
2. Being sought out by peers for help with problems.
3. Being sought out by managers for help with problems.
4. Seeking out ideas from professionals, other than your superior.

## Appendix D: Psychological Empowerment

Psychological Empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

**Please answer the following:**

1. The work I do is very important to me.
2. My job activities are personally meaningful to me.
3. The work I do is meaningful to me.
4. I am confident about my ability to do my job.
5. I am self-assured about my capabilities to perform my work activities.
6. I have mastered the skills necessary for my job.
7. I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job.
8. I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work.
9. I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job.
10. My impact on what happens in my department is large.
11. I have a great deal of control over what happens in my department.
12. I have significant influence over what happens in my department.

## Appendix E: Coping Styles

The Brief COPE (Carver et al., 1989)

1	2	3	4
I haven't been doing this at all			I've been doing this a lot

**The workplace can be filled with many different types of stressors. Please indicate the degree to which you *generally* use each of the following coping strategies to deal with workplace stress:**

1. I've been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I'm in.
2. I've been taking action to try to make the situation better.
3. I've been trying to come up with a strategy about what to do.
4. I've been thinking hard about what steps to take.
5. I've been trying to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive.
6. I've been looking for something good in what is happening.
7. I've been accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened.
8. I've been learning to live with it.
9. I've been making jokes about it.
10. I've been making fun of the situation.
11. I've been trying to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs.
12. I've been praying or meditating.
13. I've been getting emotional support from others.
14. I've been getting comfort and understanding from someone.
15. I've been trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do.
16. I've been getting help and advice from other people.
17. I've been turning to work or other activities to take my mind off things.
18. I've been doing something to think about it less, such as going to movies, watching TV, reading, daydreaming, sleeping, or shopping.
19. I've been saying to myself "this isn't real."
20. I've been refusing to believe that it has happened.
21. I've been saying things to let my unpleasant feelings escape.
22. I've been expressing my negative feelings.
23. I've been using alcohol or other drugs to make myself feel better.
24. I've been using alcohol or other drugs to help me get through it.
25. I've been giving up trying to deal with it.
26. I've been giving up the attempt to cope.
27. I've been criticizing myself.
28. I've been blaming myself for things that happened.

## Appendix F: Workplace Incivility Measures

The Workplace Incivility Scale (Cortina et al., 2013)

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Once or Twice	Sometimes	Often	Many Times

**During the PAST YEAR, were you ever in a situation in which any of your CO-WORKERS**

1. Paid little attention to your statements or showed little interest in your opinions.
2. Doubted your judgement on a matter over which you had responsibility.
3. Gave you hostile looks, stares, or sneers.
4. Addressed you in unprofessional terms, either publicly or privately.
5. Interrupted or “spoke over” you.
6. Rated you lower than you deserved on an evaluation.
7. Yelled, shouted or swore at you.
8. Made insulting or disrespectful remarks about you
9. Ignored you or failed to speak to you (e.g., gave you “the silent treatment”).
10. Accused you of incompetence.
11. Targeted you with anger outbursts or “temper tantrums”.
12. Made jokes at your expense.

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Once or Twice	Sometimes	Often	Many Times

**During the PAST YEAR, were you ever in a situation in which any of your SUPERVISORS**

1. Paid little attention to your statements or showed little interest in your opinions.
2. Doubted your judgement on a matter over which you had responsibility.
3. Gave you hostile looks, stares, or sneers.
4. Addressed you in unprofessional terms, either publicly or privately.
5. Interrupted or “spoke over” you.
6. Rated you lower than you deserved on an evaluation.
7. Yelled, shouted or swore at you.
8. Made insulting or disrespectful remarks about you
9. Ignored you or failed to speak to you (e.g., gave you “the silent treatment”).
10. Accused you of incompetence.
11. Targeted you with anger outbursts or “temper tantrums”.
12. Made jokes at your expense.

## Appendix G: Demographic Information

### Biographical Information

**Please answer the following:**

What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate your gender. M\_\_\_ F\_\_\_

You are welcome to provide your self-chosen gender identity here \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate your country of residence. Canada\_\_\_ United States\_\_\_ Other\_\_\_

Please indicate your highest level of education. No education\_\_\_ Elementary School\_\_\_

Secondary School\_\_\_ University\_\_\_ Post Grad\_\_\_

### Job Information

**Please answer the following:**

Are you currently in a full-time job? (i.e. working a minimum of 35 hours/week) Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

Are you currently in a position that requires having a supervisor/manager? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

Do you have co-workers? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

What is your current job title? \_\_\_\_\_

How many years have you been at your current job? \_\_\_\_\_

How many years have you been in your current position? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix H: Purposeful Responding Measure

**Please answer the following:**

*Note: you will still receive your compensation for participating, regardless of how you respond.*

1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. I took this study seriously and believe my responses should be included in the data analysis.
2. Please comment in the space below if you have any outstanding feedback about your responses, or about the study in general.

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## Appendix I: Debriefing Form



### DEBRIEFING FORM

Title of Project: Taking a Closer Look at Behaviour in the Workplace  
Faculty Researcher: Dr. Joan Finegan, (email: [REDACTED])  
Student Researcher: Chloe Cragg, (email: [REDACTED])  
University of Western Ontario  
Phone: [REDACTED]

Thank you for your participation in this study!

As you know, the purpose of this study is to examine people's reactions to different types of experiences in the workplace; specifically, we are interested in rude behaviour. This type of behaviour has negative consequences for individuals and organizations, thus warranting serious examination. We wondered whether the work environment could modify employees' perceptions of such behaviour. We predicted that in organizations where employees feel empowered, employees would be more likely to use positive coping strategies when faced with workplace incivility than in organizations where employees do not feel empowered.

Here are some references if you would like to read more:

Andersson, L. M., & Pearson, C. M. (1999). Tit for tat? The spiraling effect of incivility in the workplace. *Academy of Management Review*, 24(3), 452–471.

Kanter RM. Men and Women of the Corporation. New York: Basic Books; 1977.

Spreitzer, G. M. (1995). Psychological empowerment in the workplace: Dimensions, measurement, and validation. *Academy of Management Journal*, 38(5), 1442-1465.

Welbourne, J. L., Eggerth, D., Hartley, T. A., Andrew, M. E., & Sanchez, F. (2007). Coping strategies in the workplace: Relationships with attributional style and job satisfaction. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 70(2), 312-325.

All surveys are anonymous and all information provided is completely confidential. Although individual responses may be shared in open access repositories, there will be no way to identify respondents personally.

If you have any questions or concerns, or if you would like a copy of the results, please contact us by phone or by e-mail (see contact information above). Thank you so much for your participation!

## Appendix J: Ethics Approval Form



**Date:** 11 December 2017

**To:** Joan Finegan

**Project ID:** 110348

**Study Title:** Taking a Closer Look at Behaviour in the Workplace

**Application Type:** NMREB Initial Application

**Review Type:** Delegated

**Full Board Reporting Date:** 12/Jan/2018

**Date Approval Issued:** 11/Dec/2017 10:10

**REB Approval Expiry Date:** 11/Dec/2018

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Dear Joan Finegan

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the above mentioned study, as of the date noted above. NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the expiry date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

This research study is to be conducted by the investigator noted above. All other required institutional approvals must also be obtained prior to the conduct of the study.



**Documents Approved:**

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
DEBRIEFING FORM	revised		
Ethics Appendices	revised		
Ethics consent letter	revised		
Debriefing document	Rec'd	Dec 1, 2017	
Online Survey			
Implied Consent/Assent			
Rec'd	Dec 1, 2017	Rec'd	Dec 1, 2017

No deviations from, or changes to the protocol should be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard(s) to study participants or when the change(s) involves only administrative or logistical aspects of the trial.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Katelyn Harris, Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Randal Graham, NMREB Chair

*Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).*

## Appendix K: Curriculum Vitae

<b>Name:</b>	Chloe A. Cragg
<b>Post-secondary Education and Degrees:</b>	September 2016 – Present, University of Western Ontario, London, ON Master of Science candidate, Industrial/Organizational Psychology Supervisor: Dr. Joan Finegan <i>Expected completion date: August 2018</i>  September 2011- June 2015, University of Guelph, Guelph, ON Bachelor of Arts, Major: Psychology (Hons.); Minor: Child and Family Studies Honours Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Harjinder Gill
<b>Honours and Awards:</b>	Western Graduate Research Award (2018) - \$750 Western Graduate Research Scholarship (2017-2018) - \$12,000 Western Graduate Research Scholarship (2016-2017) - \$12,000 University of Guelph Entrance Scholarship (2011-2012) - \$2,000
<b>Related Work Experience:</b>	January 2017 – April 2018, University of Western Ontario, London, ON Teaching Assistant – Psychology 1000 – Introduction to Psychology  September 2016 – December 2016, University of Western Ontario, London, ON Teaching Assistant – Psychology 2061 – Psychology at Work
<b>Relevant Coursework</b>	Research Design and Statistical Modeling (Psyc 9540) Work Groups and Teams (Psyc 9623) Research Methods in I/O Psychology (Psyc 9631) Structural Equation Modelling (Psyc 9555) Performance Appraisal and Related Issues (Psyc 9611) Motivation and Leadership (Psyc 9622)
<b>Presentations:</b>	Cragg, C., Finegan, J., (2018, June). <i>Empowering Employees to Reduce Perceptions of Workplace Incivility</i> . Paper to be presented at the 29th International Congress of Applied Psychology, Montreal, QC.  Cragg, C., Cassidy, S., & Gill, H. (2017, June). <i>The effects of feeling trusted in the workplace: the role of enhanced organizational-based self-esteem on job outcomes</i> . Paper presented at the 78 <sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Canadian Psychological Association, Toronto, ON.

Gill, H., Cassidy, S., & Cragg, C. (2017, April). *Does feeling trusted at work increase psychological empowerment?* Paper presented at the 32nd Annual Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology Conference, Orlando, FL.