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Christopher C. Rosen
University of Arkansas

Joel Koopman
University of Cincinnati

Allison S. Gabriel
University of Arizona

Russell E. Johnson
Michigan State University

Incivility at work—low intensity deviant behaviors with an ambiguous intent to harm—has been on the rise, yielding negative consequences for employees' well-being and companies' bottom-lines. Although examinations of incivility have gained momentum in organizational research, theory and empirical tests involving dynamic, within-person processes associated with this negative interpersonal behavior are limited. Drawing from ego depletion theory, we test how experiencing incivility precipitates instigating incivility toward others at work via reduced self-control. Using an experience sampling design across 2 work weeks, we found that experiencing incivility earlier in the day reduced one's levels of self-control (captured via a performance-based measure of self-control), which in turn resulted in increased instigated incivility later in the day. Moreover, organizational politics—a stable, environmental factor—strengthened the relation between experienced incivility and reduced self-control, whereas construal level—a stable, personal factor—weakened the relation between reduced self-control and instigated incivility. Combined, our results yield multiple theoretical, empirical, and practical implications for the study of incivility at work.

Keywords: incivility, ego depletion, construal level, organizational politics, experience sampling methodology

Workplace incivility refers to "low intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect" (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p. 457). Examples of incivility include discourteous and rude behaviors, such as making derogatory remarks, ignoring coworkers, and using a condescending tone (Blau & Andersson, 2005; Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001). Incivility is ubiquitous and on the rise in organizations, with estimates indicating that the experience of incivility has doubled over the past two decades (Porath & Pearson, 2013; Schilpzand, De Pater, & Erez, 2016). Moreover, incivility has a large financial impact on companies, with the annual cost of experiencing incivility estimated at $14,000 per employee (Porath & Pearson, 2010).

To date, the majority of research has investigated consequences of *experiencing* incivility, with the general focus on identifying effects of incivility on job attitudes and performance (Schilpzand et al., 2016). There is, however, increasing interest in understanding precursors to enactment of incivility (i.e., *instigated* incivility). Similar to other forms of deviance, researchers have suggested that incivility may be socially learned, such that it is observed and enacted by those who experience it (Bandura, 1973; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008; Robinson & O'Leary-Kelly, 1998). Supporting this perspective, and consistent with the notion of incivility spirals (i.e., when employees who experience incivility 'pay it forward' by subsequently instigating incivility themselves; Masuch, 1985), as well as contagion models which suggest that employees may "catch" negative behavior from others (Foulk, Woolum, & Erez, 2016), prior research has reported a positive relationship between experienced and instigated incivility (Meier & Gross, 2015). However, it is not clear *why* and *when* such effects occur.

A potentially useful way for understanding incivility is via a self-regulation framework, which describes how people regulate behavior so that it corresponds to work goals and norms (Lord, Diefendorff, Schmidt, & Hall, 2010). Instances of incivility can be thought of as self-regulatory failures because they deviate from

Christopher C. Rosen, Department of Management, University of Arkansas; Joel Koopman, Department of Management, University of Cincinnati; Allison S. Gabriel, Department of Management and Organizations, University of Arizona; Russell E. Johnson, Department of Management, Michigan State University.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Christopher C. Rosen, Sam M. Walton College of Business, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR 72701. Email: crosen@uark.edu

workplace norms for mutual respect (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). To avoid such failures, successful self-regulation requires self-control; that is, it requires that employees have sufficient attentional resources to maintain goal content in memory and block competing and irrelevant information (e.g., Johnson, Chang, & Lord, 2006). When attentional resources are diminished, it becomes more difficult for employees to act in a manner consistent with interpersonal norms (e.g., being patient) and suppress acts that deviate from such norms (e.g., making rude remarks; Christian & Ellis, 2011; Lin, Ma, & Johnson, 2016).

Consistent with this perspective, Meier and Gross (2015) suggested that self-regulatory capacities moderate effects of experienced incivility on instigated incivility. Supplemental analyses from their study indicated two important findings: (a) employees suffering from exhaustion before work were less capable of inhibiting urges to reciprocate incivility during the day, and (b) the strongest relationships between experienced and instigated incivility occurred during relatively short time frames (i.e., less than 4 hr). Unfortunately, these authors were unable to examine fluctuations in self-regulatory capacities during the day, nor could their model account for how experiencing incivility might deplete the attentional resources necessary for self-regulation. Thus, the self-regulatory mechanism that links experienced to instigated incivility remains unclear. In an effort to better understand when and why incivility occurs, we extend Meier and Gross' (2015) research by drawing from a specific theory of self-regulation in which self-control places a central role, namely ego depletion theory (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998). This theory is well-suited for our purpose because it speaks directly to the role of attentional resources for regulating behavior, and it recognizes the dynamic nature of self-control, specifying that attentional resources ebb and flow during the day.

The central aim of our study is, thus, to broaden theory on workplace incivility by developing and testing a conceptual model (see Figure 1) that explains how dynamic ego depletion processes link experienced incivility to instigated incivility, turning victims of incivility into perpetrators. Examining this process through the lens of ego depletion offers some key insights to the incivility literature. First, previous studies have focused almost exclusively on chronic forms of incivility that occur on average during unspecified periods of time, which overlooks the dynamic and temporal nature of incivility and its effects (Cole, Shipp, & Taylor, 2015). Consistent with ego depletion theory, we consider a dynamic process that explains why employees become more uncivil after experiencing incivility from others. Although there is value in understanding consequences of chronic incivility, incivility experiences in situ may in fact be more impactful given that targets of incivility are unlikely to understand or resolve such experiences in the short term (Schilpzand et al., 2016). Building on recent evidence that incivility impacts employees on shorter time cycles (e.g., Meier & Gross, 2015; Zhou, Yan, Che, & Meier, 2015), we used experience sampling methodology to (a) assess proximal effects of experienced incivility, (b) capture the dynamic nature of incivility as it unfolds across brief cycles, and (c) directly test momentary ebbs and flows in self-control as posited by ego depletion theory.

Second, prior research has focused primarily on affective consequences of incivility, such as negative mood, dissatisfaction, and emotional exhaustion (Lim et al., 2008; Penney & Spector, 2005). Unfortunately, cognitive consequences of incivility have received far less attention, despite the fact that the self-regulation of behavior involves both affective and cognitive processes (Lord et al., 2010). For example, the activation of rudeness-related concepts in semantic memory is a cognitive mechanism that helps explain how rudeness spreads from one person to another (Foulk et al., 2016). Based on ego depletion theory, a reduction in attentional resources may be another cognitive mechanism that explains how victims of incivility become instigators. It is important to note that self-control and attentional resources operate independent of affective states and processes (e.g., demanding activities may leave people feeling depleted, but not necessarily happy or sad; Baumeister et al., 1998). Thus, what is known about the affective consequences of incivility does not inform our understanding of its cognitive consequences.

A third contribution pertains to our use of a performance-based measure of attentional resources. Ego depletion theory posits that difficult and/or stressful experiences reduce one's available attentional resources. Assessing depletion in field settings is difficult and, to date, organizational scholars (e.g., Christian, Eisenkraft, & Kapadia, 2015; Johnson, Lanaj, & Barnes, 2014; Lanaj, Johnson, & Barnes, 2014) have captured available resources subjectively via self-reports of mental fatigue or self-control. However, self-reports may be biased by stable (e.g., personality) and transient (e.g., mood) factors (Uhlmann et al., 2012), and people are not always accurate at judging their capabilities (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). The performance-based assessment used in the current study—the

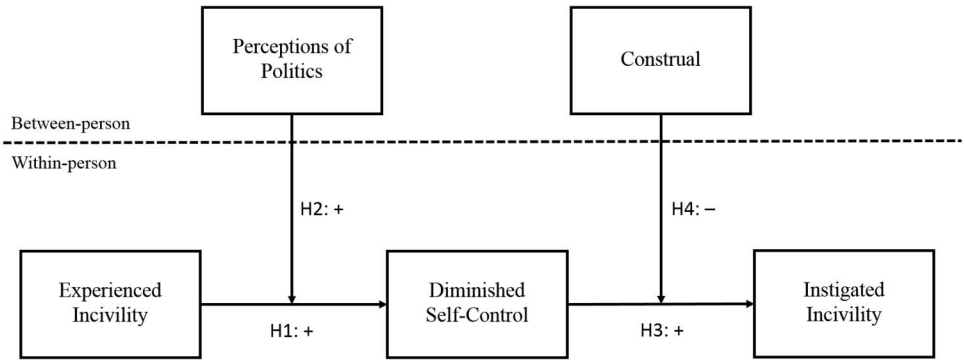

Figure 1. Theoretical model.

Stroop test (Stroop, 1935)—is a more direct measure of attentional resources and is less susceptible to perceptual biases.

Lastly, our framework highlights potentially important environmental and personal factors that may amplify the causes (i.e., workplace politics) and attenuate the consequences (i.e., construal level) of diminished attentional resources. As shown in Figure 1, we theorize and test whether failures in self-control that prompt incivility are more likely in more ambiguous and uncertain environments (i.e., when politics are high) and for employees who are less sensitive to the self-referenced meaning of their actions (i.e., those with a low construal level). If so, then managing perceptions of politics and eliciting a higher construal level are actionable steps that can be taken to counteract depletion and contagion effects of incivility.

Background, Theory, and Hypotheses

Workplace Incivility

Workplace incivility overlaps with other negative interpersonal behaviors, such as abusive supervision, counterproductive work behavior, and bullying (Hershcovis, 2011). Nonetheless, incivility is distinguishable from other forms of mistreatment for a few reasons. First, incivility is relatively low in intensity. For example, compared with the interpersonal deviance dimension of counterproductive work behavior and bullying, incivility does not involve openly hostile behavior, threats, or sabotage (Spector & Fox, 2005). As such, incivility is more benign and does not warrant the same legal attention or formal sanctions as other forms of mistreatment (Lim et al., 2008). Yet, it is a relatively frequent, low-intensity negative behavior that has a substantial impact on employees (Andersson & Pearson, 1999).

Second, although other forms of mistreatment (e.g., abusive supervision) focus on interactions with those in positions of authority (e.g., supervisors), incivility is not limited to such interactions and may emanate from coworkers (Schilpzand et al., 2016). Thus, incivility is not restricted to contexts where there is a power difference between the actor and the target, which may affect how targets perceive and interpret threats around incivility (Meier & Gross, 2015; Spector & Fox, 2005). Given that we examine how incivility begets incivility within a short time-frame, we focus on coworker incivility because employees tend to have a greater number of daily interactions with coworkers relative to supervisors.

Finally, the intent of workplace incivility is ambiguous, whereas other forms of mistreatment are acts of aggression with clear intent to harm the target (Blau & Andersson, 2005). Thus, actors can easily deny harmful intent or attribute it to a misunderstanding on the part of a target (Spector & Fox, 2005). This further explains why incivility might be more commonplace than other negative behaviors, given that actors generally do not have to accept, or admit, responsibility for uncivil acts.

In sum, there is some overlap among different organizational mistreatment constructs, but there are important distinctions that have implications for how targets experience incivility relative to more overt forms of misconduct. In addition, because incivility (a) reflects a mild form of mistreatment that is likely to go unpunished, (b) is not limited to interactions with those in authority positions, and (c) is easily denied and therefore excused, it occurs more frequently than other forms of mistreatment and, thus, has the potential to create a noxious social environment (Lim et al., 2008). Supporting this, accumulating research (e.g., Cortina et al., 2001; Lim & Cortina, 2005; Penney & Spector, 2005) indicates that incivility is widespread and, regardless of its source (e.g., coworker or supervisor), is linked to a variety of strains (e.g., emotional exhaustion, ill health) and has detrimental relations with desirable work attitudes and performance behaviors.

Despite the abundance of incivility research, relatively less is known about why employees instigate incivility. A popular theory for explaining how incivility comes to permeate organizations is Andersson and Pearson's (1999) social interactionist framework, which suggests that incivility begets incivility. That is, incivility has the potential to spread from perpetrators to targets who 'pay it forward' by being uncivil toward others, which Foulk et al. (2016) recently likened to a viral contagion process. Although there is mounting evidence indicating that incivility may crossover from one coworker to another, the veracity of the social interactionist framework has not been tested (Schilpzand et al., 2016). For example, studies considering antecedents of instigated incivility (e.g., Cortina et al., 2001; Meier, Gross, Spector, & Semmer, 2013) have largely focused on one-time interactions between individuals, without considering mechanisms that explain why individuals enact incivility after being the target of such acts (Schilpzand et al., 2016). As mentioned earlier, self-regulation theories in general and ego depletion theory in particular suggest that one such cognitive mechanism may be self-control, given that experienced incivility functions as a demand that requires attentional resources to make sense of and cope with the experience (Porath & Erez, 2007). Thus, owing to its focus on how demands consume attentional resources and how such resources fuel self-control, we draw from ego depletion theory to help explain crossover effects of incivility from one employee to another.

Experienced Incivility and Ego Depletion

Ego depletion theory suggests that people have limited resources (e.g., attention, energy) that are used to regulate behavior (Baumeister et al., 1998). These resources sustain executive functioning that enable people to move toward goal states while suppressing impulses. According to ego depletion theory (and other resource allocation theories; e.g., Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989), whenever people engage in activities requiring high degrees of self-control (e.g., careful focus, suppressing irrelevant thoughts), attentional resources are consumed, thus diminishing their capacity for attention and self-control on ensuing activities (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007). When attentional resources are depleted, it is difficult for people to regulate behavior to be consistent with goals and norms (e.g., exerting effort, being courteous) and quell opposing urges (e.g., attending to off-task demands, expressing annoyance; Lin et al., 2016).

Experienced incivility likely diminishes self-control because employees must expend attentional resources to (a) understand intentions of perpetrators, (b) formulate and inhibit responses, and (c) manage frustration and emotional burdens as the recipients of incivility. Though prior research has not directly evaluated changes in self-control or attentional resources as a function of incivility, it provides indirect evidence that episodic exposure to incivility is positively associated with symptoms of reduced atten-

tion and willpower (e.g., burnout; Nicholson & Griffin, 2015; Taylor, Bedeian, Cole, & Zhang, in press; Zhou et al., 2015). Based on theory and relevant empirical findings, we expect that, on a daily basis, being the target of incivility will be associated with decreased self-control because targets of incivility must allocate attentional resources to make sense of and regulate responses to incivility.

Hypothesis 1: On a daily basis, experiencing incivility at work will be positively related to a decrease in self-control.

Although attentional resources are consumed by the cognitively demanding activity of deciphering the reasons for experienced incivility and controlling any spontaneous reactions that stem from it, such information processing does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, cognitive demands associated with understanding experienced incivility are influenced by the broader social context in which it occurs. According to ego depletion theory, greater self-control and attentional resources are needed in complex and ambiguous social environments, such as ones in which the activities of others are less predictable, motives are obscured or hidden, and intentionality is difficult to discern (Baumeister et al., 2007). These qualities exemplify social environments at work that are labeled as being highly political.

Organizational politics refers to the extent to which the work environment is typified by informal and unsanctioned employee activities aimed at promoting self-interests without concern for the welfare of others (Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009). In political environments, motives guiding behavior are less clear (e.g., impression management and other subtle influence tactics are used as a means of getting ahead), behaviors satisfy self-interests at the expense of others, and power bases are in a state of flux (Hall, Hochwarter, Ferris, & Bowen, 2004). As a result, there is more uncertainty surrounding interpersonal relationships in political environments (Rosen, Ferris, Brown, Chen, & Yan, 2014). Given that self-regulation is more depleting in uncertain and uncontrollable environments (Baumeister et al., 2007), organizational politics likely play a key role in determining the extent to which experienced incivility is depleting.

When individuals encounter an interpersonal stressor like incivility, they appraisal the extent to which it is relevant, challenging, and controllable (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It can then be determined whether the stressor is a threat to well-being and an appropriate response can be enacted. This attributional information processing places onerous demands on attentional resources, as individuals must focus on identifying, evaluating, and formulating responses to complex social information (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Because incivility has ambiguous intent, it is difficult to assess the extent to which it presents a threat to the self. Employees tend to respond to such ambiguity by drawing on information from the broader work environment to help them understand the uncertainty they encounter during social interactions (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Thus, when employees experience incivility, they direct attention to the social context in which relationships are embedded to search for cues that can help them understand motives of perpetrators (Weick, 1995). Organizational politics infuse uncertainty and instability into the social environment (Chang et al., 2009), which increased the resources needed to appraise incivility, thereby further diminishing self-control.

Moreover, the complex interpersonal dynamics that characterize political environments make it more difficult to determine which responses to incivility will be appropriate and increase the risks associated with responding inappropriately. For example, going along to get along and acquiescing to a politically connected rival may be rewarded in more political environments, whereas confronting a member of a powerful coalition or gossiping about a coworker's actions with colleagues may be punished and have long-term consequences (e.g., being ostracized by one's work group). Thus, in more political work environments, targets of incivility experience increased demands on their attentional resources to process information. More specifically, not only must these individuals exert more caution when formulating and managing reactions to perpetrators, but they must also consider a broader range of social consequences that might result (e.g., the perpetrator's ties to powerful others and/or membership in an influential coalition might have negative implications for those who confront them), both of which demand greater self-control during information processing. For the reasons above, organizational politics likely increase the amount of attentional resources that employees must expend to unravel the meaning of uncivil acts that they experience, thereby strengthening the relationship between experienced incivility and diminished self-control.

Hypothesis 2: The daily positive relation of experiencing incivility with diminished self-control will be stronger for employees who perceive high (vs. low) levels of politics.

Ego Depletion and Instigated Incivility

Assuming that experiencing incivility diminishes attentional resources (especially when organizational politics are high), targets will be more likely to succumb to instigating incivility toward others due to increased difficulties in regulating behavior to be consistent with interpersonal norms. Indeed, it has been found that sufficient attentional resources are needed to maintain positive interpersonal relations, which involves suppressing incivility (Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994). In interpersonal contexts, diminished self-control often manifests as deviant and impulsive behaviors such as unethical and aggressive acts (DeWall, Baumeister, Stillman, & Gailliot, 2007; Lin et al., 2016). Unlike unethical and aggressive behavior though, incivility has more innocuous and less salient short-term consequences. As such, inhibiting incivility may receive lower priority than other self-regulatory activities (e.g., exerting effort on required job tasks), particularly when such acts are directed toward individuals who do not have power over the perpetrator (e.g., coworkers). Moreover, because individuals are motivated to avoid complete exhaustion of attentional resources (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007), depleted employees may be less likely to allocate resources to inhibit uncivil behaviors as a means of preserving whatever self-control remains. Thus, when opportunities for incivility arise, we theorize that reduced self-control will increase employees' likelihood of instigating incivility.

Hypothesis 3: On a daily basis, experiencing decreased self-control will be positively related to an increase in instigated incivility.

Although incivility is more likely to manifest when attentional resources are depleted (Christian & Ellis, 2011), ego depletion

theory stipulates that depletion-based effects can be counteracted if people are sufficiently motivated to overcome them (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Muraven, Shmueli, & Burkley, 2006). In general, people are motivated to hold favorable self-views (Leary, 2007) and have positive interactions and relations with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Given that exhibiting incivility damages relationships and is inconsistent with a positive self-concept, exhibiting it may produce uncomfortable states of dissonance that employees are motivated to avoid. Whether or not they are sensitive to the threats that incivility poses to their self-concept, though, requires that employees are attuned to the self-referenced meaning of their behavior. Construal level (Trope & Liberman, 2010) may therefore play a role because it shapes how people think about their behavior and the meaning they ascribe to it.

Research on behavior identification (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989) and construal level (Trope & Liberman, 2010) finds that people differ in whether they mentally construe actions in a concrete or abstract manner. Some people construe actions concretely, causing them to see behaviors as discrete, detail-rich representations that emphasize subordinate, incidental features. Concrete construals concern how to do the action and the details of the action (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989). For example, concrete construals of one's job might include "completing paperwork" and "responding to client emails." Alternatively, other people construe actions in an abstract manner, seeing their behaviors as decontextualized, detail-poor representations that capture superordinate, central features. Abstract construals emphasize why the action is performed, the motives behind the action, and the meaning of the action (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989). Example abstract construals of one's job include "learning new skills" and "building relationships with clients." Employees who hold abstract construals consider the bigger picture by thinking about the deeper meaning of behavior and what it says about their character, whereas behavior has little or no ramifications for the self-concept of those who hold concrete construals (Conway & Peetz, 2012). Consistent with this idea, Freitas, Langsam, Clark, and Moeller (2008) found that people who construe actions in abstract (vs. concrete) terms are more likely to make decisions that are aligned with the values and goals that define their desired self-concept.

Of direct relevance to the present study, construal level impacts the extent to which people are able to control their behavior (Fujita, Trope, Liberman, & Levin-Sagi, 2006). Take, for example, dieters with higher level goals like "being healthy" and "losing weight." When faced with the option of eating kale versus chocolate, those with abstract construals think about the choice in terms of these high-level goals (e.g., "being healthy"), whereas those with concrete construals focus on subordinate details (e.g., taste and aroma). It is not surprising that dieters who focus on subordinate details are more likely to succumb to the temptation to eat chocolate (Fujita & Han, 2009). We expect a similar pattern with respect to incivility. When resources are depleted, people find it more difficult to act in ways that are consistent with interpersonal norms, instead succumbing to uncivil impulses (DeWall et al., 2007). People with concrete self-construals show this depletion effect, but not those with abstract construals (Schmeichel & Vohs, 2009). Having an abstract construal motivates people to overcome effects of ego depletion because high-level values and goals, including social ones like "build positive relationships," are salient and cause them to act accordingly. In line with ego depletion and construal level theories (Fujita & Carnevale, 2012), the effect of depletion on subsequent incivility should be weaker when employees have a high/abstract (vs. low/concrete) construal level.

> *Hypothesis 4:* The daily positive relation of diminished self-control with instigated incivility will be weaker for employees who have a high (vs. low) construal level.

Our hypotheses imply that the strength of the mediated relationship between experienced and instigated incivility is influenced by workplace politics and construal level. Regarding politics, we posit that high levels enhance the positive relation of experienced incivility with diminished self-control, such that employees expend more resources dealing with incivility in highly political contexts. Regarding construal level, a high construal level motivates employees to overcome the effects of diminished self-control and refrain from exhibiting incivility. These predictions suggest a moderated mediation model, whereby politics and construal level moderate the indirect effects of experienced incivility on instigated incivility. Thus, we hypothesize:

> *Hypothesis 5:* The indirect effect of experienced incivility on instigated incivility via diminished self-control will be stronger for employees who (a) perceive high (vs. low) levels of politics, and (b) have a low (vs. high) level of construal.

Method

Sample and Procedure

The data presented in this article were part of a broader data collection effort. Data collection occurred in two phases. During the first phase, we sent a recruitment e-mail to employees of a Midwestern university in the United States that contained a description of the study and a link to an online sign-up survey. The sign-up survey contained the informed consent, the between-persons moderators (i.e., perceptions of politics, construal level), and demographics. Employees were told during this first phase that they would receive up to $75 for their participation. From this initial e-mail, 81 employees signed up. Additionally, we allowed employees to forward the recruitment e-mail to friends who may also be interested in participating. Twenty-six additional participants were recruited in this manner.[1]

The 107 employees who completed phase one were invited to begin phase two, which consisted of three email surveys each day for 10 consecutive workdays. Participants completed the Time 1 survey on average at 10:32 a.m. This survey contained a measure of self-control, which served as a control variable to model change. The Time 2 survey was sent several hours later and was completed on average at 1:32 PM. This survey contained a measure of experienced incivility, instigated incivility (used as a control to model change), and the self-control mediator variable. The Time 3 survey was completed on average at 3:38 PM. This survey contained the instigated incivility outcome variable, as well as a corresponding assessment of experienced incivility to be used as a

[1] We examined whether the participants recruited via the snowball method differed from the other participants on the focal variables in our model via a series of *t* tests. No significant differences emerged.

control to rule out alternative explanations associated with incivility enactment (i.e., retaliating in response to experiencing incivility). On average, the time elapsed between the first and second surveys was 3 hr and 36 min, and 2 hr and 11 min between the second and third surveys. Although lab studies typically examine consequences of ego depletion seconds or minutes after exertions of self-control, field studies indicate that the effects of diminished self-control can occur on hourly and daily cycles (Johnson et al., 2014; Lanaj et al., 2014). Thus, the 2–3 hour intervals between the daily surveys are reasonable.

Ten employees did not complete the daily portion of the study. Of the remaining 97 employees, we retained data only for those who completed all three surveys for at least three days (which resulted in the removal of another 10 employees). In addition, because we used a reaction time (RT) measure of self-control, we only included participants who used a computer with a traditional mouse to complete the survey. This resulted in a final sample 70 individuals who provided 482 full day-level data points (all three surveys on a given day) out of a possible 700 (a 69% response rate). Employees worked in a variety of organizations (e.g., universities, local government, and medical offices). The average age of participants was 44.5 years (SD = 10.7), with 84.3% being female and 87.1% being Caucasian. Employees worked on average 41.1 hr per week (SD = 6.1) and interacted with coworkers on average 27.3 hr per week (SD = 13.0).

Daily Within-Person Measures

Self-control. Self-control was assessed using the Stroop test (Stroop, 1935), a standard measure of ego depletion (Gailliot et al., 2007; Job, Dweck, & Walton, 2010). Ego depletion is a state of diminished regulatory resources, which can range from reduced cognitive attention to reduced physiological energy. We focused on a cognitive resource (i.e., attention) in the current study because there is debate regarding the physiological mechanism of depletion (Beedie & Lane, 2012). For the Stroop test, individuals are presented with a word that signifies a color (e.g., blue), and the letters of the word are in a color (e.g., black font). Participants are instructed to report the color of the word font and *not* the color that is spelled out. For example, if the word "blue" was presented and the letter font was black, the correct answer would be "black." By crossing colors with words signifying those colors, we can estimate self-control by measuring an individual's RT because identifying the color of the word, and not the word itself, requires self-control (i.e., people must suppress the meaning of the word; (Gailliot, Schmeichel, & Baumeister, 2006). Responses to words are relatively automatic, whereas responses to colors require attention and effort (Engle, 2002; Macleod, 1991). When people have diminished self-control, it takes longer to suppress the meaning of the word (Gailliot et al., 2006).

We used four colors (black, blue, green, orange) and fully crossed colors/words, resulting in 16 items randomly presented during the Time 1 and 2 surveys.[2, 3] Participants were instructed to quickly select the color presented and not the word itself. The survey automatically advanced once a selection was made and recorded time elapsed from when the page loaded to when the selection was made. Diminished self-control was operationalized as average RT on the 16 items, such that longer RTs reflect lower self-control. Because we used a within-person design and centered at the person's mean, between-persons differences in RTs are not a concern. Thus, each person's average RT served as his or her own referent.

Experienced incivility. Participants reported their experienced incivility by reflecting on their workday since they completed the previous survey during the Time 2 and Time 3 surveys. (e.g., when completing the Time 3 survey, participants were instructed to reflect on events that had occurred since completing the Time 2 survey). Participants indicated their agreement (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*) with four statements from Lim and Cortina (2005). An example item is "In the time since I completed the last survey, one or more of my coworkers has put me down or been condescending to me." Coefficient alphas averaged across days was .93 for the Time 2 survey and .94 for the Time 3 survey.

Instigated incivility. Participants were also instructed to reflect on their workday and complete measures of instigated incivility at Time 2 and Time 3. Participants indicated their agreement (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*) with the same 4 items from Lim and Cortina (2005), with wording changes to reflect instigation as opposed to experience. An example item is "In the time since I completed the last survey, I have put one or more of my coworkers down or acted condescendingly toward them." Coefficient alpha averaged across days for the Time 2 survey was .87 and .91 for the Time 3 survey.

Between-Persons Measures

Perceptions of politics. We measured perceptions of politics in the workplace using 6 items (α = .89) developed by Hochwarter, Kacmar, Perrewe, and Johnson (2003). Participants indicated their agreement (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*) with statements such as whether their coworkers "do what is best for them, not what is best for the organization."

Construal level. We measured construal level using the 25-item Behavioral Identification Form (α = .89) developed by Vallacher and Wegner (1989). This measure consists of a series of questions that ask participants how they would describe a prompted behavior. For example, participants indicated how they would describe the behavior "resisting temptation" by choosing one of two options: "saying no" (low construal level) or "showing moral courage" (high construal level). Responses were coded "1" for low construal and "2" for high construal, and an overall score (which ranged from 1.04 to 2) was created by averaging all 25 items.

[2] We chose bright, vibrant hues for these colors in order to ensure that they were sufficiently distinguishable from each other (Macleod, 1991). In case any participants were colorblind (e.g., red/green or blue/yellow) we used only one color from each pair (i.e., green and blue).

[3] Four of the items presented to participants were congruent (the word and the font color were the same) and the other 12 were incongruent (the word and the font color were different). This presentation strategy is in line with observations by both Macleod (1991) and Engle (2002) that, by presenting participants with both congruent and incongruent words, participants are required to focus their attention on the task instead of relying on alternative strategies (e.g., ignoring the word altogether) that simplify cognitive demands.

Analytic Approach

Because of the nested nature of our data (i.e., events nested within individuals), we utilized multilevel path analysis in Mplus 7.11 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012). As a first test, we verified that there was sufficient within-person variability to support multilevel analyses (see Table 1). We also performed a multilevel confirmatory factor analysis on the variables in our model. To demonstrate the uniqueness of experienced and instigated incivility, at the within-person level (Level 1) we included these variables for both Time 2 and Time 3, and at the between-persons level (Level 2) we included politics perceptions; self-control (Level 1) and construal level (Level 2) were excluded because they are not Likert scales. Results indicated acceptable model fit, $\chi^2(107) = 174.11$, comparative fit index = .94, root-mean-square error of approximation = .04, standardized root-mean-square residual = .05.

To test moderated mediation, we utilized parametric bootstrapping following recommendations from Preacher, Zyphur, and Zhang (2010). Scholars recommend including the magnitude of the covariance between the random slopes when calculating indirect effects in multilevel models (e.g., Kenny, Korchmaros, & Bolger, 2003). However, Tofighi, West, and MacKinnon (2013) recently suggested that this parameter be omitted if covariation of these slopes is not significant. In our model, this covariance was equal to .00 and nonsignificant; thus, we did not consider it as influencing the magnitude of the indirect effect. For moderated mediation, the indirect effect was calculated as being conditional on the strength of the moderator of each path. We utilized a Monte Carlo method with 20,000 replications to create bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs) for these effects (e.g., Selig & Preacher, 2008). To interpret our results, we grand-mean centered the cross-level moderators and we used random effects with group-mean centering for the Level 1 variables (Bliese, 2000; Enders & Tofighi, 2007). To estimate variance accounted for (LaHuis, Hartman, Hakoyama, & Clark, 2014) in our mediator and dependent variable, we followed Snijders and Bosker (1994) and compared the change in total and residual variance between the null and final models for these variables. We probed our moderation results by testing the simple slopes using a web utility provided by Preacher, Curran, and Bauer (2006).

We employed several controls in our analyses. First, we included prior assessments of self-control and instigated incivility as predictors of each endogenous variable. Doing so enabled us to eliminate prior levels of these variables as alternative explanations for our results and to interpret these variables as representing change in their level, which is common in within-person studies (e.g., Gabriel, Diefendorff, & Erickson, 2011; Lanaj, Johnson, & Lee, 2016; Scott & Barnes, 2011). Second, we controlled for a measure of experienced incivility as a predictor of our dependent variable instigated incivility measured at the same time. Doing so clarifies that instigated incivility is a function of diminished self-control stemming from *prior* experienced incivility, and not *concurrently* experienced incivility. In addition, we controlled for linear and cyclical variation in our prediction of diminished self-control and instigated incivility. Beal and colleagues (e.g., Beal & Ghandour, 2011) have argued that individuals experience linear and cyclical fluctuations in their daily states that may explain observed daily variations. Accordingly, we controlled for the effects of day of the week as a linear growth trend as well as the sine and cosine for day (with the period equal to one work week; Trougakos, Hideg, Cheng, & Beal, 2014). These effects were modeled with random effects to account for unique individual variation (Beal & Ghandour, 2011). Finally, we controlled for gender given its ties to both incivility (e.g., Cortina et al., 2001; Reio & Ghosh, 2009) and politics (Ferris et al., 1996). It is important to note that our results hold with or without controls included. We chose to retain them as a more conservative test of our hypotheses (Spector & Brannick, 2011).

Table 1
Percentage of Within-Individual and Between-Individuals Variance Among Daily Variables

Construct	Within-individual variance (e^2)	Between-individuals variance (r^2)	% of within-individual variance
Diminished self-control (T1)	.09	.05	64%
Diminished self-control (T2)	.30	.08	79%
Experienced incivility (T2)	.21	.30	41%
Experienced incivility (T3)	.16	.37	30%
Instigated incivility (T2)	.18	.25	42%
Instigated incivility (T3)	.18	.23	44%

Note. The percentage of variance within-individuals was calculated as $e^2/(e^2 + r^2)$. Diminished self-control (T1; Time 1) and instigated incivility (T2; Time 2) were used as control variables to model change in our focal constructs.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are in Table 2. Results from our multilevel path analysis are in Table 3. We first considered the direct effect of experienced incivility on diminished self-control (Hypothesis 1) and the interactive effect of experienced incivility and perceptions of politics, such that the relationship between experienced incivility and diminished self-control would be stronger when politics perceptions were higher (Hypothesis 2). Hypothesis 1 was not supported ($\gamma = .01$, *ns*); however, Hypothesis 2 was ($\gamma = .09$, $p < .05$).[4] As shown in Figure 2, experienced incivility was a positive predictor of diminished self-control when politics perceptions were higher (simple slope: $\gamma = .08$, $SE = .04$, $p < .05$), and not when politics perceptions were lower (simple slope: $\gamma = -.06$, $SE = .04$, *ns*). Thus, although we did not observe a direct relation of experienced incivility on self-control (Hypothesis 1), this effect did occur for employees who perceived higher levels of politics at work (Hypothesis 2).

Next, we considered whether diminished self-control predicted subsequent instigated incivility (Hypothesis 3). We found a significant effect ($\gamma = .06$, $p < .05$), suggesting that as self-control diminished, employees were more likely to instigate incivility toward others. Moreover, we considered whether construal level interacted with diminished self-control, such that the relation of diminished self-control with instigated incivility would be stronger

[4] Because we tested our hypotheses using a path analysis, all results come from a model that includes all variables (i.e., controls, moderators, and primary study variables). However, a reviewer suggested that we confirm our main effect findings by running a reduced model that excludes the effects of the moderators. We conducted this analysis, and our conclusions for Hypotheses 1 and 2 remained consistent with the results presented in this paper.

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Level and variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Level 1										
1. Diminished self-control (T1)	1.54	.28								
2. Diminished self-control (T2)	1.58	.51	.04							
3. Experienced incivility (T2)	1.56	.43	.05	.07	(.93)					
4. Experienced incivility (T3)	1.56	.37	−.01	.02	.24*	(.94)				
5. Instigated incivility (T2)	1.53	.39	.05	.10*	.41*	.07	(.87)			
6. Instigated incivility (T3)	1.48	.39	.04	.04	.20*	.24*	.18*	(.91)		
Level 2										
7. Perceptions of politics	3.10	.83	.06	.05	.41*	.38*	.32*	.30*	(.89)	
8. Construal level	1.70	.23	.09	.11	−.10	−.02	−.20	−.12	−.22	(.89)

Note. Level 1 $n = 482$; Level 2 $n = 70$. Correlations for the Level 1 variables are group-mean centered relationships among the daily variables. For Level 2 correlations, all Level 1 variables were aggregated to provide estimates of between-individual relationships. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; T3 = Time 3.
* $p < .05$.

when construal level was lower versus higher (Hypothesis 4). This cross-level interaction was significant ($\gamma = -.19$, $p < .05$). As shown in Figure 3, when one's construal level was lower, the relation of diminished self-control with instigated incivility was stronger (simple slope: $\gamma = .10$, $SE = .02$, $p < .05$) compared with when construal level was higher (simple slope: $\gamma = .01$, $SE = .01$, *ns*).

Given our significant cross-level interactions, we tested incremental explanatory power by examining the change in log-likelihood fit indices with and without inclusion of the cross-level moderators using a Satorra and Bentler (2001) scaled difference test. Specifically, the log-likelihood values are adjusted based on a scaling factor provided by the multilevel path analysis, and the difference in these values was tested on a chi-square distribution. Results indicate that model fit improved with the inclusion of our two cross-level moderators, $\Delta LL_{(4)} = 11$, $p < .05$.

Finally, to Test Hypothesis 5, we calculated the conditional indirect effects for the mediated relationship of experienced incivility with instigated incivility at high and low values of each moderator (+/−1 *SD*), with politics perceptions occurring in the first stage of mediation, and construal occurring in the second stage (Edwards & Lambert, 2007). Supporting Hypothesis 5, the

Table 3
Results From Multilevel Path Analysis

	Diminished self-control (Time 2)			Instigated incivility (Time 3)		
Predictors	γ	*SE*	*t*	γ	*SE*	*t*
Between levels						
Intercept	1.79	.31	5.73*	1.44	.31	4.62*
Perceptions of politics	.03	.04	0.73			
Construal level				.04	.26	0.16
Interaction	.09	.03	2.59*	−.19	.05	−4.11*
Gender	−.05	.15	−0.33	−.04	.16	−0.27
Residual variance	.08	.02	3.37*	.24	.04	5.83*
Within level						
Diminished self-control (T1)	.03	.09	0.36	.18	.18	1.00
Day	−.04	.02	−1.69	.01	.02	0.43
Sine	.00	.03	.04	−.01	.04	−0.27
Cosine	−.02	.04	−0.45	.01	.03	0.34
Instigated incivility (T2)	.12	.07	1.76	.05	.07	0.74
Experienced incivility (T2)	.01	.03	0.42	.04	.07	0.61
Diminished self-control (T2)				.06	.02	3.75*
Experienced incivility (T3)				.23	.10	2.19*
Residual variance	.28	.18	1.61	.09	.02	3.74*

Note. Level 1 $n = 482$; Level 2 $n = 70$. Variables in italics represent our focal study variables; non-italicized variables are controls. Estimates reflect unstandardized coefficients. The term *interaction* reflects the parameter for each cross-level moderation hypothesis (i.e., Experienced Incivility × Perceptions of Politics predicting diminished self-control and Diminished Self-Control × Construal Level predicting instigated incivility). The model predicting diminished self-control explained 7% of the within-person variance in that variable. The model predicting instigated incivility explained 47% of the within-person variance in that variable (calculated as the percent change in the total and residual within-individual variance; LaHuis et al., 2014). T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; T3 = Time 3.
* $p < .05$.

indirect effect between experienced incivility and instigated incivility was .005 at high levels of politics perceptions and the 95% CI excluded zero [.001, .011], whereas the indirect effect was −.003 at low levels, and the 95% CI included zero [−.009, .001]; the difference between these two indirect effects was significant (95% CI [.001, .015]). Similarly, at high levels of politics perceptions, the indirect effect between experienced incivility and instigated incivility was .008 for low levels of construal and the 95% CI excluded zero [.002, .020], whereas the indirect effect was .001 at high levels and the 95% CI included zero [.000, .003]; these indirect effects were also significantly different from one another (95% CI [−.019, −.001].[5]

Supplemental Analyses

According to ego depletion theory (Baumeister et al., 1998), the effects of diminished self-control should be distinguished from the effects of negative mood. Thus, we conducted an additional analysis controlling for two common measures of negative mood (i.e., a 9-item measure of negative affect [example items include "sluggish" and "bored;" $\alpha = .89$] and a 3-item measure of emotional exhaustion [e.g., "I feel emotionally drained;" $\alpha = .94$]). Negative affect and emotional exhaustion were measured concurrently with self-control at Time 2 and were included as predictors of self-control, as well as instigated incivility. Their inclusion did not affect model results, indicating support for the mediating effect of self-control even after controlling for these potential alternative mechanisms, thus allowing us to differentiate the effects of self-control from those of negative mood and emotional exhaustion in our model.

Another mechanism that may account for the spread of incivility is social learning (Bandura, 1973). To the extent that incivility is rewarded, or is at least not punished, such behavior will be vicariously reinforced in those who observe it. Although we did not formally assess social learning, we ran a supplementary analysis involving a relevant variable: collective identity. Employees with a strong collective identity internalize the behaviors of other group members and regulate behavior around group values and norms (Johnson & Saboe, 2011); therefore, they should be particularly susceptible to social learning. To partially rule out a social learning explanation, we reran our analyses controlling for the effects of collective identity. None of our results changed, and collective identity was not significant.

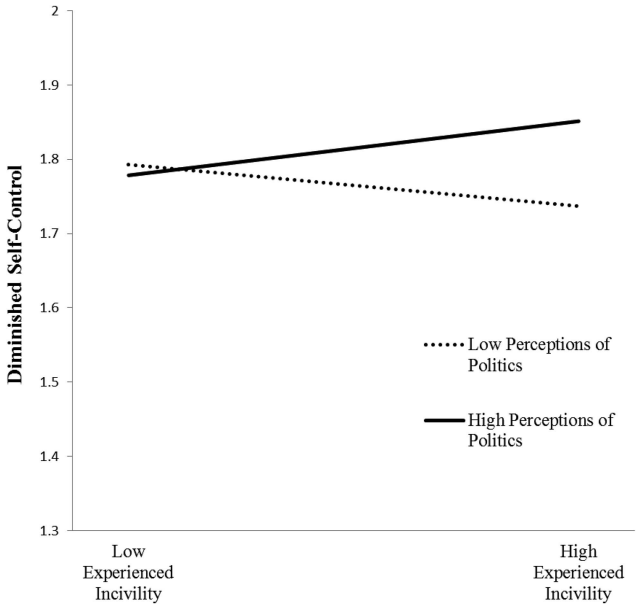

Figure 2. Cross-level moderating effect of perceptions of politics on the experienced incivility and diminished self-control relationships.

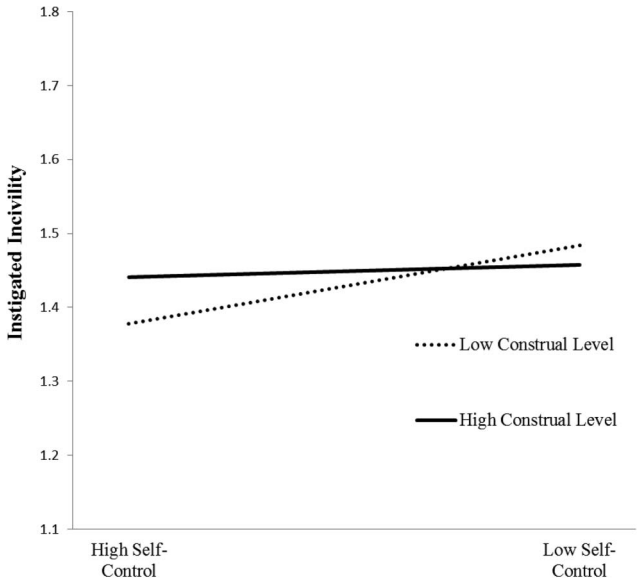

Figure 3. Cross-level moderating effect of construal level on the diminished self-control and instigated incivility relationship

Another consideration is the potential for a learning effect to occur which, if it were to occur with our measure of self-control, it would likely be a between-individuals difference alleviated by our use of group-mean centering with the daily variables. However, if learning were to occur, then results on the daily Stoop test should be negatively associated with the day of the study (i.e., as the day of the study increases [with 1 = Day 1 of participation and 10 = Day 10 of participation], then response time on the Stroop test should decrease). When modeling this factor, day of the study was not a significant predictor of the Stoop test, and this variable was not related to instigated incivility and its inclusion did not affect model results.

Moreover, although our theory specifies that experienced incivility is likely to influence subsequent instigated incivility through diminished self-control, our data structure enabled us to test a model wherein we reversed the causality of our measures (i.e., instigated incivility as the independent variable influencing subsequent experienced incivility through diminished self-control).

[5] Another way of considering our moderated mediation relationship would be to compute a single indirect effect that is conditional on high perceptions of politics and low construal level. This indirect effect was .008, and the CI for this indirect effect excludes zero (95% CI [.002, .020]). Moreover, this indirect effect was significantly different from effects at the other combinations of politics perceptions and construal level (Preacher et al., 2010). Taken together, these results further support Hypothesis 5.

The results of this analysis were not as compelling as our hypothesized model. More specifically, instigated incivility did not have a main effect relationship with diminished self-control, although perceptions of politics did moderate this relationship ($\gamma = .20$, $p < .05$). However, diminished self-control was not associated with experienced incivility ($\gamma = .00$, *ns*), and construal level did not moderate this relationship ($\gamma = .07$, *ns*). Given these results, our data appears to provide stronger support for our theoretically derived model. Relatedly, although our theory specifies perceptions of politics as a first-stage moderator and construal level as a second-stage moderator, we conducted an analysis wherein both perceptions of politics and construal level were modeled as moderators of both paths. Neither of these new paths were significant.

Finally, we probed into the distribution of our incivility variables. Incivility is a relatively low-base rate phenomenon and this is likely magnified given the short duration between our assessments (2–3 hr). The result of this is a relatively low mean for incivility and a positive skew. On the one hand, if our incivility measures exhibit such skew, the descriptive statistics for these variables are in line with those reported in other studies of incivility and similarly "negative" constructs (e.g., Chen et al., 2013; Tepper, Mitchell, Haggard, Kwan, & Park, 2015). Furthermore, regression-based analyses conducted using maximum-likelihood estimation tend to be relatively robust to deviations from normality. On the other hand, if our results hold even after correcting for this skew, then this can provide increased confidence not only in our findings, but also other studies with similarly skewed variables. To correct for this skew, we reran our model using the natural logarithm of our incivility variables (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). Using these alternative versions of our incivility variables did not affect model results.

Discussion

Drawing from ego depletion theory, we proposed and tested a model in which experiencing incivility reduced employees' self-control, putting them at risk for instigating incivility toward others due to their diminished capacity to act in accordance with interpersonal norms. Being the victim of incivility leaves employees depleted because they must expend energy to understand why they were targeted and how to respond. Such sensemaking is made more complex in highly political environments, in which intentions and motives of others are less clear; as such, organizational politics strengthened the relation of experienced incivility with diminished self-control. However, employees can still counteract diminished self-control if they are sufficiently motivated. To wit, we found that employees who think about the self-referenced meaning of behavior were less likely to exhibit incivility, despite fewer attentional resources.

Theoretical Implications

Our study broadens incivility theory and research by further advancing a within-person perspective. To date, the majority of work has explored between-persons differences in the experience and proliferation of uncivil behavior, treating incivility as chronic. For example, stable factors like demographics (e.g., gender), personality (e.g., negative affectivity), and work characteristics (e.g., procedural justice climate) have all been linked to incivility (Blau & Andersson, 2005; Cortina et al., 2001; Penney & Spector, 2005; Whitman, Caleo, Carpenter, Horner, & Bernerth, 2012). We add to this literature by showing that incivility also varies *within* people over time. We observed that over 40% of variance in experienced and instigated incivility resides at the within-person level, necessitating the need for more attention to incivility as an episodic phenomenon. Although a handful of studies have explored within-person changes in incivility across days (Nicholson & Griffin, 2015; Zhou et al., 2015) and weeks (Taylor et al., in press), our results suggest that there is meaningful variance in incivility on even shorter (e.g., hourly) timescales, a finding that is consistent with Meier and Gross' (2015) supplementary analyses. We encourage organizational scholars to pay more attention to the ebbs and flows of incivility that occur within-person and across time, which paints a more accurate picture of employees' phenomenological experience of work (Weiss & Rupp, 2011).

A fortuitous byproduct of viewing incivility from a within-person vantage point is that it introduces a fresh theoretical perspective to the literature. Organizational scholars must consider dynamic models that can account for antecedent- and consequent-based processes that unfold from one episode to the next, which differ from the static content models at the between-persons level, and even within-person studies that examine all effects at the same measurement period. The current study serves as an example of this, as we examined the dynamic relation of experienced and instigated incivility using a novel framework (ego depletion theory). Doing so proved useful because a key variable from ego depletion theory (self-control) was a linchpin mechanism that transformed experienced incivility into subsequent instigated incivility.

Ego depletion theory also informed our choice of cross-level moderators by leading us to consider a characteristic of the social context (organizational politics) that increases information processing demands and exacerbates ego depletion, and a personal factor (construal level) that enhances motivation and weakens the effects of ego depletion. Future research that considers incivility within the contexts of other episodic and dynamic within-person models, such as affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) or control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1998), may produce additional insights. Moreover, given the relational nature of organizational politics, it may behoove future researchers to consider team level constructs, such as psychological safety and team trust, as both might further explain when, why, and how the social context influences relationship between incivility and depletion. In addition, factors such as work demands, situational constraints, exposure to chronic work stress, and sleep quantity and/or quality may influence the resources available for self-regulation and should, therefore, be considered in future research as boundary conditions to the effects observed in the current study.

Although we focused on attentional resources, there may be other mechanisms that explain why incivility begets incivility. In some cases, incivility involves an escalation contained within the dyad of the initial two parties (e.g., Joelle makes a snide remark in response to Charles' curt behavior, thus provoking rude behavior from Charles). In these cases, social exchange and *quid pro quo* mechanisms are likely at play, in addition to diminished self-control. For example, the escalation of these spirals may be moderated by exchange-based variables like equity sensitivity (Miles, Hatfield, & Huseman, 1989) and exchange ideology (Eisenberger,

Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). In our study, however, experienced and instigated incivility were not necessarily confined to the two original parties (e.g., Charles is rude to Joelle, who in turn is rude to Daisy); thus, social exchange may play a less prominent role.

Another alternative mechanism was recently identified by Foulk et al. (2016), who proposed that automatic cognitive processing (i.e., semantic activation) might explain contagion effects of incivility. Supporting this perspective, they demonstrated that rudeness information becomes more cognitively accessible to individuals after they observe an actor being rude to an unrelated third party. Unfortunately, Foulk et al. did not establish the indirect relation of observed rudeness with instigated rudeness via information accessibility. Nonetheless, given its potential to explain contagion effects, future research should consider cognitive activation alongside self-control to determine the extent to which these underlying cognitive mechanisms jointly explain the relationship between experienced and instigated incivility.

Finally, our use of a performance-based measure of self-control was a key empirical contribution. Previous organizational research involving ego depletion has primarily relied on subjective reports of the extent to which participants feel mentally fatigued or low in willpower (Lanaj et al., 2014; Lin et al., 2016; Trougakos et al., 2014). However, people's knowledge about their capabilities is often fallible (Kruger & Dunning, 1999) and factors unrelated to depletion (e.g., mood and social desirability) can bias self-evaluations (Johnson, Rosen, & Djurdjevic, 2011). An effective workaround to these issues is relying on behavioral measures of self-control, such as assessing behavioral persistence (Christian & Ellis, 2011, Sample 2) or attention via a RT measure like the Stroop test. In fact, our supplemental analyses revealed that more variance was captured by the RT measure vis-à-vis a subjective measure (viz., emotional exhaustion). This finding suggests that the causes and consequences of depletion may be underestimated when subjective measures are used. We therefore encourage the use of performance-based measures of ego depletion.

Practical Implications

Although incivility is pervasive at work (Porath & Pearson, 2013), our findings indicate that it does not always translate into depletion nor subsequent acts of incivility. Practically speaking, our results indicate that incivility is depleting when it is experienced in work contexts that are perceived as political. Thus, one way of mitigating incivility is by reducing employee perceptions of politics, which can be done by providing clear feedback to employees regarding the types of behaviors that are desired (Rosen, Levy, & Hall, 2006). This can be accomplished informally, by enhancing the quality of feedback provided during day-to-day interactions, or more formally via the performance management process. In organizations where politics are widespread, it benefits leaders to engage their human resource departments to create competency models (Shippmann et al., 2000) that include goals of discouraging political behaviors and incentivizing managers to create environments that are less political (Chang et al., 2009). Doing so would reduce demands on employees' self-control by decreasing the amount of ambiguity and uncertainty that extort a larger tax on sensemaking.

A second practical implication concerns the link from diminished self-control to instigated incivility. Although depletion is a primary contributor to damaging interpersonal behavior (Christian & Ellis, 2011; Lin et al., 2016), it need not always culminate in such behavior. Employees who construe behavior at high (vs. low) levels are less likely to exhibit incivility when self-control wanes. Although we assessed chronic construal levels, ample evidence suggests that this attribute is malleable (e.g., Fujita et al., 2006). It may therefore be possible to train employees to adopt a high level construal, thus limiting the spread of incivility. Leaders may also help inoculate employees from the detrimental effects of depletion by activating a high construal level in followers. This can be done by emphasizing superordinate values, framing activities in abstract (vs. concrete) terms, highlighting the desirability (vs. feasibility) of activities, and setting long (vs. short) term goals (Trope & Liberman, 2010). A fruitful direction for future research is to explore the viability of construal-based training and interventions, which may prove to be cost-effective methods for counteracting incivility.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study is not without limitations. All constructs were assessed via self-reports, which raises concerns that results may have been biased by common method variance (CMV). This concern is somewhat alleviated by the temporal spacing of the focal constructs

(Johnson et al., 2011; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). We also controlled for previous levels of self-control and instigated incivility, enabling us to assess changes in these constructs, which mitigates concerns of reverse causality and spurious relations owing to CMV (Scott & Barnes, 2011). The use of person-centered scores at Level 1 further reduced the potential for individual response tendencies to influence the results (Bryk & Raudenbush, 2002).

In regards to our assessment of incivility, we used an agreement (vs. frequency) scale. This was done in part because our measures were collected as part of a larger data collection, and all measures were on an agreement-based scale to minimize participant burden (see: Beal, 2015). To further minimize burden, we also used a shortened measure from Lim and Cortina (2005). Although we do not believe these choices affected our results, scholars may wish to replicate our findings with the full set of items using a frequency scale. Moreover, the mean for incivility was low, consistent with what other studies report (e.g., Chen et al., 2013). After adjusting for skew though, results remained unchanged. A key takeaway is that low base rate phenomena experienced over short periods of time can still have important consequences at work.

Another limitation is our focus on coworker incivility. Our findings may not generalize to other sources of incivility and additional theory may be necessary to account for how individuals react to supervisor incivility. For example, individuals may view incivility from a supervisor as more threatening and thus depleting given that supervisors have power over them. Likewise, targets of incivility may be more motivated to override impulses to be uncivil toward supervisors, given that supervisors have influence over personnel decisions that affect them. Relatedly, though our findings indicate that depletion explains the relationship between coworker instigated and enacted incivility, we were not able to ascertain whether this mechanism also accounts for reciprocal

relationships in previous research examining supervisor incivility (e.g., Meier & Gross, 2015) and we could not assess the extent to which individuals are strategic in directing incivility toward supervisors versus less powerful targets when self-control is low. Thus, we urge future researchers to more directly consider how (a) incivility experienced from different resources affects depletion, and (b) depletion might predict specific targets of incivility, in terms of whether and when employees reciprocate incivility or displace their reactions by being uncivil to unrelated third parties (Miller, Pedersen, Earleywine, & Pollock, 2003).

Finally, we did not assess whether acts of incivility were directed toward the original perpetrator. Thus, we could not differentiate between primary incivility spirals, where the focus is on the dyad, and secondary ones, where the target of incivility engages in a subsequent act of incivility directed toward a third party (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Moreover, in addition to heightened frequency of incivility, spirals imply an escalation in intensity, which we also did not assess. Thus, although our findings indicate that incivility begets incivility, future research should consider the extent to which such effects occur within or extend beyond a particular dyad or fixed social network, as well as the extent to which the severity of behaviors increases.

Conclusion

The prevalence and costs of incivility are on the rise in organizations. This study provided insight into this phenomenon, indicating that a dynamic ego depletion process explains how experiencing incivility can spread to instigating incivility. Our findings suggest that when employees are exposed to incivility in work environments that are perceived as more political, they experience diminished self-control. In turn, for employees who construe the world at a concrete level of abstraction, diminished self-control predicts subsequent enactment of incivility toward coworkers. Together, these findings provide evidence that incivility begets incivility and, it is important to note that they verify that these contagion effects occur within very short, daily cycles.

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