

## UNSEEN INJUSTICE: INCIVILITY AS MODERN DISCRIMINATION IN ORGANIZATIONS

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**This article advances a theory of incivility as a veiled manifestation of sexism and racism in organizations. To support this argument, I draw from social psychological research on modern discrimination. The result is a multilevel model of *selective incivility*, with determinants at the level of the person, organization, and society. Selective incivility could be one mechanism by which gender and racial disparities persist in American organizations, despite concerted efforts to eradicate bias. I discuss scientific and practical implications.**

Recent years have seen increasing scholarship on subtle, nonphysical manifestations of interpersonal mistreatment in the workplace, including *general incivility*. This term encompasses low-intensity conduct that lacks a clear intent to harm but nevertheless violates social norms and injures targeted employees (Anderson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001). In this paper I extend the notion of incivility by examining it through lenses of gender and race. The central argument is that incivility, in some cases, is not "general" at all but instead represents contemporary manifestations of gender and racial bias in the workplace. That is, with the rise of taboos, policies, and laws prohibiting discrimination against specific social groups, blatant intentions and efforts to alienate women and minorities from organizational life are no longer tolerated. However, one can mask discrimination (even without realizing it) behind everyday acts of incivility and still maintain an unbiased image. This would be consistent with research demonstrating that prejudices persist in covert forms within society in general (e.g., Dovidio & Gaertner, 1998) and within organizations in particular (e.g., Brief, Dietz, Cohen, Pugh, & Vaslow, 2000).

I begin the article with a recap of theory and findings from research on workplace incivility. Next is an in-depth review of theories of modern discrimination, focusing on cognitive, affective,

social, and organizational antecedents. An integration of these two bodies of literature then supports the proposition that incivility can constitute a particularly insidious, behavioral manifestation of modern/contemporary/covert sexism and racism. The result is a multilevel model of incivility as modern discrimination in organizations. In the latter half of the paper, I address implications of this "selective incivility" model for research, policy, and practice in organizations. The following definition of workplace discrimination frames this work: "Unfair employment discrimination [occurs] when persons in a 'social category' . . . are put at a disadvantage in the workplace relative to other groups with comparable potential or proven success" (Dipboye & Halverson, 2004: 131).

This article's novel contributions are fourfold. First, by building bridges with social psychological scholarship on discrimination, I extend the organizational literature on antisocial work behavior to address issues of *race and gender*. Most studies of workplace aggression, deviance, bullying, and so forth to date have focused almost exclusively on "general" conduct irrespective of social categories, without recognizing that antisocial work behavior may often reflect bias against members of undervalued social groups. A second contribution of the present work is to the social psychology literature. A common criticism of social psychology (e.g., Fiske, 2000) is that research on "discrimination" and "intergroup conflict" has addressed attitudes and affect in great detail, often to the neglect of action. Attitudes, stereotypes, and ideologies are certainly important, but a complete understanding of intergroup relations re-

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quires attention to intergroup behavior. The current article does just that by bringing to light the specific behavioral experience of selective incivility. The few psychologists who have looked at actual discriminatory conduct have generally focused on "formal discrimination"—for example, unfair selection decisions (e.g., Brief et al., 2000; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). In contrast, I take an in-depth look at a form of "interpersonal discrimination," which Hebl, Foster, Mannix, and Dovidio define as "nonverbal, paraverbal, and . . . verbal behaviors that occur in social interactions" (2002: 816); this represents a third contribution of the present article. Finally, I integrate concepts from organizational and social psychology, management science, and the law to propose fruitful new directions for research and practice in cases of selective incivility in the workplace.

#### WORKPLACE INCIVILITY: DEFINITION, INCIDENCE, AND IMPACT

Andersson and Pearson define *workplace incivility* as "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, displaying a lack of regard for others" (1999: 457). They conceptualize this as a specific form of *employee deviance* (Robinson & Bennett, 1995), which, in turn, represents a subset of *antisocial employee behavior* (Giacolone & Greenberg, 1997). When unambiguous intentions and expectations to harm the target or organization are present, definitions of incivility overlap with *psychological aggression* (e.g., Baron, 2004; Neuman, 2004). However, incivility differs from psychological aggression when behaviors lack clear, conscious intentionality. That is, although incivility may occasionally have visibly injurious objectives, it can often be attributed to other factors, such as the instigator's ignorance, oversight, or personality; intent, whether present or not, is ambiguous to one or more of the parties involved (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Pearson, Andersson, & Wegner, 2001). However, workplace incivility, by definition, is completely distinct from *physical aggression* and *violence* (e.g., VandenBos & Bulatao, 1996).

Incivility is perhaps one of the most pervasive forms of antisocial behavior in the workplace. To assess incivility prevalence, my colleagues

and I surveyed employees in a range of work settings; the incidence rates we uncovered illustrate the ubiquity of this phenomenon. For example, 71 percent of a court employee sample (Cortina et al., 2001), 75 percent of a university employee sample (Cortina & Magley, 2007), and 79 percent of a law enforcement sample (Cortina, Lonsway, & Magley, 2004) reported that they had encountered some form of uncivil conduct at work in recent years. Other researchers have reported similarly high rates of related workplace behaviors: for example, "generalized harassment"—75 percent (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997); "generalized workplace harassment"—64 percent (Rospenda, 2002); and "rude or disrespectful treatment"—67 percent (Neuman, 2004).

The proliferation of incivility in the workplace has very real, very negative consequences for employees, workgroups, and organizations. Barling and colleagues (Barling et al., 1996; Barling, Rogers, & Kelloway, 2001) have theorized that experiences of abusive behaviors at work lead to negative mood, cognitive distraction, fear, and perceived injustice. Others (e.g., Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2001; Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2004) have added damaged social identity and anger to this list. These cognitive and affective reactions, in turn, adversely influence targets' occupational, psychological, and physical health. Some have proposed that these negative consequences extend beyond the targeted employee to affect bystanders, workgroups, and whole organizations (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2004).

Data are emerging to support theories that although incivility may be subtle, its effects are not. Empirical research suggests that employees targeted with uncivil behavior experience greater job stress and dissatisfaction, lower creativity, cognitive distraction, and psychological distress. Possibly in an attempt to dampen the increased stressfulness of work, targets also use more substances. Moreover, incivility disrupts employee relationships and derails cooperation, rending the social fabric of the workgroup. Personnel targeted with pervasive incivility ultimately lose commitment to their organizations and exit at higher rates (Cortina et al., 2001, 2002; Lim & Cortina, 2004; Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000; Pearson et al., 2001; Pearson & Porath, 2004; Richman et al., 1999; Rospenda, 2002). Even employees who merely observe un-

civil treatment (e.g., toward colleagues) show lower job satisfaction and commitment and greater job burnout and turnover intentions; such observer effects emerge even while controlling for negative affectivity, so they cannot be attributed to a negative dispositional stance making observers more attuned to negative stimuli in their environments (Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2006). These adverse individual and collective consequences have financial implications for employers, who must absorb the costs of employee distraction and discontentment, job accidents, substance abuse, sick leave, work team conflict, productivity decline, and turnover.

Explaining how such a "low-grade" phenomenon as incivility can have such widespread consequences, my colleagues and I (Cortina & Magley, 2004; Cortina et al., 2001) have asserted that many uncivil work behaviors fall into the category of *daily hassles*—that is, routine nuisances of everyday life (e.g., Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Daily hassles lack the drama and intensity of *major life events*. Nevertheless, chronic, low-key stressors that repeat over time can "wear down" an individual, both psychologically and physically (e.g., Wheaton, 1997). Moreover, targeted employees may have difficulty developing effective means of coping with and controlling such ambiguous phenomena. Hopelessness and resignation may result (Deitch et al., 2004). Following Richman and colleagues' (1996; Rospenda, 2002) reasoning, personnel might also find interpersonal hostility highly unexpected and unnecessary in the work environment (in contrast to task-based stressors, which might seem more routine and therefore more tolerable in that context). For all of these reasons, daily interpersonal stressors at work can accumulate to have a greater impact on psychological and health outcomes than major time-limited disturbances (e.g., Cortina & Magley, 2004; Cortina et al., 2001; Deitch et al., 2004; Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

In sum, prior research has laid important foundations in defining incivility, delineating its impact, and articulating its relationship to other categories of *generalized* hostility in the workplace. Questions remain about how incivility relates to *specific* forms of workplace mistreatment, such as that based on sex and race.<sup>1</sup> Incivility, sexual ha-

arrassment, and racial harassment share certain features, all entailing behaving in an antisocial way; degrading, offending, or intimidating targets; and violating standards of interpersonal respect. In addition, similar motivations may drive these different forms of abuse, such as instigators' pursuit of social power/dominance, disregard for authority and norms, desire for valued resources, self-presentational goals, and value differences with the target (Åndersson & Pearson, 1999; Buchanan, 2005; Cleveland & Kerst, 1993; Deitch et al., 2004; James, Lovato, & Khoo, 1994; Lim & Cortina, 2005; O'Leary-Kelly, Paetzold, & Griffin, 2000; Pearson & Porath, 2004; Sanchez & Brock, 1996; Schneider, Hitlan, & Radhakrishnan, 2000; Thacker & Ferris, 1991).

In addition, perhaps incivility, sexual harassment, and racial harassment are, at times, one and the same. This may seem illogical, given that incivility is facially neutral by definition. That is, "generally" uncivil behaviors have no overt reference to gender, race, or other social category. This nevertheless does not rule out the possibility that incivility sometimes represents *covert* manifestations of gender and racial bias in the workplace. The theory advanced in this article will elucidate this possibility. Such *selective incivility* could be one mechanism by which gender and racial disparities persist in organizations, despite concerted legislative, judicial, and organizational efforts to eradicate bias.

## CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON DISCRIMINATION

The last four decades have seen sweeping changes in antidiscrimination laws, practices, and ideologies in the United States. Owing to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and related reforms, blatant employment discrimination based on gender and race (among other factors) has become illegal. Women and people of color now enjoy much greater access to occupational and economic opportunities than in the past. Along with these tangible changes, attitudes toward women's paid employment, and white attitudes toward ethnic minorities, have become more positive, tolerant, and accepting.

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age, disability status, and so on. The theory elaborated in this paper focuses primarily on gender and race; however, similar arguments could be developed for other characteristics that divide and stigmatize individuals.

<sup>1</sup> Of course, workplace mistreatment can be based on other social dimensions as well, such as sexual orientation,

Public expression of sexist and racist beliefs has undergone a radical decline (Benokraitis, 1997; Brief & Barsky, 2000; Brief et al., 1997, 2000; Brief & Hayes, 1997; Dipboye & Halverson, 2004; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1998; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Bachman, 2001; Operario & Fiske, 1998; Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995; Tougas, Brown, Beaton, & Joly, 1995). The importance of these changes cannot be overstated.

In spite of progress, gender and racial disparities endure in American organizations, particularly at the highest levels, where power is most concentrated (e.g., Benokraitis, 1997; Brief et al., 1997; Brief & Hayes, 1997; Pettigrew & Martin, 1987; Valian, 1998). This is true across a range of industries, from the military to the federal government to the Fortune 500 (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Bachman, 2001). According to Census and Department of Labor statistics, women and ethnic/racial minorities still receive less pay, face greater unemployment, and work in lower-status jobs than their white male counterparts; this remains true even after controlling for education, experience, and skill level (Brief et al., 1997; Dipboye & Halverson, 2004). In 2002 the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) received 84,442 complaints of employment discrimination; two out of every three allegations were based on either gender or race (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2003). Illustrating the striking persistence of these forms of bias, Benokraitis (1997) noted that, in the mid 1990s, white men constituted one-third of the U.S. population. At the same time, they made up "85% of tenured professors, 85% of partners in law firms, 80% of the U.S. House of Representatives, 90% of the U.S. Senate, 95% of Fortune 500 CEOs . . . and 100% of all US presidents" (1997: 5).

One might wonder how discrimination could be so robust against several decades of legal, organizational, and attitudinal reform. Some suggest that these changes may have been effective in reducing blatant or "old-fashioned" discrimination, but *subtle* discrimination lives on in the world of work (e.g., Benokraitis, 1997; Brief & Barsky, 2000; Brief, Buttram, Elliott, Reizenstein, & McCline, 1995; Deitch et al., 2004; Dipboye & Halverson, 2004). In fact, contemporary antifemale and antiminority bias is sometimes so ambiguous that instigators are unaware of its discriminatory nature, and they typically have rational, nondiscriminatory ex-

planations for their conduct. As Dipboye and Halverson explain, "Much of today's discrimination takes a more subtle form and has slipped out of the light into the dark side of the organization" (2004: 132).

The ambiguity inherent in subtle discrimination makes it particularly difficult for targets and managers to recognize, much less control. Meyerson and Fletcher compellingly summarize this situation as it relates to gender:

As we enter the year 2000, the glass ceiling remains. What will it take to finally shatter it? Not a revolution . . . the women's movement [once] used radical rhetoric and legal action to drive out overt discrimination, but most of the barriers that persist today are insidious—a revolution couldn't find them to blast away. Rather, gender discrimination now is so deeply embedded in organizational life as to be virtually indiscernible. Even the women who feel its impact are often hard-pressed to know what hit them (2000: 127).

Similar arguments can be made for persistent but subtle racial bias in the workplace. The glass ceiling holds strong in contemporary organizations, impeding women and employees of color from advancing to the same levels and at the same rates as their white male contemporaries. Moreover, "glass walls" keep women and minorities confined to certain occupational categories (Brief & Barsky, 2000; Rowe, 1990). These concealed barriers likely take many forms, one of which may be selective incivility. Theories of *modern discrimination* explain how and why this might be the case.

To account for persistent gender and racial inequalities in the United States, social psychologists have identified various forms of modern discrimination. In the realm of race relations, these concepts include *aversive racism* (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1998; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986), *symbolic racism* (Sears, 1988, 1998), and *modern racism* (Brief et al., 2000; McConahay, 1986; McConahay & Hough, 1976). The gender bias literature refers to similar phenomena, such as *modern sexism* (Swim, Scott, Sechrist, Campbell, & Stangor, 1995), *neosexism* (Tougas et al., 1995), and *contemporary sexism* (Jackson, Esses, & Burris, 2001). Although each conceptualization of contemporary discrimination is slightly different, the mythologies behind the behaviors are well-represented by McConahay's depiction of modern racism against blacks:

The principal tenets of modern racism are these:  
(1) Discrimination is a thing of the past because



Blacks now have the freedom to compete in the marketplace and to enjoy those things they can afford. (2) Blacks are pushing too hard, too fast, and into places where they are not wanted. (3) These tactics and demands are unfair. (4) Therefore, recent gains are undeserved and the prestige granting institutions of society are giving Blacks more attention and the concomitant status than they deserve (1986: 92–93).

Modern racists see these views as empirical fact rather than opinion or racist ideology. In fact, they ostensibly endorse egalitarian values, publicly condemn racism, and strongly identify themselves as nonprejudiced. This explicit rejection of overt bias—combined with implicit antiminority (or antifemale) beliefs—yields subtle, often unintentional and unconscious forms of discrimination. However, to maintain an egalitarian identity, modern racists only engage in discrimination when there is a plausible, non-racial (or nongendered) explanation for the differential treatment—for instance, a business justification. Absent a reasonable, nonprejudiced rationale for disparate conduct, discrimination does not manifest (Brief et al., 1995, 1997, 2000; James, Brief, Dietz, & Cohen, 2001; McConahay, 1986; McConahay & Hough, 1976). This allows the would-be instigators to protect themselves from charges of racism.

Contemporary forms of bias are distinct from “old-fashioned” sexism and racism, characterized by blatant antipathy, beliefs that women and people of color are inherently inferior, endorsement of pejorative stereotypes, and support for open acts of discrimination. Such antiquated beliefs and overtly discriminatory conduct are becoming less and less common (Brief et al., 1997; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1998; McConahay, 1986; McConahay & Hough, 1976; Sears, 1988, 1998; Swim et al., 1995; Tougas et al., 1995). For this reason, scholars are beginning to recognize that

singular attention to major discriminatory acts in the workplace is insufficient for explaining the experience of discrimination many minority members experience on the job, and may be an increasingly inadequate research focus in the future as the social and political landscape shifts toward newer forms of racism and discrimination (Deitch et al., 2003: 1300–1301).

Different theories have emerged about the developmental history of modern discrimination. One is that this “second-generation” form of bias has recently arisen to replace old-fash-

ioned sexism and racism, now deemed undesirable and, at times, unlawful (Benokraitis & Feagin, 1995; Brief et al., 1997; Forbes, Adams-Curtis, & White, 2004; Pettigrew & Martin, 1987; Tougas et al., 1995). A second argument is that prejudice has had a long history in our society, persisting over time in different manifestations, as affected by each sociohistorical moment. An elaborated version of this hypothesis is that negative attitudes toward women and ethnic minorities have continued despite social pressure to renounce prejudice; rather than going away, the negative attitudes become stored in memory and change from explicit to implicit (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002). A final possibility is that subtle, unintentional, unconscious forms of discrimination are not new; what may be new is their visibility, now that blatant discrimination no longer overshadows them. Regardless of their developmental trajectory, prejudice and discrimination seem to be alive and well in the contemporary American workplace.

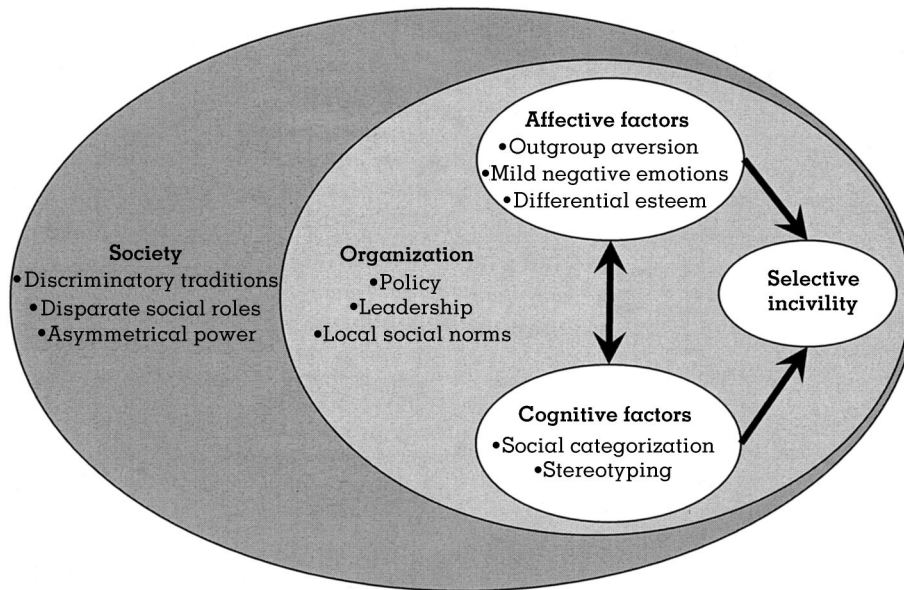
Research has identified various factors that fuel discrimination, including cognition, affect, and the organizational and societal context. Some of these same driving forces could also underlie discriminatory forms of workplace incivility, so here I highlight studies of each category of antecedent. The resulting model follows recent multilevel trends in the organizational sciences (e.g., Klein & Kozlowski, 2000), attending to influences at the level of the individual, the organization, and society. The review below is intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive—to demonstrate how scholarship on bias and discrimination can inform science and practice related to incivility in organizations. Figure 1 displays a conceptual model of the ideas that follow.

### Person-Level Explanations

Research on modern discrimination has primarily attended to intraindividual cognitive and affective events that drive a person to discriminate.

**Cognition.** Theories of social cognition lie at the heart of the literature on modern discrimination, which focuses in particular on categorization and stereotyping. *Social categorization* refers to the cognitive process by which our minds place people into social categories based on salient cues, such as gender, race, and age. This

**FIGURE 1**  
**Integrated Model of Incivility As Modern Discrimination in Organizations**



is argued to be a natural, automatic, and often unconscious process. This process has various benefits: easing the cognitive burden, simplifying perception and judgment, and helping us make sense of an intricate social environment. Without social categorization, the complexity of person perception would be overwhelming (e.g., Devine & Monteith, 1999; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Bachman, 2001; Fiske, 2000; Jones, 2002; Operario & Fiske, 1998; Stone, Stone, & Dipboye, 1992).

Categorization of a person into a particular group often triggers *stereotypes*—that is, prevalent and overgeneralized knowledge, beliefs, and expectancies about members of that social category (e.g., Hilton & von Hippel, 1996; Jones, 2002; Miller & Turnbull, 1986; Stone et al., 1992). In short, stereotypes are the “cultural baggage” that social categories carry (Operario & Fiske, 1998: 40). They allow perceivers to understand (often inaccurately) and make predictions about others, averting the onerous task of learning in-depth details about each individual encountered. Indeed, we tend not to seek further personal information after placing someone into a social category, instead basing impression formation largely on stereotypes associated with that category (e.g., Operario & Fiske, 1998; Stone et al., 1992).

Stereotypes come in explicit and implicit varieties. *Explicit* stereotypes operate at the con-

scious level and occur with intention, effort, awareness, and control. Attitudes and stereotypes can also be *implicit*, however, occurring unintentionally, unconsciously, and effortlessly (e.g., Banaji & Dasgupta, 1998; Baron & Banaji, 2006; Devine, 1989; Devine & Monteith, 1999; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Jones, 2002; Valian, 1998). The implicit variant of stereotyping is particularly implicated in modern discrimination. That is, a modern sexist or racist unknowingly applies negative stereotypes to women and people of color, which can lead the stereotyper to mistreat members of these social groups. However, the mistreatment only arises in situations when there is a plausible, nonprejudiced explanation for the behavior so that the instigator can maintain a nondiscriminatory self-image.

Stereotypes of outgroup members can also be “ambivalent,” containing both positive and negative elements. That is, they need not reflect uniform antipathy or contempt. Across years of stereotyping research (e.g., Allport, 1954; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Glick & Fiske, 1999, 2001), scholars have identified two core stereotype dimensions: warmth and competence. Some groups are the object of benevolent or paternalistic stereotypes, being perceived as warm but generally incompetent; these include housewives, the elderly, and the disabled. Others, in contrast, are seen as low in warmth but

(overly) high in competence, so they are targeted with a more hostile, envious stereotype; these groups include black professionals, career women, and Asians. Hostility toward these "envied" outgroups becomes amplified when they achieve success, status, and power, posing a competitive threat to the ingroup.

**Affect.** Some scholars claim that, compared to stereotypic cognition, prejudice is the better predictor of discriminatory behavior (Fiske, 2000). Prejudice refers specifically to an affective reaction to people solely because of their membership in a specific social category. Particularly relevant are the categories of ingroup and outgroup. That is, social categorization processes lead all people to categorize others as "one of us" versus "one of them." This gives rise to positive affective biases toward ingroup members, coupled with negative feelings toward individuals in the outgroup (Fiske, 2002; Jones, 2002; Operario & Fiske, 1998).

The negative affect toward the outgroup can take different forms, not simply amounting to a homogeneous feeling of contempt. For example, research by Fiske and colleagues (2002) has shown that people tend to feel "paternalistic prejudice" toward groups stereotyped as warm but incompetent; this prejudice entails a strong sense of pity, without admiration or envy. Groups stereotyped as cold but competent conjure up the opposite emotional profile: envy and admiration, but little pity. Regarding these latter findings, Fiske et al. wrote that "admiration for high-competence out-groups . . . coexisted with envy, suggesting a volatile mix of emotions that could create hostility when groups feel threatened" (2002: 897).

Diffuse, unconscious antifemale and antiminority feelings are thought to underlie modern discrimination (McConahay, 1986; McConahay & Hough, 1976; Sears, 1988, 1998; Swim et al., 1995; Tougas et al., 1995). Dovidio, Gaertner, and Bachman (2001) have emphasized the subtlety of these negative emotions in aversive racists, who experience mild fear, disgust, uneasiness, and indifference when they encounter ethnic minorities. This contrasts with "the open flame of racial hatred" that fuels traditional racism (2001: 419). In addition, Jackson and colleagues (2001: 49) have shown that an important component of contemporary sexism is greater feelings of esteem (i.e., respect) for men than women—a differential, affective "gut reaction" to social

groups. Because this visceral response toward members of particular social groups is outside conscious awareness and control, modern sexists and racists can maintain a nonprejudiced self-concept.

### Situational Explanations

A complete understanding of workplace discrimination requires attention to the surrounding context—at the level of both the immediate organization and the larger society. These contexts provide the proximal and distal backdrops of discriminatory cognitions, emotions, and behaviors in the workplace. The shaded, concentric ovals surrounding the model in Figure 1 convey the pervasive influence of context on all aspects of this process. In social psychological research on modern discrimination, scholars have, to some extent, discussed the societal context, so this review of situational factors begins there. Next will come the workplace context, which is discussed more in the organizational sciences.

**Societal context.** All organizations operate within a larger society/culture, which certainly affects the unfolding of discrimination. Historically speaking, racism and sexism have a long tradition in American history, and people tend to internalize the values and beliefs of their culture. Not long ago in this country, women were denied the right to vote, own property, and matriculate in many institutions of higher education; employers could openly fire or refuse to hire women solely on the basis of their gender. Likewise, "the periods of slavery and Jim Crow forced African Americans, unlike any other ethnic group, into a legalized second-class citizenship for over 300 years" (Sears, 1998: 79). Other U.S. ethnic minority groups have also encountered oppression in policies of mass internment, forced expulsion from their homelands, discriminatory immigration practices, and antimiscegenation laws (Operario & Fiske, 1998).

Although many of these overt discriminatory practices have since been abandoned, the structure of society remains such that men and whites tend to occupy different social roles than women (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Eagly & Wood, 1999) and ethnic minorities (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Bachman, 2001; Sears, 1998), which helps to sustain stereotypes. Moreover, people growing up in the United States still encounter stereotypic

imagery in cartoons, books, films, and other cultural media (Brief & Barsky, 2000; Fiske, 2002; Operario & Fiske, 1998). This social heritage maintains prejudice against women and people of color. It also follows individuals into their places of work: "Employees come to the organization with heavy cultural and social baggage obtained from interactions in other social contexts" (Scott, 1992: 20).

The structure of society also perpetuates unequal distributions of power, and asymmetrical power combined with prejudice sets the stage for oppression. Powerful people often seek to preserve the status quo in order to bolster their own status, maintain access to valued resources, and increase personal and collective self-esteem (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Bachman, 2001; Fiske, 1993, 2000, 2001, 2002; Jones, 2002; Operario & Fiske, 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Power also gives individuals at the top of the social structure the tools to translate their biases into discriminatory conduct. With respect to race, Operario and Fiske argue that "prejudice alone does not determine racism; everyone has prejudices, because all people prefer their group over others. History and society confer power to certain groups, granting them excessive ability to exercise their prejudice" (1998: 49). In contrast, powerlessness necessitates dependence on and acquiescence to the demands of the powerful (Fiske, 1993; Jones, 2002; Operario & Fiske, 1998). These social structural forces provide prime conditions for discrimination to thrive, in ways both blatant and subtle.

**Organizational context.** Turning now to the more immediate context, the organizational environment should play an important role in either enabling or inhibiting discrimination. It is also a level of context that seems particularly malleable—more so than the social structural context, given the difficulties inherent in effecting change at the broad societal level. However, social psychologists have largely ignored the workplace in studies of modern discrimination. The focus of this review therefore now switches to field research in organizational psychology. This literature suggests that several features of the work environment are especially relevant to discrimination: policy, leadership, and group norms.

Many U.S. organizations presently have policies that reflect Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964—protecting certain classes of employees

(including women and personnel of color) from discrimination or harassment based on social category membership. Numerous scholars, however, emphasize that a good policy is necessary but not sufficient to inhibit discriminatory and antisocial work behavior; consistent enforcement of that policy is paramount (e.g., O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2000; Riger, 1991; Williams, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1999). To implement policies effectively, strong leaders must be present.

Leaders set the tone for the entire organization, and employees look to them for cues about what constitutes acceptable conduct. Organizations tend to have fewer problems with (blatant) discrimination when their authority figures establish clear expectations for respectful behavior, model nondiscriminatory values and conduct, take discrimination complaints seriously, and sanction those who discriminate. Arguments and evidence supporting this claim have emerged particularly in studies of sexual harassment (e.g., Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand, & Magley, 1997; Hulin, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1996; O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2000; Pryor, Giedd, & Williams, 1995; Williams et al., 1999). In a similar vein, organizational authorities can send messages to employees that either promote or inhibit racial discrimination (Brief et al., 1995, 1997, 2000).

Another feature of the organizational context that can influence discrimination is its local social norms (Dipboye & Halverson, 2004). The need for belonging and acceptance by ingroup members is a powerful motivator for human behavior (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Fiske, 2000), including organizational behavior (Williams, 1998; Williams & Sommer, 1997). In fact, personnel often work in groups or teams, facing pressure to conform to group norms. Even without a formal "team" structure, many organizations foster a psychological sense of community, and informal social norms arise (Heller, 1989; Pretty & MacCarthy, 1991; Sarason, 1974). Group norms "not only define reality for group members but also communicate how members can obtain the approval and avoid the criticisms of fellow group members" (Dipboye & Halverson, 2004: 145). As a result of these group processes, people adapt their cognitions, emotions, and behaviors to fit better into the social world of work. Thus, when coworkers convey expectations for or model biased behavior, an employee is more likely to follow suit and engage in discrimina-



tion (Brief et al., 2000; Robinson & O’Leary-Kelly, 1998).

**Person-Situation Interactional Explanations**

With a few exceptions, the organizational context literature reviewed above focuses primarily on overt discrimination. Drawing on Dipboye and Halverson’s (2004) reasoning, we find that the picture becomes more complicated when we consider how the organizational environment might influence covert discrimination. The organization’s implicit or explicit support for discrimination (as indicated by lax enforcement or absence of a nondiscrimination policy, permissive leader behavior, and sexist or racist norms) could create an immediate social context that promotes discriminatory conduct. However, employees bring their own personal convictions and affective tendencies to that context. The result is a person-by-situation interaction that determines whether or not discriminatory behavior occurs and, if it does, whether it is overt versus covert and implicit versus explicit. Figure 2 summarizes how person and situation factors jointly influence discriminatory behavior.

As Figure 2 demonstrates, when we cross the organizational context and individual tendencies, (at least) four different behavioral possibilities emerge. The lower left quadrant represents the ideal situation: a nonbiased individual works for an organization that, likewise, does

not permit biased conduct; that employee will likely not discriminate against women and minorities. Even if the employee unconsciously endorses negative beliefs or feelings toward female or minority coworkers, a strong antidiscriminatory context should prevent that person from acting on his or her implicit biases (Brief et al., 2000).

The opposite situation appears in the upper right quadrant: when a biased employee works for a bias-tolerant company, the likelihood of overt discrimination (e.g., sexual and racial harassment) is high. This employee may be fully aware of and open about the biased nature of his or her conduct, and the organization does not motivate the individual to restrain his or her prejudices.

Note that in both of these situations the individual’s approach (pro or con) to bias is in line with that of the organizational environment. A different picture emerges in the case of individuals whose feelings and beliefs about discrimination are in conflict with those advanced by the organization (Dipboye & Halverson, 2004). This disconnect fosters ideal conditions for covert discrimination.

The lower right quadrant of Figure 2 portrays a situation in which a biased employee works for an organization that deters discriminatory conduct. Motivation to avoid sanctions, to remain in the organization, and to fit in with the workgroup could inhibit the employee from ex-

**FIGURE 2**  
**Person-by-Organization Influences on Discriminatory Behavior**

		Personal bias	
		Absent or implicit	Explicit
Organizational stance on bias	Permit/promote	Covert discrimination (e.g., selective incivility toward women and minorities)	Overt discrimination (e.g., sexual and racial harassment)
	Prohibit	Little or no discrimination	Covert discrimination (e.g., selective incivility toward women and minorities)

pressing visible bias (i.e., no blatant sexual or racial harassment). However, these organizational influences might only drive discrimination "underground." In other words, in lieu of open, overt acts of hostility, the employee may express personal biases against female coworkers and colleagues of color covertly (Dipboye & Halverson, 2004). Concealing discrimination in this way could be a conscious choice on the part of the employee.

The upper left quadrant applies to two different types of employees, although the behavioral outcome is the same. In one situation an employee with no implicit or explicit biases against women and minorities works for an organization in which there is pressure (e.g., from peers) to engage in sexist or racist behavior. Assuming that the employee is motivated to remain with the organization (e.g., for financial or professional reasons), the conflict between the individual and the immediate context may yield discrimination that is quite subtle. That is, the person is ideologically opposed to sexism and racism and therefore unlikely to engage knowingly in overtly discriminatory behavior. This person, however, spends forty (or more) hours per week working in an antifemale and/or anti-minority climate. His or her fundamental need for belonging, acceptance, and security could foster covert discrimination against women and/or colleagues of color, as a means of "fitting in" in the discriminatory environment. The biased conduct would need to be subtle and rationalizable, and perhaps even unconscious, for the employee to maintain an unbiased self-image.

A second possibility for the upper left quadrant is that an employee self-identifies as non-prejudiced but implicitly harbors negative thoughts and feelings toward women or people of color. This person also works in a context that is in some way antifemale or antiminority. This environment permits and perhaps even encourages the employee to act on implicit biases, but explicit discrimination (e.g., sexual or racial harassment) would be aversive to his or her egalitarian identity. Instead of overtly discriminating against undervalued social groups, the employee could disproportionately target them with negative behavior that is too subtle and facially neutral to appear biased. This antisocial conduct would be a concealed, uninten-

tional, unconscious form of discrimination (Dipboye & Halverson, 2004).

### WORKPLACE INCIVILITY AS MODERN DISCRIMINATION

How might social psychological concepts of modern/covert/aversive discrimination inform our understanding of incivility in the workplace? These theories suggest different paths to selective incivility. In one case reasonable, forward-thinking, tolerant employees unknowingly target women and minorities with disproportionate incivility, despite being explicitly opposed to sexism and racism. That is, the employees' *implicitly* stereotypic attitudes, preference for ingroup members, motivation to maintain social power, and so forth could give rise to subtle biases against the outgroup. Lax antidiscrimination policies, permissive leadership behavior, and antisocial models in the workplace could set the stage for employees to act on those biases. Cultural traditions of sexism, racism, and asymmetrical power compound the situation. These instigators might have plausible, non-racial, and nongendered explanations for the uncivil conduct (e.g., "I didn't see you," "I'm having a bad day," "I thought you were done speaking")—explanations that they themselves believe.

In other cases selective incivility might not be so innocent, because "some people may be particularly motivated to think in stereotypic ways and may use controlled processing to promote stereotype use" (Devine & Monteith, 1999: 356, note 1). For example, an employee may consciously experience blatant antipathy toward women and minorities and make no attempt to prevent it from influencing his or her behavior toward coworkers, but may hide prejudice behind the guise of "general" incivility. This attempt at concealment may be particularly likely if a biased employee works in an organization with strong nondiscrimination policies and norms, enforced by strong leaders. Overt disrespect (e.g., harassment) of women and minorities would not be tolerated in such a context, so the employee must find more discreet and rationalizable methods of expressing bias; selective incivility is one means toward this end. That is, bias may emerge in the form of low-level deviance that, absent any overtly sexist or racist content, can be attributed to something less ob-

jectionable than prejudice (e.g., instigator oversight, personality, work overload). In this example the employee can explain the conduct in a way that has nothing to do with gender or race, but this would be a deceitful "cover-up" for bias.

A third scenario could be that an employee has strong egalitarian values, both explicit and implicit, but works alongside coworkers who express sexism and racism on a regular basis. The employee is caught in a quandary: not going along with the biased conduct could lead to ostracism from the peer group, which constitutes a significant part of the employee's social world, but participating in blatantly biased behavior would be antithetical to the employee's values and, thus, highly aversive. One means of solving this dilemma would be to target women and people of color with subtle disrespect—that is, incivility. The discriminatory nature of this conduct would fit in with group norms, and the low-level (possibly unconscious) nature of the deviance might be tolerable for the instigator, who prides him or herself on being nonsexist and nonracist.

Given the theories and scenarios reviewed above, I propose that incivility is not always an "equal opportunity" form of antisocial work behavior. Specifically, in many organizations women and ethnic minority employees likely experience more uncivil treatment than men and whites. This should be especially true for organizations that lack strong nondiscrimination policies, have leaders who turn a blind eye to (or even model) antifemale and antiminority conduct, and employ individuals who openly express bias.

In many cases disproportionate incivility toward women and people of color would likely comprise the most ambiguous forms of disrespectful conduct (e.g., interrupting an employee, failing to include an employee in professional camaraderie, ignoring an employee). These subtle behaviors could be attributed to many factors other than race or gender (e.g., instigator oversight, target hypersensitivity), making it particularly difficult to label them as discriminatory. They are thus means by which personnel can mistreat women and people of color while maintaining a nonprejudiced image to themselves and others. The apparent neutrality of this behavior could avert disciplinary actions related to Title VII violation.

It could be, however, that more transparent forms of incivility (e.g., rumor spreading, accusations of incompetence, anger outbursts) would not show intergroup differences. These behaviors, when targeted at female and minority employees disproportionately, might be perceived as sexist or racist, which would be aversive to the instigator's egalitarian self-concept. This might also trigger organizational or legal sanctions. Therefore, it makes sense that many instigators (those who want to avoid penalties or labels as sexist/racist) would refrain from blatant forms of discriminatory disrespect.

This profile of findings would be highly consistent with modern understandings of discrimination. For example, *aversive racism theory* (e.g., Dovidio & Gaertner, 1998; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Bachman, 2001; Dovidio, Gaertner, Niemann, & Snider, 2001) suggests that discrimination will not emerge in situations where the discriminatory nature of the conduct is apparent, either to the instigator or others. This is because "aversive racists" consciously endorse values of egalitarianism and justice and condemn prejudice both internally and externally. However, these same individuals implicitly harbor negative emotions and cognitions toward minorities, driving them to discriminate in subtle or rationalizable ways. That is, they discriminate (1) when the biased nature of the behavior is not obvious or (2) when a negative response can be attributed to something other than race. Both of these descriptions fit many manifestations of workplace incivility.

From the target's perspective, who would be most at risk for selective incivility? According to theories of ambivalent stereotyping (e.g., Fiske et al., 2002; Glick & Fiske, 1999, 2001) and intergroup competition (e.g., Jackman, 1994), the most vulnerable might be professionally and economically successful women and minorities—those who are perceived as highly competent and advancing in ways that threaten the dominant majority. This is based on research showing that successful outgroups, such as black professionals, Asians, career women, business women, and feminists, are often stereotyped as (too) competent, ambitious, and hardworking and, at the same time, interpersonally unpleasant and cold. This can trigger admiration to some extent, but also envy and hostile competition from the dominant majority. Again, though, to avoid appearances of racism and sexism, the

hostility may often take a disguised form, such as selective incivility.

### EVIDENCE FROM THE TARGET'S PERSPECTIVE

The theories reviewed above explain forces that may promote incivility as a covert form of modern discrimination against undervalued social groups. But is there any empirical evidence to this effect? With workplace incivility being a new area of inquiry, the empirical record on this topic remains limited. Several studies do, however, suggest that gender bias may underlie some manifestations of incivility. Fewer data are available on race and incivility, but findings from one study do suggest potential racial bias.

Starting first with incivility as subtle sexism, qualitative data suggest that incivility and gender bias are often one and the same. Specifically, my colleagues and I (Cortina et al., 2002) examined the interpersonal experiences of 4,608 attorneys practicing in the federal courts. Respondents who had indicated any recent encounter with workplace incivility were asked to provide brief descriptions of the uncivil conduct that had had the greatest impact on them. Many women detailed experiences of incivility that they attributed to gender, despite the mistreatment not being explicitly gendered on its face. Some of the behaviors described represented more overt, active, direct forms of disrespect:

Male judges and attorneys tend to cut short, ignore, or exclude female attorneys.

There is still a big gap in how women attorneys are treated by male attorneys: extremely aggressive behavior in depositions; failure to listen; repeated interruptions in all contexts.

A court clerk apparently did not believe that I was an attorney even though I had been sitting at counsel table for two weeks of the trial. He treated me rudely and kept me from getting exhibits in order in a document-intensive case. I believe this occurred because I am a young-looking female.

More often, though, the disproportionately uncivil treatment of women was more subtle, indirect, and perhaps unintentional and unconscious:

I was plaintiff's counsel on a motion, but the magistrate spoke exclusively to the male defense counsel and deferred to him throughout the in-

chamber hearing. Magistrate treated me like I wasn't in the room.

The person in charge of the settlement program . . . refused to speak to me in that conference, and would only address my male co-counsel, even though I had identified myself as lead counsel.

The bankruptcy bar . . . is rather small and exclusive. To be young and female is to be discounted and ignored and makes it very difficult to establish yourself. I hated my first 5 years of practice because of it. Good thing I'm tough.

These previously unpublished quotes illustrate how incivility can represent gender discrimination (and sometimes age discrimination) of a less blatant type. The last examples are consistent with the form of bias that Fiske (2002: 125) calls "cool neglect," or withholding "basic liking and respect" rather than being openly hostile.

The Cortina et al. (2002) study is particularly well-suited to testing the theory articulated above. The participants were female attorneys, who would elicit the "career woman" (and sometimes "feminist") stereotype, which includes high competence but low warmth (e.g., Fiske et al., 2002; Glick & Fiske, 1999, 2001). These women are making inroads into a prestigious profession that was once exclusively the province of men. Men, as members of the dominant majority,<sup>2</sup> may feel a sense of threat, competition, and hostility toward these outgroup members who are "encroaching" on their terrain. In some cases men could justify uncivil behavior as part of their job, which mandates "zealous advocacy" for clients. Note, however, that opposing counsel were not the only instigators of incivility in these narratives, since the rude behavior also came from judges, court clerks, and other court personnel. Behavior from these various sources cannot be attributed to trial strategy or the adversarial model of justice.

Corroborating these qualitative findings, quantitative research also suggests gender differences in the experience of incivility. Specifically, the Cortina et al. (2002) attorney study also included a survey, in which more women (65 percent) than men (47 percent) described recent experiences of "general incivility" in the context

<sup>2</sup> In the year before my colleagues and I (Cortina et al., 2002) collected our data, only 23 percent of all lawyers nationwide were women (Eighth Circuit Gender Fairness Task Force, 1997). Thus, in this profession men clearly remain the dominant majority.



of their work. This gender difference echoes the results of Björkqvist, Österman, and Hjelt-Bäck (1994), who reported that 55 percent of female compared to 30 percent of male university employees had faced "work harassment" during the previous six months. Likewise, in a survey (Cortina et al., 2001) of 1,180 court employees, women described greater frequencies of incivility than did their male colleagues.

The gender differences just reported were based on composite measures of workplace incivility, making it difficult to pinpoint which types of incivility are more prone to being discriminatory. Extending these findings, my colleagues and I (Cortina et al., 2004) have provided in-depth evidence of both gender- and race-based disparities in the experience of specific uncivil behaviors. Our results were based on survey data from two organizations: (1) a city government in which women have a strong presence and (2) a law enforcement agency that employs sizable numbers of ethnic minorities. With some exceptions, women and ethnic minorities reported more frequent encounters with specific uncivil behaviors at work, compared respectively to men and whites. Gender and racial differences were particularly large for the most *ambiguous* behaviors (e.g., "ignored you or failed to speak to you [e.g., 'the silent treatment']," "doubted your judgment on a matter over which you had responsibility," "withheld information that you needed to do your job correctly," "failed to give you an award or recognition you deserved"). Many of these ambiguous and "withholding" behaviors could be attributed to instigator oversight or target hypersensitivity, making it difficult to label them as prejudiced. These behaviors are thus means by which employees may disproportionately target women and minorities with disrespect while maintaining a nonprejudiced self-image.

In contrast, we (Cortina et al., 2004) did not find gender or racial differences in the experience of more *blatant* or overtly disrespectful behavior (e.g., "made jokes at your expense," "refused to work with you," "targeted you with anger outbursts or 'tempter tantrums'"). These behaviors, when targeted disproportionately at women and minorities, could be attributed to prejudice more readily, which could threaten instigators' self-concept and trigger sanctions from the employer or court system. Modern rac-

ists and sexists would likely want to avoid such outcomes.

## NEW DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

These empirical studies support the theory of selective incivility advanced in this article. The findings are preliminary, however, elucidating only half of the incivility equation (the target's perspective) and rarely addressing issues of race. Thus, this theory and this evidence raise intriguing possibilities, to be addressed in future research on workplace intersections of incivility, sexism, and racism.

Generally speaking, research related to workplace incivility could benefit from stronger alliances with social psychology, and vice versa. Given the richness of social and organizational scholarship on discrimination, the independence of these two bodies of literature is striking. Both arenas offer novel concepts that could be mutually informative. They also tend to favor different paradigms: lab experiments dominate social psychological research, whereas surveys are more typical in the organizational sciences. Research informed by multiple conceptual traditions, diverse methodologies, and questions of both basic and applied significance could take studies of workplace incivility (and other discriminatory behaviors) down interesting new paths.

A second recommendation is that organizational researchers of antisocial work behaviors follow the model set by social, feminist, and cultural psychology and routinely engage issues of gender and race. This includes studies of not only incivility but also other forms of "general" interpersonal mistreatment: bullying (Hoel, Rayner, & Cooper, 1999), aggression (Baron, 2004; Neuman, 2004), interpersonal deviance (Robinson & Bennett, 1995), petty tyranny (Ashforth, 1994), social undermining (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002), organizational retaliation behavior (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997), and counterproductive work behavior (Spector & Fox, 2002). To date, gender and race (and other social identities) have been largely absent from this literature. A few studies, reviewed above, have addressed gender and incivility, but there has been little discussion of incivility and race. Indeed, the neglect of race in the burgeoning literature on antisocial work behavior has persisted for much too long, perhaps owing to the

fact that "it has become somewhat taboo to recognize the role of racism in contemporary American work organizations" (Brief & Hayes, 1997: 100). Importantly, this research should not require targets to have insight into the discriminatory nature of the conduct they face, owing to the inherent ambiguity of uncivil situations (Andersson & Pearson, 1999) and to employees' reluctance to identify as victims of prejudice (Magley, Hulin, Fitzgerald, & DeNardo, 1999).

Beyond targets, the perspective of instigators also deserves further scholarly attention. In fact, tests of the theory summarized in Figure 1 necessarily imply an instigator focus. This work will require innovative methods to avoid problems of socially desirable responding. In particular, research on aversive racism, neosexism, and so on shows that individuals responsible for these "modern" forms of discrimination strongly identify as nonprejudiced. In other words, they see their own behavior as reasonable, fair, and unbiased, so they would not openly admit to disproportionately targeting female and minority employees with uncivil conduct. It is therefore critical that we develop unobtrusive techniques for assessing selective incivility.

On another front, social psychologists interested in modern discrimination should consider the negative interpersonal behaviors discussed in the organizational literature (e.g., incivility, aggression, bullying, etc.) as potential behavioral vehicles for subtle sexism and racism. All of these actions appear, at face value, to have nothing to do with social categories, stereotypes, or prejudices. However, as this article illustrates, seemingly neutral insensitivity or aggression toward persons could, in many cases, serve as a convenient mask for unfair discrimination against *socially undervalued* persons. Studies of this possibility would help address a deficit that is often lamented in social psychology: little research in the bias literature directly assesses discriminatory behavior. This is a major problem, because "thoughts and feelings do not exclude, oppress, and kill people; behavior does" (Fiske, 2000: 312). Selective incivility is a specific behavior that could be the focus of novel social psychological research.

Questions may arise as to what methods may be most appropriate to launch this line of inquiry. Scholars interested in the antecedents of incivility could use the social psychological experiment as one research tool, pinpointing the

personal and social conditions under which individuals are most likely to disrespect others—particularly women and people of color. Techniques developed by organizational psychologists could also benefit social research on modern discrimination. Particularly promising for this purpose are new survey methods for assessing implicit motivation and cognition, such as the "conditional reasoning" paradigm (e.g., James, 1998; James & Mazerolle, 2003). In addition, organizational and social psychologists could collaboratively translate stereotype-control strategies developed in the laboratory into respectful-workplace initiatives, followed by evaluation of those initiatives in actual organizations. Finally, despite some discussion of societal influences on modern discrimination, empirical attention to this topic has been sparse. Cross-cultural methods of studying organizational behavior (e.g., Gelfand, Raver, & Ehrhart, 2002; Schaffer & Riordan, 2003) could allow us to understand how social structural forces impinge on bias in multinational organizations. These are just a few examples of how social and organizational psychologists—and management scholars from other disciplines—could pool their ideas and methodologies to advance research on incivility and discrimination in the modern workplace.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Nonspecific workplace mistreatment—in the absence of overtly sexual, sexist, or racist conduct—is not typically regarded as a Title VII violation. However, in this article I propose that employees may at times be differentially targeted with incivility *on the basis of their sex or race*, potentially creating disparate work environments across social groups. At the very least, this could interfere with the recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce; at worst, pervasive patterns of incivility toward protected classes of employees could expose the organization to legal liability. For these reasons it is critical that organizations and policy makers develop effective strategies for managing this disguised form of workplace discrimination.

Referring again to Figure 1, interventions are possible for every factor that fuels selective incivility, at the level of both person and context. Indeed, it is important that both levels be targeted, as Figure 2 illustrates. If explicit, internal

bias persists in an individual working in a non-discriminatory context, the person may simply transmute the bias into covert, rationalizable forms of discrimination. Likewise, an employee who fundamentally opposes gender and race bias, but who works in discriminatory organizations, may give in to social pressures and discriminate covertly. Given that selective incivility has antecedents at multiple levels, it seems only logical that attempts to manage it also take a multilevel approach. Below is a discussion of person-level interventions, followed by societal and organizational actions.

### Person-Level Interventions

To reduce the incidence of selective incivility, some might assume that interventions should primarily target the organizational context, with less hope for intrapersonal reform. However, the social psychology literature is replete with ideas on how to do both: modify the environment so as to influence individual cognition and affect, which could ultimately inhibit discriminatory behavior. These techniques could potentially be applied to the management of workplace incivility. A complete review of this literature is beyond the scope of this article, but I highlight several segments as an illustration.

The emphasis in stereotype scholarship on unconscious cognitive processes, unintentionality, and automaticity may give the false impression that organizational attempts at influencing social thought and emotion would be pointless. On the contrary, research shows that it is possible to intervene at the outset of these internal processes, manipulating perceivers' cognitive representations of their social worlds. Social categorization may be automatic, but social category boundaries—and the dimensions around which they organize—are far from fixed. Thus, it is possible to broaden peoples' conceptions of who belongs to their ingroup. This can foster more positive, respectful attitudes and behavior toward individuals formerly perceived as out-group members.

To give a concrete example of this, Gaertner and Dovidio (2000) developed the *common ingroup identity model*. This intervention shifts conceptions of social group membership from many separate groups to a more inclusive, superordinate group. Experimental and field stud-

ies support the model, with the superordinate identity created using a range of strategies (e.g., spatially integrating people, creating a common group name, implementing joint evaluation and reward systems) in a range of settings. The common group identity cultivates greater interdependence, cooperation, and respect among individuals who were formerly members of separate groups (e.g., Dovidio, Gaertner, & Bachman, 2001; Dovidio, Gaertner, Niemann, & Snider, 2001; Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2000; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000).

Even when gender- or race-based social categorization occurs, it does not always yield stereotypic thought, emotion, and behavior. Despite being natural and automatic, stereotyping is not inevitable—it can occur automatically but does not *always* occur. For instance, people apparently do not engage in negative stereotypic thinking when they are motivated to endorse a positive judgment of the target. To demonstrate this, research shows that when an employee receives a positive evaluation by a member of a stereotyped group, the employee is motivated by self-interest to respect that person's opinion; stereotype activation does not occur (e.g., Devine & Monteith, 1999; Erber & Fiske, 1984; Neuberg & Fiske, 1987).

Moreover, when it does occur, stereotype *activation* does not unavoidably lead to stereotype *application*. Although a social perceiver may initially categorize a person and trigger a stereotype, the perceiver can be motivated to replace this automatic categorical processing with more controlled, intentional, individuated processing, and this can prevent a discriminatory behavioral response. For example, situations that involve high stakes, emphasize the need for accuracy, hold people accountable for their judgments, relax undue time pressures, or require cooperation to work toward shared goals give rise to individuated processing in lieu of stereotyping (e.g., Devine & Monteith, 1999; Dipboye & Halverson, 2004; Fiske, 2000, 2001, 2002; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Valian, 1998). In addition, learning and self-regulation processes can help individuals self-monitor and recognize situations in which they are susceptible to stereotyped responding; they can then interrupt stereotypic thinking, even if it is activated, and generate nondiscriminatory behavior (Brief & Barsky, 2000; Monteith, 1993). To quote

Gordon Allport, social perceivers can sometimes "put the brakes on prejudice" (1954: 332).

### Situational Interventions

**Societal context.** Legal frameworks make up an important piece of the fabric that holds civil society together. However, one might wonder whether existing law is relevant to uncivil work behavior: because a defining feature of incivility is that intentionality is ambiguous, does the absence of clear discriminatory intent remove legal liability? The issue of intent factors into some, but not all, legal definitions of discrimination. For example, in *McDonnell Douglas Corp. v. Green* (1973), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that proof of intent to discriminate must be present before a behavior can be considered unlawful *intentional discrimination* or *disparate treatment*. However, in *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.* (1971), the Supreme Court also ruled that *unintentional discrimination* or *adverse impact* is also unlawful. In other words, if an organizational practice has differential, adverse effects on protected classes of employees, then that practice may be illegal, even if the effects are unintentional. Likewise, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1993) has stated that practices that have the *effect* of interfering with work or creating a hostile work environment for women and racial minorities constitute unlawful sexual and racial harassment, respectively, regardless of the employer's intent. Thus, when workplace incivility is disproportionately targeted at women and minorities and interferes with their work and/or contributes to a hostile environment, this situation may violate law.

Despite potential legal implications, it is unclear whether legal grievance mechanisms present effective solutions to the problem of selective incivility. These mechanisms require the target to formally complain about the behavior, which may not be a realistic expectation. Employees generally have high thresholds for whistle-blowing (Miceli & Near, 1992), and isolated acts of subtle discrimination may not seem "severe" enough to warrant complaint (Dipboye & Halverson, 2004; Rowe, 1990). As Neuman notes, "How (and to whom) do you report having had your feelings hurt, and what reporting system captures the time you spend ruminating about the perceived mistreatment? Furthermore, would you believe that such an incident is seri-

ous enough to merit a formal report?" (2004: 74). Moreover, individual instances of misconduct may not appear discriminatory unless considered in the aggregate (Crosby, 1984; Crosby, Iyer, Clayton, & Downing, 2003; O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2000), particularly compared to conduct targeted at men and whites.

Further reducing complaint likelihood, targets may experience attributional uncertainty about incivility—a low-level behavior that lacks clear intent (Andersson & Pearson, 1999) and has no overtly gendered or racial content (Lim & Cortina, 2005). They may have difficulty deciding whether they are experiencing general incivility or, rather, discrimination based on their social category membership (Cortina et al., 2002; Schneider et al., 2000). Even if they do suspect differential negative treatment, targets may still hesitate to label their instigators' behavior as discriminatory. This would imply that the instigators are prejudiced, which is generally seen as immoral or evil in the current political climate of this country. Thus, accusations of prejudice could embroil targets in emotionally charged, painful situations, which they would likely prefer to avoid (Monin & Miller, 2001; Swim et al., 2003). Given the subtlety and attributional uncertainty inherent in these situations, it is even less likely that incivility targets would file discrimination complaints with management.

In the rare cases when employees do come forward with reports of selective incivility, managers (or judges and juries) might not find such "minor," seemingly neutral misconduct worthy of reprimand. This may be especially true when instigators can provide a plausible, nonracial, nongendered account for their behavior. To make matters worse, some research suggests that people who merely observe one social group (e.g., women) treated less favorably than another (men) are less likely to perceive the treatment as discriminatory, compared with perceptions of the individuals who *are the direct targets* of the disparate treatment (Swim et al., 2003). Managers are even further removed from potentially discriminatory situations—only *hearing reports* about them—so they may be even less likely to believe that discrimination has taken place. Moreover, it is difficult to discern discrimination in individual cases; patterns of discrimination often emerge only with the aggregation of multiple incidents across



persons, places, or time (Crosby, 1984; Crosby et al., 2003; O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2000). For all of these reasons, traditional, reactive, and legalistic approaches to combating blatant discrimination may not be effective for managing subtle biases in the form of selective incivility.

**Organizational context.** To create respectful, incivility-free work environments, it would behoove organizations to look beyond traditional methods of achieving and managing diversity; in particular, the reactive complaint mechanism may have limited utility. Proactive, preventative, and educational approaches seem more promising instead. For example, in the interest of incivility prevention, senior management can model appropriate, respectful workplace behavior and clearly state expectations of civility in mission statements or policy manuals. Reference checks for prospective employees can include questions about interpersonal behavior. All new employees should receive education about civility expectations, and employees at all levels could undergo interpersonal skills training. When incivilities do arise, instigators should be sanctioned swiftly, justly, and consistently (Pearson et al., 2000; Pearson & Porath, 2004).

Given the links to gender and race theorized in this article, I would also recommend that efforts to prevent incivility dovetail with those addressing overt discrimination (e.g., sexual and racial harassment). For example, organizational procedures, policies, and practices to set norms of civility could explicitly discuss equitable respect toward women and men and members of different ethnic groups (as well as employees who are young and old, gay and straight, etc.). Leaders should emphasize that unacceptable discrimination includes not just overt acts of misogyny and bigotry but also subtle devaluation and exclusion of social minorities. The intended effect should be a broadening of employees' construals of what it means to be non-prejudiced (Brief & Barsky, 2000). Organizational interventions should also incorporate solutions from the social psychology literature on stereotyping and prejudice, detailed above. This sort of combined strategy would provide a more efficient and effective means of combating antisocial work behavior, which has many behavioral faces (general, gendered, raced, etc.). Related training programs might then attract broader audiences, being relevant to all employees (re-

gardless of gender or ethnicity) and avoiding resistance met by interventions that exclusively target gender discrimination, racial discrimination, and so forth (Cortina et al., 2002; Lim & Cortina, 2005; Podgor, 1996). As Brief et al. note, "The forces driving discrimination in the workplace are many, and any legitimate attempt to combat discrimination must be multifaceted" (1997: 68).

## CONCLUSION

This article integrates the literature on workplace incivility with that addressing modern sexism and racism. The resulting concept—selective incivility—is almost certainly more pervasive than blatant discrimination and harassment in the workplace. Incivility is also, by definition, more insidious, taking hold in such an ambiguous and stealthy manner that it is difficult to identify, manage, and prevent. This speaks to the need for particular vigilance about issues of "general" incivility, which may not be so general after all. More research on the nature, causes, and consequences of this workplace phenomenon will bring us closer to being able to combat it effectively. And, to the delight of many, perhaps this ongoing work will ultimately add a crack to the proverbial glass ceiling.

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